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The Mental Attitude of a Systemic, Constructivist Leader
within a Business Organization: A Heuristic Research Project

Klaus-Peter REINTGES

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Abstract

Klaus-Peter Reintges

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Keywords: Heuristic inquiry, humanistic psychology, positive psychology, authentic leadership, systemic leadership, autopoiesis, radical constructivism, systems theory, practitioner research, template analysis

This thesis explores leadership from an inverted or inner perspective of a leader. It draws on humanistic, psychological approaches to leadership, and develops a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership. While systemic, constructivist concepts are well known and accepted methods in therapy, counselling, coaching, and organisational consulting, in leadership there is still a gap between theory and practise. In this study systemic, constructivist ideas such as self-organization of human systems, radical constructivism, and systems theory are transferred, through an experiential learning project to leadership practise. Previous research (Steinkellner, 2005) indicated that in addition to the understanding of systemic theory and the application of systemic interventions, the specific mental attitude of a leader is required. So this thesis (1) explores the qualities of the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader, (2) reflects on the transformation of the self of a leader in an experiential learning process, and (3) develops a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership. The methodology is heuristic inquiry, which

involves the subjectivity of the researcher, and includes introspective procedures such as self-searching, self-dialogue, and self-discovery (Moustakas, 1990). Its focus on the inner perspective of a leader is unusual, if not unique. Various concepts from humanistic psychology including tacit knowledge (Polanyi & Sen, 2009), awareness (Perls, 1973), and focusing (Gendlin, 2003) were applied to transcend the concept of rationality both in science and in business. The main contributions of this study are: the description of a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership and; the design of appropriate training to implement this.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the friendship and memory of Christine Knauf, who trained me in systemic coaching and thus provided me with a life-changing experience. Christine died much too early from cancer in 2011. My thanks and my appreciation to my supervisors Dr. Sara Nadin and Dr. Hugh Lee, my study director Dr. Eva Niemann, my highly esteemed teacher Veeresh D.Yuson-Sanchez, my business partner Musa Aktas, my friend and feedback partner Ralf Schönfeldt, and all the people who supported and enabled me do this research project. I am grateful to the systemic specialists who shared their experiences and inspired me to gain deeper insights into systemic, constructivist ideas: Dr. Rajan Roth, Ira Ganßmann, Andrea Hellmich, Claus-Bernhard Pakleppa, Holger Bubenheim, Elisabeth Neumann, Stephanie Hartung, Regina Remy, Timo Schlage, and Michaela Wasser. My special thanks to my wife Claudia, my daughter Larissa, my son Alex, and my parents Ursula and Hans-Peter, who have all provided me the space to complete this study.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

'The impotence of the traditional manager' is a picture that comes to the author's mind when he reflects about systemic, constructivist leadership. This drastic metaphor captures in a nutshell both the author's personal experiences of his leadership practise and findings of prevailing systemic theory. "Several decades ago many managers were hard-nosed autocrats, giving orders and showing little concern for those who worked under them" (Longenecker, Moore, Palich, & Petty, 2006, p. 400). Traditionally, managers saw themselves as the centre of their universe, a 'company', which they perceived to be under their control. A coercive leadership style, which "demands immediate compliance" or an authoritative style, "which mobilizes people towards a vision" (Goleman, 2001, p. 60) prevailed. Corresponding to this understanding of leadership, previous leadership research was concentrated on the leader who was "portrayed as a superior being uninfluenced by subordinates and responsible to no manager or leader" (Ford et al., 2008, p.23). However, this isolated focus on the leader excludes aspects such as the influence of the so-called followers; specific leadership situations; or the subjective reality of the leader including emotions, judgements, or internal and external drivers of action. Leadership research has diversified over time and today includes many different perspectives and approaches. This is reflected in manifold definitions of leadership. For example, Neuberger (2002) identified 38 delineations and approaches to leadership. As leadership research involves the investigation of human

beings as well as their relationship within leadership contexts, both of which are highly complex and dynamic, the exploration of leadership seems to be a multi-faceted and challenging process. Ford et al. (2008, p.17) suggest six teleological phases in the exploration and categorization of leadership theory. These are (1) trait theory, (2) contingency approaches, (3) transformational leadership, (4) guru theories, (5) post-heroic leadership, and (6) the leader as servant. Emerging in the second decade of the 20th century (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004) leadership theories focused on the personality of the leader or on specific traits of the leader which were presumed to “remain stable over time and are independent of the situation” (Stippler, Moore, Rosenthal, & Dörffer, 2011). The basic assumption was that leaders were born, not developed. The ‘great man’ or ‘great woman’ theory, and the trait theory of leadership ignore the specific contexts of leadership situations. However, the characteristics of a leader, which are advantageous in a specific situation, can be a disadvantage in a different setting.

Leadership research began to explore “contextual factors such as the environment, the work performed and the characteristics of followers” (Ford et al., 2008, p.14). In the 1960s and 1970s, contingency approaches to leadership shifted the focus from the leader to include the context of specific leadership situations (Zaccaro et al., 2004). Transformational leadership which developed in the 1970s (Burns, 2003) includes not only the leader, but also the followers “with the unstated assumption that what followers define as good leadership is something which motivates them to work more efficiently and effectively” (Ford et al., 2008, p.15). The followers are explicitly encouraged and empowered “to participate actively in implementing

the vision and its concomitant goals for social change” (Stippler et al., 2011). The leadership ‘Guru’ is a metaphor for a quasi-religious approach to leadership which arose in the 1980s (Yukl, 1999). On the one hand there is the ‘all-knowing leader’ or ‘Guru’, and on the other hand are the followers or devotees. The ‘Guru’ is expected “to transform an organization, its people and its structures, to move it to a different (higher) level of achievement and success through an almost supernatural transformation of the factors that comprise the organization” (Ford et al., 2008, p.16). However, high expectations induced by Leadership ‘Gurus’ always carry the danger of failing and thus resulting in disappointment and disorientation in the former believers. Post-heroic leadership in the last decade of the 20th century focuses emphasis on “all people in an organisation, and through harnessing the collective intelligence of the workforce as part of a process of building new relationships within, across, and outside the organisation, the organisation’s efficiency and effectiveness will improve” (Ford et al., 2008, p.16). The leader shares power with the followers in the organisation. In servant leadership theory, a more recent approach to leading people, “the needs of others must be the leaders’ highest priority” (Bass & Bass, 2009, p. 51). Ford portrays the shift of the focus of leadership theory from the individual leader to all people involved in the organization. However, this is not the whole story. An additional perspective in leadership research is the integration of peoples’ subjectivity. For example, in authentic leadership the leader has to develop authenticity through self-awareness, self-acceptance, as well as authentic actions and relationships (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005, p. 345). Thus such theories of leadership not only

describe the leader from an outside perspective, but also include the leader's own experienced, subjective reality.

A Systemic, Constructivist Approach to Leadership

This thesis offers the transference of the systemic, constructivist approach from systemic therapy, counselling, coaching, and organizational consulting, where it has been applied for many years, to leadership. Previous leadership theories do not actually show much understanding of the person who is the leader in the human system 'business organization'.

The author explores systemic, constructivist leadership whereby the forces of an organization are not specific leaders, for example a manager who plans, delegates, and controls, but the principles of autopoiesis. In systemic theory autopoiesis epitomizes the self-creation and self-organization of a company. Thus the leader loses his or her power to influence, steer and control the company directly. The idea of being in control of human systems becomes an illusion and the term 'leadership' takes on a new meaning.

Systemic leadership is more than a leader-follower relationship comprising of superiors and subordinates in a company. It is about human systems, which involve not only employees as significant stakeholders in any organisation, but also all other stakeholders including shareholders, customers, suppliers, banks, and even competitors. Both the leader and the stakeholders are elements of the same system. All actions and communications are interrelated. In general, "at its broadest level, systems' thinking encompasses

a large and fairly amorphous body of methods, tools, and principles, all oriented to looking at the interrelatedness of forces, and seeing them as part of a common process” (Senge, Ross, Smith, Roberts, & Kleiner, 1994, p. 89). Systemic thinking is frequently contrasted to linear-causal thinking, which focuses on isolated incidents. For example, a manager is not achieving company sales targets and identifies her subordinates as the only cause for the failure. However, often these simple conclusions do not mirror reality. There could be many other causes such as wrong management decisions, a new competitor or economic crises. Often the reasons are hidden and become obvious in retrospect. “Systemic leadership sees the whole issue, including aspects that are not immediately apparent” (Pinnow, 2011, p. 118). A manager, who criticizes an employee, does not only have an isolated effect on this person in the organisation, but changes the whole system. The employee could react in an angry manner, sharing his emotions with co-workers or being unfriendly to customers affecting the manager and so on. Systemic thinking in leadership transcends linear-causal thinking and considers circularity and dynamics in social relationships. The hanging mobile is a metaphor illustrating these processes. “Its individual parts represent the members of a system. The threads and rods symbolize the complex relationship between the members. Now, if one part of this mobile starts to move, all of the other parts will move as well” (Grau et al. as cited in Tomaschek, 2006, p. 27). Thus every leadership decision also changes the manager, who is the original cause of the change. A systemic attitude of a leader includes an understanding of the interdependencies of the elements in the system. Hence systemic leadership is not about a leader or specific

people in a leadership system, but about the interrelations between them. And as human beings are complex, these interrelations can develop a high momentum. Human systems have the characteristic that “as soon as someone begins to observe, understand, and intervene in a system, he or she becomes part of a process in that system” (Königswieser, Hillebrand, & Ortner, 2005, p. 27). For this reason the leader is never outside of a social system, but an integral part.

Systemic leadership is based on a constructivist understanding of the world. There is no objective reality, which is the same for all people. Rather reality is individually or socially constructed and thus all human beings have their own, subjective perspective. The ‘radical constructivists’ Ernst von Glasersfeld and Heinz von Förster, and the social theorist Niklas Luhman have especially inspired the author. For example, a customer is angry because she feels a receptionist has treated her in an unfriendly manner. If the manager of the company examines the cause, then often both the perspective of the customer and the service receptionist seem to be plausible and reasonable. If the manager makes a decision in favour of one party, the other would be angry. The manager is not outside the conflict, but becomes part of the problematic situation disabling him from making and communicating the one and only right decision. “The world is mostly grey, people in leadership and management positions try to lead and manage as if it were black and white” (Reznik, Dimitrov, & Kacprzyk, 1998, p. 19). Often there is not one right solution to a problem or conflict, but many are possible. “There are as many subjective, individual truths as people exist” and

“organisations are made up of multiple realities”(Woldt & Toman, 2005, p. 240). Systemic leadership is a way to transcend the dichotomous ideas of ‘right and wrong’, ‘true and false’, ‘real and unreal’ by developing an attitude that integrates people’s multiple perspectives which are individually and socially constructed.

The systemic leader faces a paradox (Steinkellner, 2006): on the one hand she is expected to lead a human organization; profitability, financial solvency, effective working processes, human resource management, and the consideration of legal and tax requirements determine her performance. On the other hand, the leader often feels powerless because the final consequence of a management decision is uncertain, unpredictable and uncontrollable. Incompatible intrinsic and extrinsic expectations often give rise to inner conflicts and feelings of self-doubt in the leader. This highlights the importance of including the internal biological and psychic system of the manager, not only the social system of the workplace. Biopsychic refers to the inner world of a leader. It is being in contact with oneself and includes elements such as perceptions, emotions, inner dialogues, and felt senses. In contrast, the social system is being in connection with the outer world and focuses on encounters with other people, their behaviour, and communication processes.

“The model of a manager changed from a heroic steersman who leads the company with his superior knowledge, to that of a cultivator, who creates and supports the appropriate basic conditions, in which the subsystems could

unfold” (Bardmann & Groth, 2001, p. 10). Steinkellner uses the provocative term ‘devil’ to describe this new role of a leader. “And as a metaphor for a systemic leader does not fit the all-knowing God, who masters from the outside the organisation, but the devil, who brings forward the company by his (hopefully constructive) disturbances and irritations” (Steinkellner, 2005, p. 325). According to systemic theory, a leader does not intervene directly in a system, for example by giving instructions how to carry out a specific task. Rather she uses indirect, systemic interventions, which “establish the conditions of a self-organization of a system” (Schiepek, 1999, p. 158). One simple example is the use of ‘circular questions’. Instead of blaming and judging an employee who is confronted with a customer complaint, a systemic manager could ask her how she would feel in the position of the annoyed customer and what would she do in his case? Thus the employee gains a new perspective of the situation, which could be the basis for a solution.

In contemporary society, people are flooded with information resulting from progress in information technology. Internet, emails, twitter, mobile phones, social networks, internal- and external databases of a company and other information channels provide a never-ending stream of news. The quantity of information is growing exponentially. One result is that the experienced world of human beings becomes more complicated and complex. “Uncertainty and ignorance have to be accepted as a normal state, not as an exception” (Graf, 2010, p. 9). Therefore predicting future developments is becoming more and more difficult. The only certainty is enduring uncertainty. “Concepts which

cope with complexity and which have the potential for innovation, without disproving the validity of existing knowledge and research strategies are needed” (Achouri, 2011, p. 13). Systemic leadership is a holistic approach which is suitable to deal with the increasing complexity of today’s business world. It uses existing knowledge from various sciences such as philosophy, psychology, biology, sociology and cybernetics as a resource in managing complex human systems.

A “homo oeconomicus” who acts purely rationally in business does not exist. “There is a strange mythology around which encourages the belief that while in ‘real’ life most people are quite emotional beings, once getting into a business environment they become entirely rational and logical” (Clarke, 1994, p. 74). On the contrary, business organizations are human systems which request emotions from their employees such as “positive feelings of enthusiasm, self-initiative, courage and a certain degree of productive aggressiveness” (Heitger & Doujak, 2008, p. 121). Systemic leadership doubts the idea of ‘pure’ rationality in human systems. Instead it places emphasis on the subjective, emotional, and often irrational. “The actors in these systems are people with different needs, desires, traits, dislikes, abilities, limitations, memories and visions (Königswieser et al., 2005, p. 32). Therefore a specific mental attitude of a leader is required in order to deal with irrationality and illogicalness as well as rationality and logic.

The literature review indicates various approaches, which use the term “systemic” in the context of leadership and management. In order to

emphasize the 'constructivist' approach of this thesis explicitly, the author introduces the term 'systemic, constructivist leadership'. The focus of this investigation is the work with constructed realities of people in the human system 'business organization'.

1.2 Research Motivations

The author believes that life is a continuous process of personal self-development. As a manager, he is always challenged to 'invent himself' to adapt to changing requirements in business. Crises such as the attack of the World Trade Centre in 2001, the collapse of the world financial market in 2008, and the current debt disaster of European countries affect the economy directly. Managers could react to these incidents fearfully or anxiously, or they could accept the challenge, try to master it, and finally experience personal growth.

This investigation is applied constructivist philosophy in management practise. According to Karl Marx "philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it "(Marx, 1845). The author has always been interested in philosophy. However, he was often confused and trapped in theoretical concepts with no practical relevance for his life. Due to this the author searched for further concepts to give his life meaning and to explore new experiences. Buddhism, especially in the tradition of ZEN, is a fascinating alternative to the busy Western capitalism. But the tendency to renounce the materialistic world and embrace the inner world of meditation does not fit to the author's personal value system of responsibility

for his family and company. So he searched for possibilities to combine his inner world with the outside world of economic activities. “Now it is the time to bridge the opposite between the materialistic mode of operation of the world and the so-called spiritual efforts” (Tulku, 1994, p. xii). In humanistic psychology the author has found a synthesis of Eastern spiritual traditions and Western practical life. In particular, the aspects of humanistic psychology such as self-actualisation, experience- and awareness-orientation attracted him.

Self-actualisation is a never-ending process of individual and social learning.

The human goal, the humanistic goal, the goal so far as human beings are concerned – is ultimately the self-actualisation of a person, the becoming fully human, the development of the fullest height that the human species can stand up to or that the particular individual can come to. (Maslow, 1973, pp. 168,169)

In this process personal, subjective experiences in life are most important.

Carl Rogers formulates this as following:

Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person’s ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again to discover a closer approximation to truth as it in the process of becoming in me. (Rogers, 1967, p. 23)

To gain access to one's experiences the development of awareness is essential. Gestalt psychology describes awareness as "a relaxed rather than a tense perception by the whole person" (Perls, 1973, p. 10). It resembles the concept of mindfulness in Buddhism:

You establish a practice of meditation in order to develop the habit of mindfulness so that your awareness remains engaged when you leave the meditation cushion and to go out into the world. You're able to act consciously instead of unconsciously. Developing mindfulness allows you to quickly and naturally become aware of what's really going on in any situation instead of being distracted by your thoughts, feelings, and actions or resisting the truth in order to avoid suffering. (Alexander, 2009, p. 14)

Applied in business both awareness and mindfulness result in working effectively in a relaxed way. The author includes his experiences about these mental states in his research project.

The author's first contact with humanistic psychology was during a training programme in systemic coaching. The transfer of new systemic skills from systemic coaching to leadership is part of his self-actualisation process and the outcome of a personal and financial crisis. In 2004 the author's company RAS, a car-dealership group in Germany, was in financial difficulties and had to be restructured. Founded in 1903 as a smithy, RAS has offered services and sales around mobility. Encouraged by the car manufacturer Ford Motor

Company, which diversified its product portfolio to premium automotive by taking over companies such as Jaguar, Land-Rover, and Volvo at the end of the nineties, the management of RAS also decided to expand. In addition to the investment in two new premium car stores, RAS took over five car-dealerships in the Ruhr area in Germany. The speed of growth was high and the number of outlets and employees quadrupled. However, at that point in time two critical incidents occurred. Firstly, the Ford premium automotive strategy failed because buyers of luxury cars chose not to buy a Ford, despite its branding as a Jaguar or Land Rover. For example, the essential parts of the Ford Mondeo were the same as those used for the Jaguar X-Type. Prospective customers for the X-Type realized this deception and avoided the car. In the end the small Jaguar was the greatest failure in the company history of Jaguar. Secondly, the Ford Motor Company changed their dealership strategy in Germany. After years of encouraging dealers to grow by fusion, takeover, or 'forced cooperation' in so-called 'business areas', the management of the Ford Motor Company decided to accept the independence of smaller dealers. The result was that the author's company, which had heavily invested in infrastructure for two cooperation partners, lost them, consequently losing two important cities as sales areas. Therefore RAS could not achieve its ambitious sales goals. The cash flow became negative due to high financial losses. The crisis was there and had to be handled by the author. At that time a withdrawal from the company was not possible, because the author had given personal guarantees for company loans. A collapse of the company would also have had serious consequences on his personal financial situation. He felt trapped in this

situation, which totally changed his perception of the world. For the first time the author perceived how dependent he was on various players in the systems organization and market. Despite being a CEO of the company with all his power, he lost control and often felt impotent and powerless. He felt like a pawn in a chess game. Decisions and pressures that affected him came from his colleagues on the board, the shareholders, the banks, suppliers, employees and their representatives in worker councils, customers and tax authorities. Together with business consultants and board members the author worked out a rescue plan for the company. The staff had to be reduced radically to improve the cost-base. The author was forced to dismiss people, who had been employed for a long time and to whom he felt personally connected. Despite the company being short of cash, banks demanded a proposal of how their loans would be repaid. The author had to accept more and more conditions laid down by the stakeholders in order to ensure their support. However, he had the impression that as he solved one problem, two new problems arose. The accumulation of problems also had a negative influence on the physical and psychic state of the author. At that time he was ailing and feeling depressed. A problem-oriented perspective dominated his social relationships. There was no joy of life any more, but only worries about an uncertain future and a feeling of hopelessness. The author was trapped in this mood without seeing any a possibility of escape. The metaphor of a 'hamster wheel', in which the author was running faster and faster without arriving at a destination illustrates how he experienced his subjective world at that time. Finally the author collapsed exhausted behind the desk in his office and passed out. Suddenly his 'personal hamster wheel'

was forced to stop. When the author woke up again he found himself in intensive care in a hospital. Fortunately nothing serious had happened and the author could leave the hospital the same day. However, this existential key experience changed the author's life as a manager and leader. Firstly, he realized in a profound and significant way, the dependencies between himself and others within human systems. Secondly, the author learnt how his perception of reality had changed during this crisis. Uncomfortable emotions such as fear and anger affected his ability to make rational decisions. Thirdly the author recognized the interconnectedness between his psyche, his body and his social relationships. The author used these existential insights of this critical time of his life to learn new approaches and skills to manage and lead a business organization. Parallel to the restructuring of the company, he decided to start a two-year training programme in systemic coaching. Instead of focusing on problems, systemic coaching promotes a resource- and solution orientated mental attitude. The author realized that systemic coaching had also changed his leadership style. He could cope better with the complexity in business and the volatile market environment. Furthermore, relating and connecting to people in leadership contexts has become more effective.

The research field of this investigation is the author's company, which he restructured after the above-described crisis. Today, about 100 employees work for RAS in various departments such as sales, service, financial products, and administration. The business strategy is focused on two car-brands, Ford and Kia Motors, and two subsidiaries in the south and north of

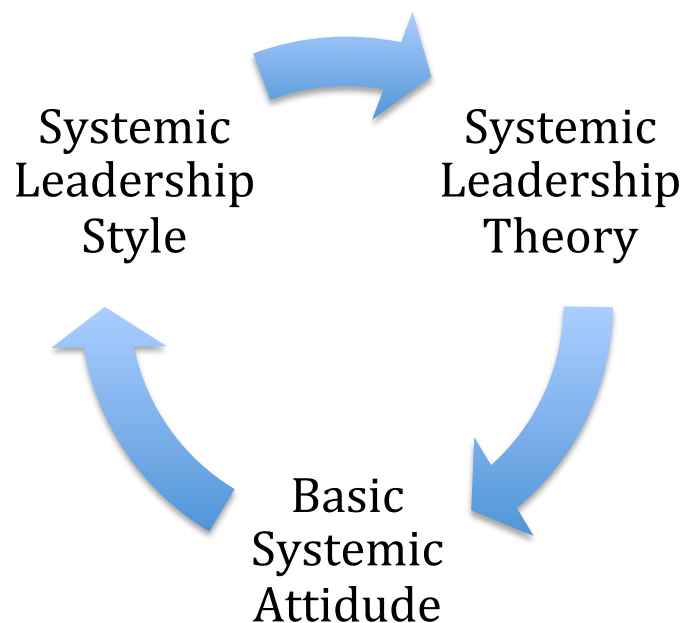
Germany's important economic region 'Ruhrgebiet'. The author sees himself as a practitioner researcher, who "systemically explores experience with a view to refining knowledge" and "applies knowledge skilfully with a view to improving practice"(Barber, 2009, p. 24). While the practitioner part of the author is concerned with his job, leading his company profitably in a difficult market environment, the researcher part is concerned with the contribution to the new field of systemic, constructivist leadership. "The aim of practitioner research is fundamentally no different from other forms of research in that it is about generating new knowledge. Nor are there unique research techniques attached to it. However, practitioner researchers *are* different as a result of their unique position in the research process" (Fox, Green, & Martin, 2007, p. 1). The researcher becomes an integral part of the investigation and thus personally involved. Instead of being a distant and detached observer he or she is personally affected by all interventions and outcomes. The subjective reality of the practitioner researcher is an important source of data. This study is an opportunity for the author, through practise and reflection, to do real-life research and to investigate how systemic, constructivist concepts can be applied in leadership practise.

1.3 Research Problem

The research project investigates the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader. Steinkellner, who explored systemic interventions in leadership practise, inspired the author. His two fundamental conclusions concerning the attitude of a systemic leader are:

The most essential result of this work is indeed the insight that systemic leadership is not a question of leadership theory or leadership style, but a question of the attitude. Systemic leadership can be seen as a kind of cycle, in which the systemic leadership style is based on a systemic attitude, and which is reflected by systemic leadership theory. The second essential result is relativized by the first: Systemic interventions are, in the area of interactional leadership appropriate to lead employees. However, these are not social technologies which can be applied without a systemic attitude. (Steinkellner, 2005, p. 324)

Figure 1-1 Circular, Systemic Leadership Model



Source: Steinkellner 2005, p. 322

While Steinkellner understands the systemic attitude as a key function of systemic leadership, Achouri rejects this. He points out that a basic systemic attitude “may be required by a systemic therapist, but for a systemic

manager it is inappropriate” (Achouri, 2011, p. 265). The author is stimulated by these contrasting positions to investigate the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader.

There are two possibilities to explore a psychic phenomenon such as a mental attitude. On the one hand, the researcher could be an outside observer who portrays and explains the qualities of systemic, constructivist leadership of appropriate research participants. On the other hand the researcher could be an inside observer investigating from within his own personality, systemic constructivist leadership in a self-experimental manner. Thus he would generate subjective insights from a perspective, which is only accessible and experienceable to him. The author decided upon the second alternative, because he knows intuitively from his management practise, that there is something like a specific attitude of a systemic, constructivist leadership. However, he is unable to specify this. The research project gives the author the possibility to investigate this mental attitude from within himself and thus to generate deep subjective insights into the phenomenon.

1.4 Gap in Existing Research

The author has reviewed literature about systemic therapy, counselling and their transfer and application into the business contexts; coaching, organisational consulting. In these reviews he found descriptions of qualities of the attitude of people working within these systemic fields. However, there are only a few indications of how an appropriate attitude in leadership could be. Therefore this study provides the unique opportunity to investigate the

mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader from within the personality of the leader. Thus aspects, which are usually hidden, tacit, or difficult to access, are included in the exploration.

1.5 Research Objectives

The author's aim is to develop a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership from an inverted or inner perspective of a leader. The following research questions should be answered in this study:

1. What are the qualities of the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader?
2. How does the experiential learning process of becoming a systemic, constructivist leader transform the self of the leader?
3. How can a systemic, constructivist leader be trained and developed?

The author has narrowed down the scope of his exploration to personal encounters of a leader with people in leadership situations. For example, this could be a meeting with staff members, a feedback talk with an assistant or a complaining customer. The result should not be a dichotomous 'yes' or 'no' whether a systemic, constructivist mental attitude is appropriate in leadership situations or not, but an in depth investigation of specific qualities. It is based on the subjective experiences of an experiential learning process of the researcher himself. As it became obvious that experiential learning has had a deep impact on the self of the practitioner researcher, he constantly reflects about his own change process and reports this in the study. In the following

section a research methodology is introduced which enables the researcher to accomplish this.

1.6 Research Methodology

The author investigates in a 'heuristic inquiry' the inner, mental attitude of a systemic leader. The quintessential characteristic of this methodology is that it includes the subjectivity of the researcher. Moustakas outlines it as following:

Heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning and inspiration. When I consider an issue, problem, or question, I enter into it fully. I focus on it with unwavering attention and interest. I search introspectively, meditatively, and reflectively into its nature and meaning. My primary task is to recognize whatever exists in my consciousness as a fundamental awareness, to receive and accept it, and then dwell on its nature and possible meanings. With full and unqualified interest, I am determined to extend my understanding and knowledge of an experience. I begin the heuristic investigation with my own self-awareness and explicate that awareness with reference to a question or problem until an essential insight is achieved, one that will throw a beginning light onto a critical human experience. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11)

Moustakas differentiates between six phases of a heuristic inquiry from initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, and explication to a final creative synthesis. The creative synthesis is the intuitive, innovative part of heuristic research and “can only be achieved through tacit and intuitive powers” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31). Furthermore there are various core processes, which provide the researcher with ideas how to implement a heuristic inquiry.

The author has integrated the six phases of heuristic research in the experiential learning model (Kolb, 1976, p. 22). Thus the practical, experiential dimension and the reflecting, conceptualizing dimension of learning are incorporated. Therefore this heuristic inquiry is also a process of personal growth.

Searching for methods of investigating human experiences, the author develops a Gestalt-orientation, which “deals primarily with what is going on *here and now* rather than with the historical causes of analysis of behavior” (Herman & Korenich, 1982, p. 11). Besides the focus on the present, Gestalt furthermore stresses “that it is the organization of facts, perceptions, behavior or phenomena, and not the individual items of which they are composed, that defines them and gives them their specific and particular meaning” (Perls, 1973, p. 2). Human beings perceive their subjective reality not as an accumulation of separate parts, but as a whole. The research methodology heuristic research as a “holistic inquiry in the Gestalt tradition integrates ‘the science of researching’ (concerned with methods, theory,

exactness and the verification of data) with ‘the art of researching’ (concerned with expression, human growth and development, communication, aesthetics and relational dance)” (Barber, 2009, p. 94). The author is drawn to heuristic research and the Gestalt-orientation, because it offers the opportunity to explore empirically something subjective, intangible and difficult to communicate such as, the inner mental attitude of a systemic leader.

The research methodology of this exploration is a reflexive focus on the self of the author, which is documented in a reflective diary. A large volume of data was generated. These collected data were analysed by a template analysis, which categorize them into relevant topics. The results of the analysis, a master template consisting of mental attitudes of systemic, constructivist leadership, will be presented in detail. In addition, personal reflections of systemic, constructivist leadership are described. Built on these insights a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership will be conceptualized and a possible training programme as practise transfer introduced.

1.7 Research Challenges

The investigation of the mental attitude of a systemic constructivist leader also includes metaphysical issues. The distinction between subjective realities and ontological realities of people is pre-eminently addressed. General metaphysics “is concerned, on the whole, with the general nature of reality: with problems about abstract and concrete being, the nature of particulars, the distinction between appearance and reality, and the universal

principles holding true of what has fundamental being” (Aune, 1985, p. 11).

Radical constructivism, systems theory, and the Gestalt approach are all engaged with these questions. The author focuses his research on leadership practise. The challenge is not to become lost in general philosophical questions.

The application of constructivist theory changes also the author’s understanding and perception of the world. He is often in a psychological space of uncertainty and unknowing. Previous assumptions like a clear-cut object-subject split have become fuzzy. On the one hand, the author realizes that the assimilation of constructivist ideas is a premise for a deep investigation of the mental attitude in his leadership practise; on the other hand, this process has the potential to change his identity. Therefore a critical reflection of the author’s personal change processes is necessary. A reflective diary documents changes and insights and gives an overview of them.

This is a practitioner researcher project. As the author is doing real-life research, any intervention in the system company has real-life consequences. Moreover, the author has to find a balance between research and practical life issues. A negligence of one sphere could be risky. Being the manager and owner of a company means taking responsibility for oneself and the stakeholders. On the one hand, the author has to invest an appropriate amount of time in his management practise to avoid negative consequences and to promote the long-term survival of the company. On the

other hand, the author has to spend time on the research project. New knowledge has to be acquired, reflected and integrated. A disregard of the scientific sphere would result in an investigation, which, on the surface, has no relevance. In light of permanent time restrictions, this balance between research and practise challenges the self-management and self-motivation of the author.

The author uses the systemic method of switching perspectives during the research project. Firstly, he has the perspective of a primary researcher who investigates his subjective experiences of the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader. He is connected to a university and has to conform to certain scientific rules, for example ethical approval. Being primary researcher in a heuristic inquiry means documentation of experiences in a reflective diary, the organization of the collected data, and reflection of results. Secondly, the author has the role of a practitioner in management, who experiments with new insights and is open for new experiences. He is doing his job. The research project has often to play a background role because of important business requirements. Thirdly, the author is the writer of a scientific thesis, which reports from a distant third-person perspective to formulate his insights in the thesis.

All entries in the reflective diary are written in the “first person-singular”, because they depict his personal experiences and reflections from experiential learning processes. Furthermore the author uses the first-person singular, when he describes a conceptual framework, provides examples

about systemic, constructivist leadership, and formulates subjective reflections in a creative synthesis. The switch of perspectives is the attempt to clarify differentiations between subjective experiences and scientific documentation.

1.8 Overview of the Research Project

The following timetable provides an overview of the research project. It started in 2004 as an experiential learning process of the author integrating systemic ideas in his coaching and leadership practise. This approach was extended in 2007, when the author applied to the University of Bradford for an academic exploration of systemic, constructivist leadership.

Table 1-1 Overview Research Project

	Activity/Incident	Start	End
1	Initial Engagement: Crises of the Company	Jan 04	Mar 04
2	Training as “Certified, Systemic Coach”	Nov 04	Aug 07
3	University of Bradford: Research Project	Sep 07	Apr 15
4	Keeping Reflective Diary	Jan 10	Dec 14
5	Training as Gestalt Coach	Jan 11	Dec 12
6	Pilot Study “Heuristic Inquiry”	Feb 11	Apr 11
7	Acceptance of Research Proposal by University	Apr 12	Apr 12
8	Approval Research Ethics Committee	Sep 12	Oct 12
9	Writing the Thesis	Oct 12	Apr 15

The author asked for suspension at the University in 2008 due to the world economic crises. His company was directly affected and he had to restructure it. Despite the suspension, he used the time for additional literature research and strengthened his skills in systemic, constructivist leadership by meeting the new entrepreneurial challenges.

1.9 Outline of the Thesis

Following the introduction, two humanistic, psychological approaches to leadership are presented. Firstly, the merits and critiques of authentic leadership are reviewed. Secondly, the author provides an overview of the foundations of a systemic, constructivist leadership theory, which will be developed later in the study. Thereafter the research methodology 'heuristic inquiry' is presented. This includes a bio-psyche-social model as conceptual framework, the distinctiveness of the experiential learning cycle in this project, and the method of data collection. Next, the analytical tool 'template analysis' is described. Twelve mental attitudes of a systemic, constructivist leader are identified. Nine personal reflections depict how the self of a leader is affected and transformed. A theory of systemic, constructivist leadership proposes the importance of the inverted perspective of the leader and how a systemic, constructivist self is indirectly induced by perturbations. As a contribution to management practise, training in systemic, constructivist leadership is introduced. Finally the limitations of the research project are critically discussed and suggestions for future research are recommended.

2 Humanistic, Psychological Approaches to Leadership

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the theoretical fundamentals of two humanistic, psychological approaches to leadership. Peculiar to both is the subjective or inner dimension of the leader. Firstly, authentic leadership which is based on positive psychology is presented. After working out the merits and critiques of this approach, the author introduces the foundations of a systemic, constructivist leadership theory which will be developed later in the study. As systemic theory is an eclectic approach utilizing knowledge from various scientific fields (Achouri, 2010; Königswieser et al., 2005; Mücke, 2011), the author focuses in this literature review on concepts with relevance to leadership practise such as; how people construct their reality, the operating mode of human systems, how human systems can be influenced indirectly by systemic interventions, and the appropriate systemic attitude to work with people in various contexts.

Humanistic psychology is a useful approach as it allows exploration of the inner life and subjectivity of a leader in leadership theory and practise. It is based on the works of psychologists such as Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Clark Moustakas and Fritz Perls emerging at the beginning of the 1960's. At that time humanistic psychology was established as an alternative to the two main theories of psycho-analysis and behaviourism (Dewey, 2014). More recent forces to investigate the inner world of human beings are cognitive psychology, "the study of higher mental processes such as

attention, language use, memory, perception, problem solving, and thinking“ (APA, 2002a) and neuroscience, the “study of the brain and of the links between brain activity and behavior“ (APA, 2002b). The author believes that psychology, and especially humanistic psychology, can contribute to the understanding of leadership. Understanding the subjectivity of the leader will add an important dimension to leadership theory and practice. Humanistic psychology is concerned with all aspects of people such as love, self-consciousness, self-determination, personal freedom, greed, lust for power, cruelty, or morality (AHP 2015). As leaders are not ‘rational entities’ dealing with other ‘rational entities’, the understanding of “inner needs, fulfilment, the search for identity, and other distinctly human concerns”(Dewey, 2014) have to be included in order to gain a holistic understanding of leadership. In the next section an approach to leadership, that draws on positive psychology is reviewed, that is, authentic leadership. After discussing the limitations of this approach, the discussion will move on to exploring an alternative approach to humanistic psychology in leadership.

2.2 Authentic Leadership

The unique quality of authentic leadership is that it includes the inner life of the leader and his or her introspective exploration. It is influenced by positive psychology, an off-shoot of humanistic psychology (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 332). Positive psychology is built on three pillars: the “study of positive emotion”, “the study of the positive traits”, and “the study of the positive institutions” (Seligman, 2002). Table 2-1 provides an overview of the various levels and qualities of positive psychology.

Table 2-1 Levels and Qualities of Positive Psychology

Subjective Level: Positive Emotions	Individual Level: Positive Traits	Group Level: Positive Institutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-being • Contentment • Satisfaction (in the past) hope and optimism (for the future) • Flow and happiness (in the present) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity for love and vocation • Courage • Interpersonal skills • Aesthetic sensibility • Perseverance • Forgiveness • Originality • Future mindedness • Spirituality • High talent • Wisdom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility • Nurturance • Altruism • Civility • Moderation • Tolerance • Work ethics

Derived from Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p. 5)

Positive psychology does not emphasise pathological and deficient aspects of human beings, but spotlights strengths and virtues of people (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 7). It is a reorientation of psychology “making normal people stronger and more productive and making high human potential actual” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 8). Positive psychology does not mean the exclusion of negative aspects and thus is not “a sugar-coated view of life” (Snyder & Lopez, 2009, p. 10). Instead positive psychologists focus more on strengths than on weaknesses while working with challenges.

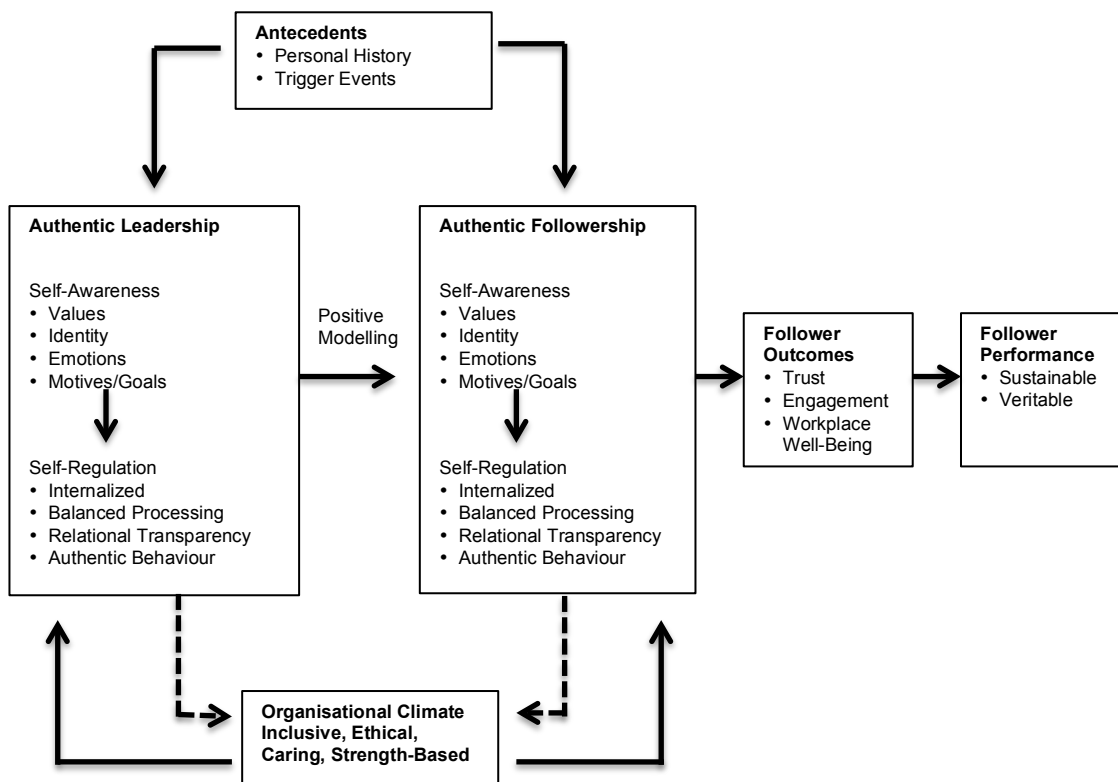
One key concept of positive psychology is authenticity. On the one hand authenticity comprises of “*owning* one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs” and on the other hand, “it implies that one *acts* in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings” (Harter, 2001, p. 382). Thus being authentic means for people to explore and identify the own true self, and to act accordingly. Authentic leadership is the utilization of these maxims in leadership and creates high expectations within organizations:

We believe authentic leadership can make a fundamental difference in organizations by helping people find meaning and connection at work through greater self-awareness; by restoring and building optimism, confidence and hope; by promoting transparent relationships and decision making that builds trust and commitment among followers; and

by fostering inclusive structures and positive ethical climates. (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 331)

Thus the central premise of authentic leadership is “that through increased self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modelling authentic leaders foster the development of authenticity in followers” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 317). A conceptual framework of authentic leader and follower development illustrates this approach (see figure 2-1).

Figure 2-1 Conceptual Framework of Authentic Leadership



Derived from Gardner et al. (2005, p. 346)

Authentic leadership incorporates individual aspects of leaders such as; their own personal history and trigger events in life. In particular trigger events, for

example; extraordinary achievements or failure have the potential to “serve as catalysts for heightened levels of leader self-awareness” and thus “facilitate personal growth and development” (Gardner et al., 2005, p. 347).

There are two factors of authentic leadership. Firstly, self-awareness is an active and continuous process “to understand how one derives and makes meaning of the world” by exploring ““Who am I?”” (Gardner et al., 2005, p. 347). Hence the ‘authentic self’ is explored in a self-experiential manner and enlightens personal characteristics of a leader such as his or her values, identity, emotions, motives and goals. Secondly, based on the explored ‘authentic self’ of the leader, he or she develops self-regulation. Gardner differentiates the self-regulation of a leader between being internally driven, balanced processing, relational transparency, and authentic behaviour. Internally driven implies the acting out of the authentic self in contrast to being influenced by external or hetero-imposed forces. Balanced processing is being open to feedback from others in a non-reactive manner. Indications of relational transparency are open-mindedness, self-disclosure as well as relationships based on trust. Authentic behaviour denotes that the leader’s actions are congruent with his or her true self reflected by “core values, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 347).

A leader who has developed self-awareness and self-regulation is in contact with his or her own ‘true self’. Consequently the leader becomes a role model for the followers, who are then also inspired to develop authenticity. The result is a working climate within the organization which is characterized by “full access to information, resources, and support” as well as the provision of “opportunities to learn and develop procedures that are

structurally and internally fair (Gardner et al., 2005, p. 367). The outcome is that the followers experience trust, engagement, and workplace well-being, resulting in a more sustainable and veritable follower performance.

Algera and Lips-Wiersma (2012) criticise the concept of authentic leadership. Firstly, “leaders cannot be authentic in relation to all individuals and all situations at all times, as the practical reality of life promotes inauthenticity over authenticity”. Secondly, “goals and values of organization, leader and follower are not necessarily aligned. Goal and value divergence is likely”. Thirdly, “authenticity does not necessarily have ethical implications for the character or objectives of the leader/follower” (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012, p. 125). Ford and Harding argue “that authentic leadership as an indication of a leader’s true self is impossible”, “that attempts at its implementation could lead to destructive dynamics within organizations”, and that “it privileges a collective (organizational) self over an individual self and thereby hampers subjectivity to both leaders and followers” (Ford & Harding, 2001, p.463). Thus no ‘real self’ can be developed. In consequence, “the authentic leader would breed a sick organization” (Ford & Harding, 2001, p.475). If authentic leadership could be “lifted out of its theoretical home and epistemological stance to be relocated in a more realistic space where the focus is upon improving interactions at work for the sake of the people involved rather than the sake of the organization” (Ford & Harding, 2001, p.477), it has the potential to be of value to the organization.

In light of these criticisms, this thesis explores an alternative approach to understanding the psychology of the leader. The next section introduces the

foundations of systemic, constructivist leadership. It adds a new perspective to leadership by integrating systemic theory and constructivism and in this way offers a form of leadership practise that builds on the turn to psychology in authentic leadership, while avoiding its problems.

2.3 Foundations of Systemic, Constructivist Leadership

2.3.1 Introduction

The author has been a systemic practitioner since 2007, when he became certified as a 'Systemic Coach'. As such he is experienced in working with people in a systemic way. From the perspective of a systemic practitioner, he selected and reviewed systemic literature which seemed relevant for his empirical research project. There are two objectives of this part of the literature review: the first is to explore the current theoretical foundations of systemic, constructivist ideas and how they relate to the author's current practise; the second is to explore the possibility of new insights about systemic leadership, which could then be integrated in the author's own experiential learning process. This presentation does not claim to provide a complete exposition of systemic concepts in all its facets. Rather it should justify a conceptual framework of systemic, constructivist leadership (see 3.2.), which the author has developed, and which will be the guideline for his exploration.

"The term *systemic leadership* is a hybrid-term, which unites two opposite elements: *System* is usually associated with holism, self-organization or

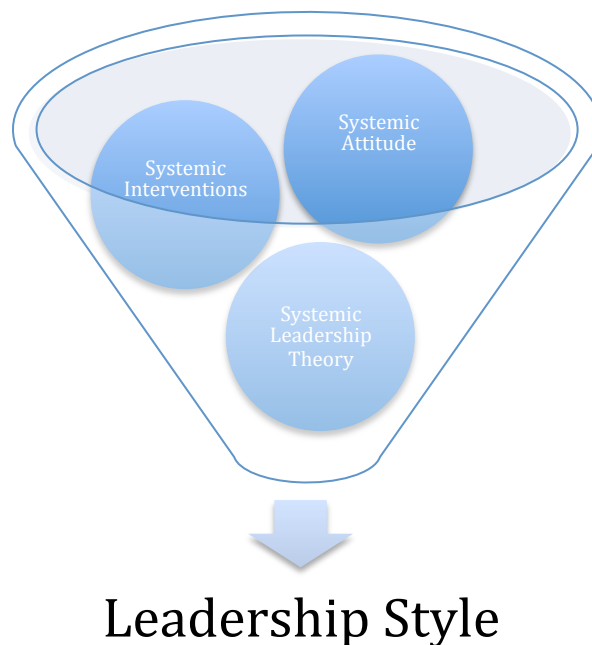
autopoiesis; *leadership, in contrast*, with individual influence and heteronomy” (Neuberger, 2002, p. 597). There is a field of tension between the poles of ‘self-organization’ and ‘hetero-organization’ which will be illuminated in the literature review. To emphasize that this kind of leadership is based both on systemic theory as well as on constructivism, the author prefers and applies the term ‘systemic, constructivist leadership’. Systemic, constructivist leadership is about living, human systems, whose organisational principle is autopoiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1980). A leader is seen as an integral part of a system and is thus part of the autopoietic process. Constructivist means that there are no systems as such, but only observers of systems, who distinguish what is a system and what is not (Fritz B. Simon, 2004). Hence the system is not independent of an observer, but a construct in his or her mind. Other observers may define other systems. Essential is the viability of the distinction for the specific observer.

Systemic thinking cannot be classified as a coherent theory, but it is more a general scientific programme or paradigm (SG, 2014). Hence there is no unified understanding of what systemic knowledge is. Rather systemic researchers and practitioners select concepts from various scientific backgrounds which they integrate into their work. For example, Achouri (2010) refers, in his book about systemic leadership, to the scientific fields management, evolution-biology, chaos-theory, cybernetics, physics, sociology, psychology, pedagogic, philosophy, cognitive science, and others. Königswieser et al. (2005, p. 26) identify as roots of systemic theory physics, biology, psychology, social sciences, language theory, epistemology,

philosophy, logic, and mathematics. The systemic approach is interdisciplinary and thus enormously complex.

Systemic thinking became a new paradigm in management in the 1970's and 1980's (Winter & Thurm, 2005). The specific scientific disciplines of research include researchers from the international scientific community. However, the integration of systemic thoughts, for example in systemic coaching, is dominated by management literature from German speaking countries, which is often translated into English (Reintges, 2011). The author prefers original English literature. As many significant sources are only available in German, the author translates citations which are relevant for his research project into English.

Figure 2-2 Components of Systemic Leadership Style



Source: Cf. Steinkellner, 2005

The structure of this literature review is orientated to Steinkellner's (2005, p. 321) three components of a systemic leadership style: systemic leadership theory, systemic interventions, and systemic attitude.

2.3.2 Systemic Theory

2.3.2.1 Introduction

Systemic theory can be characterized as a meta-theory, "a set of interrelated concepts and principles about which theories or types of theory are appropriate" (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008, p. 20). It is an interdisciplinary approach, which integrates knowledge from various scientific fields. In the same way as knowledge grows, systemic researchers adapt and develop their systemic approach, which again has an influence on the literature.

There is not one fixed systemic theory, but different forms and models, which share common systemic concepts. For example, "the systemic approach assumes an unmanageable complexity of living (and social) systems, which are not 'trivialised' by, for example, breaking them down into clearly and controllable cause-effect and means-end relationships" (Neuberger, 2002, p. 594).

The author found the distinction between two kinds of systemic literature useful. On the one hand there are scientists from various disciplines, who created the theoretical foundations of systemic and constructivist thinking in humanities. For example, these are the philosopher and communication scientist Ernst von Glasersfeld (2002), the physicist Erich von Foerster (2003), the neurobiologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980),

and the sociologist Niklas Luhmann (2013). On the other hand, there are systemic researchers who transferred these systemic basic theories to specific practical contexts. For example, Fritz Simon (2004) publishes about systemic management, Arist von Schlippe and Jochen Schweitzer (2007, 2012) about systemic therapy and counselling, Nico Tomascheck (2006) about systemic coaching, and Roswita Königswieser (2005) about systemic consultancy in organisations. While the first category of authors is very specialized in their specific scientific field, the second category of authors has a more integrative and practical approach.

As the author understands himself both as a researcher and practitioner, he also reviews the systemic theoretical foundations of the integrative and practical literature. However, where the systemic theory becomes too specialized, for example in sophisticated biological or sociological discussions, the author focuses his literature review on the authors with the integrative approach.

One challenge has been the systemic terminology. It is abstract and quasi-metaphysical. Terms such as autopoiesis, system or constructivism cannot be validated empirically. Nobody has ever observed the organisational principle of living systems 'autopoiesis' or a 'psychic system'. However, applying these concepts in systemic practise makes them experiential and thus gives them another quality rather than pure theoretically orientated discussions. In order to bridge the gap between abstract systemic theory and

experiential practise, the author refers to metaphors and analogies whenever appropriate.

2.3.2.2 Historical Roots of Systemic, Constructivist Leadership

The statement 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts' is often assigned to Aristotle. This suggests that the first systemic thoughts can be found in ancient Greek philosophy. For example, the sum of six and six is not twelve, but something more. That something 'more' can be contributed to the whole or system, not to the parts or elements. However, regardless of the illustrative benefits of this sentence, "it seems to be undisputed that this so-called "Aristotle quotation" ...is not a verbal quote. Aristotle's writings do not contain a sentence like that" (Guberman & Minati, 2007, p. 182). The statement refers to Aristotle's manuscript 'Metaphysics' in which he argues that "in all things which have a plurality of parts, and which are not a total aggregate, but a whole of some sort distinct from the parts, there is some cause" (Aristotle, book 8, section 1045a). Independent from the historical exactness, the popular interpretation of Aristotle's statement indicates that there is an interest in a holistic and systemic understanding of the world. Systemic ideas are central to the Gestalt paradigm and psychology. In a speech to the Kant Society in 1924, Max Wertheimer formulated: "There are wholes, the behaviour of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole. It is the hope to determine the nature of such wholes" (Wertheimer, 1938). In contrast to an analytic approach, which

dissects wholes, breaking them down into smaller and smaller entities, the Gestalt approach focuses on the dynamics of the system as a whole. In Gestalt psychology this idea is transferred to human experience. "The basic premise of Gestalt psychology is that human nature is organized into patterns or wholes, that it is experienced by the individual in these terms, and that it can be understood as a function of the patterns or wholes of which it is made" (Perls, 1973, pp. 3,4).

In the 1950s therapists started to work with families (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 17). Working with the human system of the 'family' was in contrast to the psychoanalytic theory "of personality in which the unconscious mind was to play such crucial role" (Gross & Humphreys, 1992, p. 5) and to behaviorism, "advocating that human beings should be regarded as complex animals and studied using the same scientific methods as used by chemistry and physics" (Gross & Humphreys, 1992, p. 4). Family therapy "focuses attention on the family as subject matter. It is the family as a functioning transactional system, as an entity in itself more than the sum of the inputs of its participants that provides the context for understanding individual functioning" (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013, p. 17). The focus of family therapy is on the relationship between the members in a family system, and not on the individual people within the family.

Today in the USA as well as in many European countries systemic therapy is part of contemporary psychotherapeutic care (Sydow, Beher, Retzlaff, & Schweitzer-Rothers, 2007). As result of the success, these concepts were

extended from the original work with families to individuals, couples, groups, institutions or organizations (Mücke, 2011). Systemic practitioners and researchers have discovered new applications of the systemic approach such as “supervision, coaching, organization consultation and development, crisis intervention, psychiatry, law, ecology, national and international systems of organization, politics, anthropology, ethnology, ethology, epistemology, and practical philosophy (Mücke, 2003, p. 21). Systemic, constructivist leadership is the logical consequence of this development.

2.3.2.3 Autopoiesis

As identified by the Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela, there are three kinds of systems: living biological systems, non-living physical and chemical systems, and technical systems (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007). The term ‘autopoiesis’ describes the organizational structure of living systems. Originally Maturana and Varela used the term autopoiesis in biology.

Living systems as they exist on earth today are characterized by exergonic metabolism, growth and internal molecular replication, all organized in a closed causal circular process that allows for evolutionary change in the way the circularity is maintained, but not for the loss of the circularity itself. (Maturana & Varela, 1980, p. 9)

According to this definition, a single biological cell is not an autopoietic system. A prerequisite for a living system is a collection of cells, which are interrelated and influence each other. Autopoietic systems are “the product of

their organization themselves, which means, that there is no differentiation between a producer and product. Being and acting of an autopoietic entity is inseparable, and this constitutes their specific kind of organization” (Maturana, Varela, & Ludewig, 1987, p. 57). In contrast “an allopoietic system produces components which do not participate in its constitutions as an autonomous unity” (Koskinen, 2010, p. 37). An example for an autopoietic system is the nervous system, which “requires treating seriously the activity of the nervous system as determined by the nervous system itself, and not by the external world; thus the external world would only have a triggering role in the release of the internally-determined activity of the nervous system” (Maturana & Varela, 1980, p. XV). An allopoietic system can be illustrated by a factory which produces cars. The output car is a product that is separate from the factory and does not become part of it.

Autopoietic systems have three characteristics (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 68) :

1. They are structurally determined, which means that the actual structure determines, in which limits a life form can be changed without losing its autopoietic organization, thus to die.
2. They have no different purpose than to reproduce themselves.
3. They are operationally closed, which means that they can only operate with their own state of being, and not with systemic external components.

As autopoietic systems are structurally determined, self-reproducing, and operational closed they are labelled as self-referential.

Self-reference ... is based on the concept of operationally closed autopoietic systems, which are occupied only with themselves. Although they exist in a medium, which provides their material and energetic sustainment or destruction, the internal function can only be stimulated by external influences (or irritated and respectively perturbed). What is really happening in the system, is determined by its internal, systemic modus of operation. (Neuberger, 2002, p. 626)

2.3.2.4 Trivial and Non-trivial Machines

Von Foerster differentiates between trivial- and non-trivial machines. He defines a trivial machine as following:

A trivial machine is characterized by a one-to-one relationship between its "input" (stimulus, cause) and its "output" (response, effect). This invariable relationship is "the machine." Since this relationship is determined once and for all, this is a deterministic system; and since an output once observed for a given input will be the same for the same input given later, this is a predictable system. (von Foerster, 2003, p. 208)

The result of the operation of a trivial machine can be determined by a simple 'cause-effect' thinking structure. An input A always causes the same output B. An example of a trivial machine is a car. Every time a driver starts the car, it should drive. The car is assembled in such a way that it fulfils the function of transportation again and again. Nothing more is expected from

the car. In the case that the car breaks down while transporting people, the trivial machine is disturbed, and a car repair shop is expected to restore the car's triviality.

In contrast to trivial machines, the inner processes of non-trivial machines are dynamic:

Their input-output relationship is not invariant, but determined by the machine's previous output. In other words, its previous steps determine its present reactions. While these machines are again deterministic systems for all practical reasons they are unpredictable: an output once observed for a given input will most likely be not the same for the same input given later. (von Foerster, 2003, p. 208)

Thus 'trivial' cause-effect thinking is inappropriate to determine the output of a non-trivial machine from a given input. Non-trivial machines are analytical not determinable because of their high complexity of constant changing inner processes. A non-trivial machine can be used as a metaphor for a living system, for example a driver of a car. While the internal state of a trivial-machine 'car' does not change, the internal states of human beings vary depending on individual factors such as emotions, mood, personal energy, etc. People's reactions to stimuli are not pre-determined and predictable. For example, the non-trivial machine 'driver A' is cut off by another driver B, taking the right of way. The driver A who has been cut off can react to this dangerous situation by either being angry at the other person, or he realizes

that he also makes sometimes mistakes himself and remains calm. The exact reaction cannot be anticipated.

2.3.2.5 Radical Constructivism

Radical constructivism is based on the biological epistemology of the self-reference of living systems which was labelled as 'autopoiesis' by Maturana and Varela (Graf, 2010). People as living systems, construct their knowledge in their heads on the basis of their own experiences (Von Glasersfeld, 2002). According to von Glasersfeld, the basic principles of radical constructivism are:

- Knowledge is not passively received either through the senses or by way of communication;
- Knowledge is actively built up by the cognizing subject;
- The function of cognition is adaptive, in the biological sense of the term, tending towards fit or viability;
- Cognition serves the subject's organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of an objective ontological reality. (Von Glasersfeld, 2002, p. 51)

Radical constructivism can be characterized as radical, because knowledge does not represent an objective ontological reality, but subjective experiences of people (Von Glasersfeld, 1984). All observations of a person depend on the observer himself in a self-referential way. Thus the observer

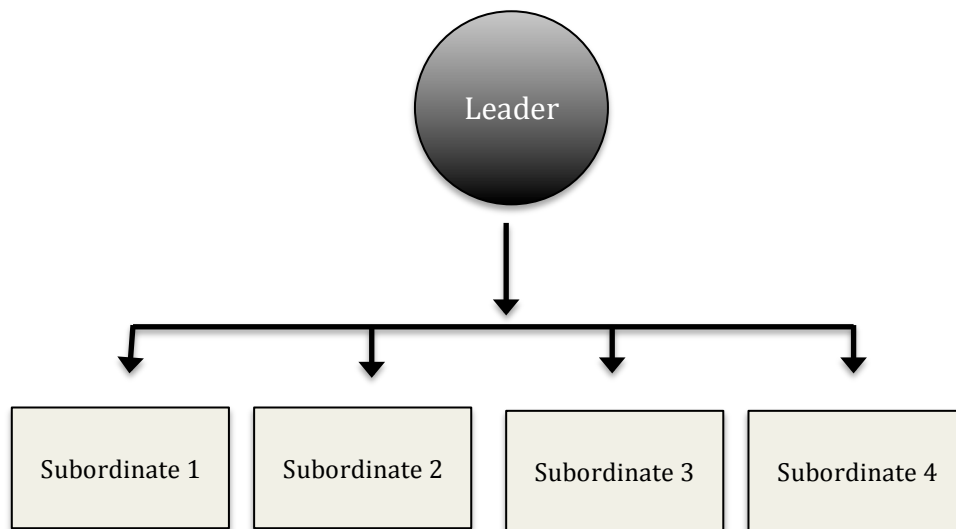
creates his own reality. Every description of a phenomenon has to be allocated to the person who describes it, and not to what is being described (Segal, 2001). For example, what a person A says about a person B often has more to do with A than with B. From a radical constructivist point of view, the observer of a phenomenon, the observed phenomenon itself, and the process of observation are all constructs of the mind and cannot be separated (P. Watzlawick in Segal, 1988, p. 16). Radical constructivism challenges the understanding and perception of reality as something being separate from an observer. "The same objective physical events lead to different perceptions and world views in different observers, depending on the conditions of their observation. Each person lives in his [or her] own reality, even if in many fields he [or she] agrees ... on a mutual view of reality called objective" (Fritz B. Simon, 2004, p. 18). The construction of reality, and not reality itself, determines the experience of the world. A specific observer constructs a specific system with no direct link to an ontological reality. Other observers of the same situation or circumstances can construct a completely different system. Due to this, reality from a constructive viewpoint has to be understood as a construct of the mind of a specific observer. The individual's subjective construction of reality can change without a change of reality itself.

The following example illustrates how the construction of reality of a leader could change from a linear-causal perspective to a systemic perspective.

One possibility to document the organisational structure of a company is the organisational chart. At the top of the hierarchy is a leader, who assumes that from her superior position, she can determine the flow of communication and the execution of tasks. It is the subjective construction of reality of a

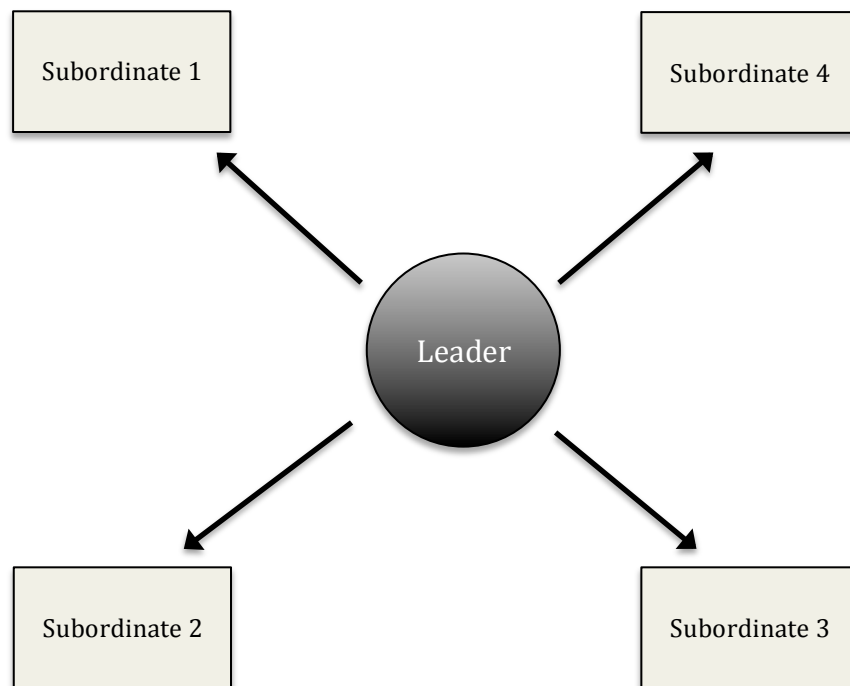
specific leader from an outside perspective, who believes in linear-causal thinking.

Figure 2-3 Hierarchical Organisational Chart



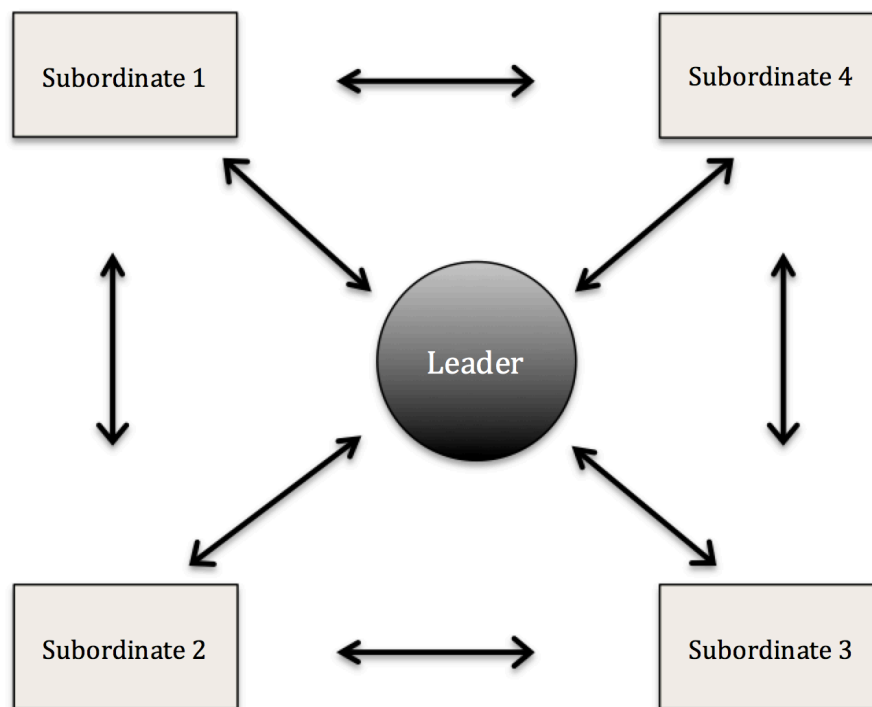
Next the leader changes her construction of reality. She switches from an outside perspective to an inside perspective. Thus she becomes part of the system organization and her constructs of 'hierarchy' and 'superior position' dissolve. However, she still controls the flow of communication and the execution of tasks. Therefore her construction of reality is still based on the idea of linear-causal relationships and determinism.

Figure 2-4 Switch of Perspective in Organisational Chart



Then the leader changes her construction of reality to a systemic perspective. Everybody influences everybody. There is no longer any determinism or linear-causal thinking. The leader becomes an integral part of a dynamic human system and ideas of control seem to be an illusion.

Figure 2-5 Systemic, Organisational Chart



Important is that this change is an operation of the mind of the leader. Other observers could prefer other constructions of reality and all constructs are independent of an ontological reality in the outside world.

Constructivism seems to stand in contrast to realism, the philosophical idea “that the physical world exists independently of human thought and perception” (Okasha, 2002, p. 58). However, radical constructivism does not deny the existence of the outside world. It is not solipsistic proposing “the view that this world is only in my imagination and the only reality is the imagining” (von Foerster, 2003, p. 226). Radical constructivism does not reject an ontological reality independent of an observer, but a direct correlation between this ontological reality and the subjective constructed

reality. Thus radical constructivism is not anti-realistic or solipsistic, but rejects only a direct access to an ontological reality by human beings.

“Although we can linguistically assert the notion of objectivity – knowledge of an object, independent of observation – there is no way of proving reality’s existence or confirming our ‘knowledge’ “ (Segal, 2001, p. 6). The notions, which we hold of our world are not a representation of reality (Graf, 2010).

Radical constructivism is not a mind-oriented philosophy. Rather it highlights the importance of personal experiences in daily life. It is not about how reality is, but how reality is experienced. Therefore it is a phenomenological concept of reality.

Radical constructivism does not mean that human beings have the possibility to construct realities in a way that everything is possible. Constructions of reality are not arbitrary. The ontological world exists and influences how human beings experience their subjective reality. “Knowledge does not constitute a ‘picture’ of the world’. It does not represent the world at all – it comprises action schemes, concepts, and thoughts, and it distinguishes the ones that are considered advantageous from those that are not” (Von Glasersfeld, 2002, p. 114). Thus radical constructivism does not mean searching for an ultimate truth in a non-accessible ontological reality, but is a constant process of finding and selecting solutions, which are viable for specific life situations of human beings. Human beings constantly face the dilemma that they do not know how close their construction of reality is in relation to the corresponding ontological reality. Therefore the philosophical

concept of 'truth' is substituted by 'viability' (Von Glasersfeld, 2001). Radical constructivism does not understand itself as a dogma, but one possible way of how people construct their realities and how the world they live in can be experienced (Von Glasersfeld, 2002). "Modes of action and thought [are] useful or viable if they help to achieve a desired goal by overcoming all given obstacles" (Glasersfeld in an interview with Poerksen, 2004, p. 31). The goal- or solution-orientation of radical constructivism is no exculpation for a mindless and ruthless mental attitude in life. In contrast, the responsibility for actions and thoughts is located in the individual thinker (Von Glasersfeld, 2002). Thus the notion of objectivity has to be substituted by responsibility (Segal, 2001). Every human being is responsible for his or her fate without the possibility to refer to something as being 'objective' or 'absolute truth'.

Von Foerster formulates two imperatives, which both emphasize personal action and consequently responsibility (von Foerster, 2003, p. 227): "*The ethical imperative: Act always so as to increase the number of choices. The aesthetical imperative: If you desire to see, learn how to act.*"

In addition, Segal refers to a moral imperative from von Foerster. "A is better off when B is better off.' For the constructivist, life is a non-zero sum game: all players win or all players lose" (Segal, 2001, p. 2). The moral imperative of radical constructivism emphasizes cooperation in contrast to the notion of capitalism, which is based on the idea of Social Darwinism, the survival of the fittest in business (cf. Leonard, 2009).

2.3.2.6 Systems Theory

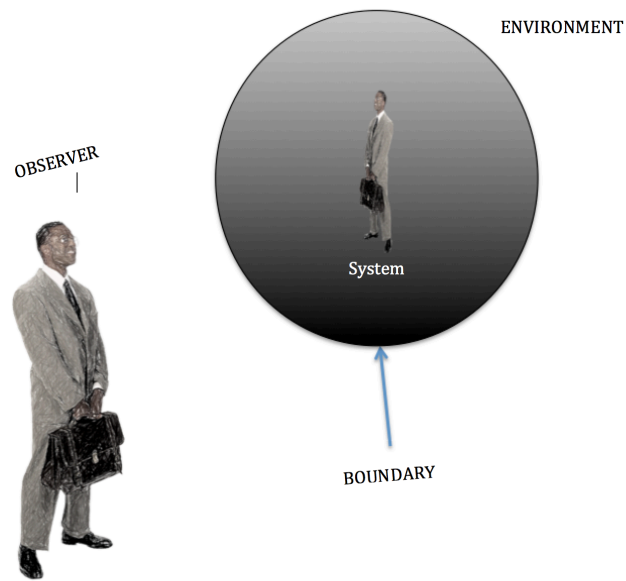
The 'systems theory' by Niklas Luhmann is a sociological approach to constructivism. It is the transfer of the concept of 'autopoiesis' by Maturana and Varela to social systems. The following review of systems theory focuses on the understanding of biological, psychic, and social systems, their central operations, and the importance of the observer.

In general, a system is "set of things working together as parts of a mechanism or an interconnecting network; a complex whole; a set of principles or procedures according to which something is done; an organized scheme or method" (Oxford Dictionary, 2012) . Luhmann's understanding of a system from a sociological perspective is different. Fundamental is the idea of an observer. "There are no systems 'as such'; there are merely observers who call something a 'system', for example an enterprise, a division or the market. Observers differentiate and thereby distinguish units from an environment. If these units are made up of elements they can be called a 'system' " (Fritz B. Simon, 2004, p. 31). "An observation is making a differentiation and naming that differentiation" (Krause, 2001, p. 88). For example, a manager observes a department in a company. He differentiates between department A and non-department A, representing all other departments B, C, D of the company. And he names his observation as department A. In defining what something IS, it is also defining those things which it is NOT. The observer of a system determines the meaning by differentiation. As a result there are no problems or challenges, which are unrelated to the observer. "Evolution has led to a world that has many

different possibilities for observing itself without characterizing any one of these possibilities as the best one” (Luhmann, 1992, p. 252).

“Reality can only be recognized and described by differentiations, which are not reality itself, but are added by an observer of the world. Because of that all descriptions of reality are constructions” (Berghaus, 2011, p. 30). Simon differentiates between ‘hard realities’ and ‘soft realities’. An example for the first one is Newton’s classical physics. “ In this area, the observed phenomena and objects can be regarded as autonomous, and it is possible to imagine the operationally closed feedback cycle that characterizes structures, functions, processes of such objects without the observer” (F.B. Simon, 1996, p. 43). In contrast, social systems are classified as soft. “Social reality, the reality of human action and economy, is relatively ‘soft’, that is, changeable by observation” (Fritz B. Simon, 2004, p. 19).

Figure 2-6 Observer Defines System and Observes Himself



Systems have four characteristics: they are operationally closed, structurally determined, open to their environment, and structurally coupled to other systems (Luhmann, 2013).

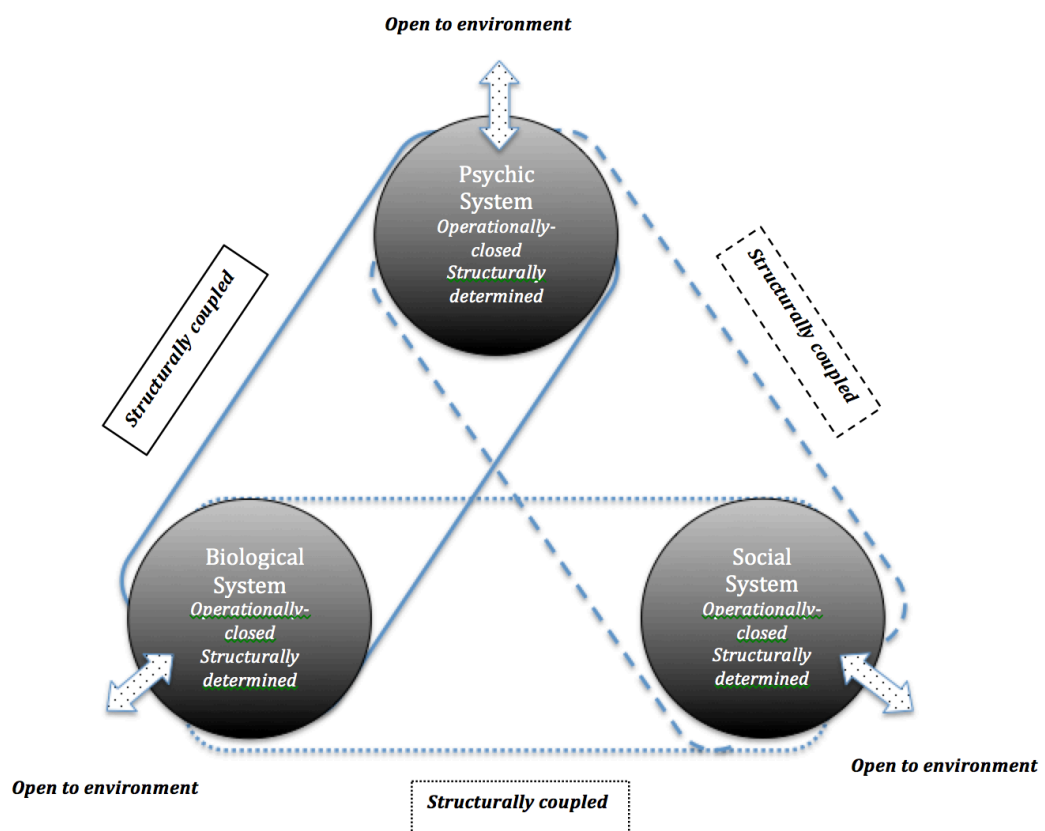
'Operationally closed' describes "operations that are from the beginning to the end ... always possible only inside a system, and they cannot be used to make an intervention in the environment" (Luhmann, 2013, p. 64). Systems produce and organize themselves independently from other systems or the environment. They are structurally determined from within the system.

Despite human systems being operationally closed, they are also open to their environment. In the case of biological systems, an exchange of energy happens. For example, the bodies of human beings require energy in form of nutrition, which is delivered from the environment in the form of food. In

meaning systems such as psychic systems and social systems the exchange with the environment is information (Luhmann, 2013).

Structural couplings between systems mean that a system cannot directly determine the state of another system. However, systems have the potential to irritate or perturb each other, and thus to influence themselves indirectly (Luhmann, 2013). Therefore on the one hand the autopoietic character of self-steering and self-organization is retained, and on the other hand the internal organization of the system can be influenced by external irritations (Borch, 2011).

Figure 2-7 Structural Couplings of Bio-Psychic-Social System



The peculiarity of the sociological approach to systems theory is that there is a differentiation between different orders of observers. The first-order observer is the observing observer, “who sees only that, what he sees because of his denotation of the distinction” (Krause, 2001, p. 94). A distinction has always two parts: what is observed and what is not observed. However, “there is always a “blind spot” – something which the observer does not see, because he is included in the observation” (Berghaus, 2011, p. 30). The concept of a second-order observer closes this blind spot. There are two possibilities to deal with these blind spots. They “can be observed by the observer himself in retrospect or by another observer” (Neuberger, 2002, p. 604). In the first case, first-order and second-order observer are one person, in the second case they are two persons. Of significance is that between first order and second order observations, there is an inevitable delay (Krause, 2001). The reflective diary of the author, used in the research process, is an example of an observer who observes himself recording incidents retrospectively. Thus potential blind spots can be identified.

Luhmann (2013) differentiates between biological systems, psychic systems, and social systems. “Subjects (human beings, individuals, persons) are ... according to systemic theoretical thinking not elements of the system, but belong to its environment (because they are not produced by the system, they are foreign objects)” (Neuberger, 2002, p. 634). This abstraction excludes human beings from the system. “Man in the sense of a biologically and psychologically individualized being belongs not to the social system, but to the environment of the social system” (Luhmann, 1992, p. 255). For

example, a company as a social system does not include management and employees as persons, but only their communication.

According to Berghaus (2011) specific human subsystems have different internal operations. Biological systems live, psychic systems perceive or think, and social systems communicate. Characteristic is that a system processes only in its inherent operation. "One system, one operation, time, and so on" (Luhmann, 2013, p. 188). Thus a psychic system can never communicate, and a social system can never perceive and think.

The basic operation of a social system is communication. "Communication is connected to communication" (Luhmann, 2013, p. 55). It "can be conceived as the *synthesis* of information, utterance, and understanding. That is to say, that communication happens when information that has been uttered is understood" (Luhmann, 1992, p. 251). There are always three selections in a social system: the "selection of information, selection of utterance of information, and a selective understanding or misunderstanding of this utterance and its information" (Fritz B. Simon, 2004, p. 20). "Therefore communication occurs only when a difference of utterance and information is understood. That distinguishes it from the mere perception of the behaviour of others" (Luhmann, 1992, p. 252). Perception is not part of the social systems, but belongs to psychic systems, and thus is not communication.

Because of the autopoiesis of a social system there is a continuous flow of communication. The meaning of the previous communication determines the meaning of the following. Or the other way round: the communication at a

moment is determined by the communication before. Both are directly connected. "Communication continues as long as it does not encounter contradiction or is not disturbed by an indication of acceptance or rejection. ... - communication bifurcates reality. It creates two versions – a yes version and a no version – and thereby forces selection" (Luhmann, 2013, p. 55). Communication is always a selection process.

All systems operate separately. However, systems are not isolated entities, but are related to a medium. In the case of the social system the medium is meaning (Fuchs, 2012). An example for a social system is the exchange of information in an interview for a job between a manager of the human resource department and an applicant. The communication of the manager is connected to the communication of the applicant. The manager selects information what the job is about. Then he selects a form of utterance, how he intends to say it. And finally the applicant has to understand what was said and why this information was provided. Next the applicant uses the understood as new information and the cycle continues. Communication is connected to communication until the meeting is over.

"A psychic system is an operating autopoietic system based on meaning. Psychic systems reproduce themselves by enabling their elements, namely thoughts, through their elements, also thoughts, to produce thoughts by thoughts" (Krause, 2001, p. 33). The basic operations of psychic systems are thoughts. Just like 'communication is connected to communication' in a social system, 'thoughts are connected to thoughts' in a psychic system.

The basic operation of biological systems is life (Luhmann, 2013). In contrast to psychic and social systems, the medium is not meaning, but body conditions. Whilst the psychic and social systems have no substance, a biological system is an object in the world.

Systems are separate entities which operate autonomously. However, they are also related to their environment (Luhmann, 2013). The biological and social systems are environments for the psychic system; the social and psychic systems are environment for the biological system; the biological and psychic systems are environment for the social system. These different systems are connected or coupled together.

A special form of structural coupling is interpenetration. It refers to the connection between social and psychic systems. "Interpenetration means that the active operation of a system depends on complex achievements and conditions that must be guaranteed in the environment, although these conditions cannot operationally participate in the system" (Luhmann, 2013, p. 196). Psychic and social systems are entities, which form an environment for each other. On one hand, they are operationally closed and work internally in an autonomous manner. On the other hand, the psychic and social systems perturb each other and thus influence their internal operations. Table 2-2 provides an overview about the characteristics of biological, psychic, and social systems.

Table 2-2 Characteristics of Biological, Psychic, and Social Systems

	Biological System	Psychic System	Social System
System Operations	Life/ Organic Processes (examples) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neural system • Digestive System 	Consciousness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts • Inner dialogues 	Communication <p>Information: What?</p> <p>Utterance: How?</p> <p>Understanding: Why?</p>
Medium	Body conditions	Meaning	Meaning
Example:	Emotion 'Anger'	Worrying about future	Discussion about deficits of a company
Permanence	Relative stable	Short-lived	Short-lived

Source: Derived from Fuchs (2012)

Mücke criticizes Luhmann's abstract approach concerning communication:

Luhmann uncouples human communication from real people by applying the concept of autopoiesis to systems of communication. It is difficult to understand the necessity of this construction. It seems to me that it would be more appropriate to turn Luhmann back around and stand him on his feet instead of on his head and consider man as the

constructor and thus the subject of his systems of communication.

(Mücke, 2011, chapter 3.15)

Consequently, many systemic working practitioners leave Luhman's abstract approach and "reintroduce the subject- or actor perspective by personalising techniques, which indeed generate communication, but intend to trigger subjective insights and action impulses (Neuberger, 2002, p. 636). For the purposes of this study, the practitioner-oriented approach is preferred over Luhman's abstract level which denies the potential of personal reflection and resulting practical interventions. These ideas are explored in the next section where systemic interventions appropriate for leadership systems are presented.

2.3.2.7 Summary Systemic Leadership Theory

At this point it is useful to reflect on the key ideas presented. Neuberger provides a concise summary of the characteristics and maxims of systemic theory in human systems:

- There are no imperturbable hard facts, but only observations and constructs.
- There is no reality, but only the reality of an observer.
- A leader is only one of many context factors, which affect the led people...
- Nobody has an overview of everything and the possibility to influence. Even small changes in one part can have far reaching effects.

- The basal element, which is produced by social systems themselves, is communication.
- The action- and person-centration (perpetrator-victim-pattern) is overcome by an interaction- and communication-centration.
- Nobody knows everything and is aware of 'the whole'.
- Every observation has a blind spot, which can only be cleared up by a second-order observation – and therefore a second observer is necessary.
- A problem can be interpreted as a symptom, in which 'holographic' system-specific patterns (point of views, differentiations, blind spots, fundamental difference) become obvious.
- The available knowledge of the centre [e.g. headquarters] is only a small part of the spread knowledge in the system.
- By connecting the possibilities of partial systems occurs an increase of possibilities of the whole system.... The relation of elements allows the emergence of Gestalt-characteristics, which the elements originally did not have.
- The environment – and that includes for the led people also the leaders – inspires or irritates, but does not determine (Neuberger, 2002, pp. 638-640).

According to radical constructivism no human being has direct access to an objective truth. A specific person actively constructs his or her subjective reality. Therefore there is not only one reality, but as many realities as people

exist. Reality is multi-perspective and the ideas of one truth or objectivity are replaced by the notion of viability.

2.3.3 Systemic Interventions

2.3.3.1 Introduction

Systemic interventions bridge the abstract ideas of systemic theory with systemic practise. They are communicative techniques developed in systemic therapy, counselling or coaching. Peculiar is that they use systemic and constructivist insights in conversations between a systemic professional and a client. Systemic leaders apply these interventions with the intention to influence and to support a specific human system in a leadership context.

However, from a systemic perspective these interventions are a paradox. On the one hand living systems are autonomous and create and organize themselves according to the principles of autopoiesis. On the other hand, a systemic leader intends to influence a system, which is autonomous. Thus the paradox arises that a systemic leader aims to influence a system which is not able to be influenced.

This paradox is solved by the idea of perturbation. According to Mücke, systemic interventions have two aspects:

Firstly, they should have a disturbing effect on a social or individual system (perturbation aspect of system). Secondly, this perturbation

should stimulate the system to achieve a more appropriate, more satisfactory or “more economical” state of self-organization. In turn, the system to be perturbed sets its own goals and thus determines the direction perturbation will take. Deliberate perturbation should then activate its own forces of change as well as the necessary resources and competence (aspect of focus on solution, of principles of self-organization immanent to the system, and of forces of change). (Mücke, 2011, chapter 9.0)

A systemic intervention perturbs a system, but there is no linear-causal predictability of the possible outcome. The inner structure and self-organization of a system determine how it will adapt and integrate the intervention. This process is independent from the intervening leader and not controlled by him or her. Thus a living system is simultaneously autonomous and open for interventions. The challenge for a systemic leader is to select interventions, which have the potential to support the self-organization of the system without knowing the outcome. Kauschke (2010, p. 119) suggests “that it is not possible to implement intentions [of a leader] by directly influencing employees: a change within one part of a system always causes a change in other parts – and even the change by a direct intervention does not correspond with the [original] intention of the leader”.

2.3.3.2 Selected Systemic Interventions

In his study about ‘Systemic Interventions in Leadership’ Steinkellner (2005, pp. 285-309) transfers his insights of intervention methods in systemic

therapy, systemic consulting, and systemic coaching to the context of systemic leadership. Furthermore, he integrates the results of nine interviews with systemic experts. In the following, the author provides an overview of selected systemic interventions, which proved useful in Steinkellner's study. These are hypotheses, systemic questions, appreciation, and reframing.

In contrast to traditional science, where hypotheses are tested against facts to come closer to truth, the objective in systemic leadership is viability. Hypotheses reflect the construction of reality of a leader (Knauf, 2010; Mücke, 2003). They are temporary and can be replaced by more viable hypotheses at any time. The systemic leader uses systemic hypotheses "to reduce complexity and to get an overview" (Steinkellner, 2005, p. 284). Whether she uses the hypothesis in an inner dialogue or shares it explicitly with the members of the leadership system depends on the specific situation. The leader has to ensure a communicative field in which people are encouraged openly without fear to reject hypothesis which do not fit to their perspective. In this case, the leader has not to react in an angry manner, because she feels that her know-how is not appreciated, but to continue the process of asking herself what is needed for the other parties in this specific situation. The leader could either rephrase the hypothesis, ask the other party whether there is a more viable hypothesis, or apply a new systemic intervention. The advantage of working with shared hypothesis is that they are formulated from a subjective perspective, and provide others the space for their own point of views. Thus a direct confrontation is avoided, therefore preventing a cycle of reactive behaviour resulting in a conflict between

people fired by their emotions. For example, if a sales target is missed, the leader could blame the responsible salesman directly for the failure. However, from a systemic perspective these simple linear-causal relationships do not consider the impact of the system. Often the attack would trigger a reactive behaviour by the salesman. A systemic approach would be that the leader compares the target and actual performance without any comments, and waits for a reaction. If the leader has the hypothesis that the acquisition performance of the salesman was poor, he could formulate it mentally or articulate it openly: "From my perspective, you missed your sales targets because of your poor acquisition performance." The hypothesis does not confront the salesman, as a person, with an absolute, non-disputable truth, but formulates one possible perspective. In this situation the salesman need not defend himself. Instead he has the opportunity to explain the incident from his position. In the end the leader learns more about the construction of reality of the salesman and can use this in the further feedback conversation.

Systemic questions are basic tools for the systemic practitioner. From a systemic perspective, it is not only relevant what happens within a specific human being, but also what occurs between individuals in the system. "Due to this it can be more interesting to make the communicative meanings explicit than to ask the concerned people in-depth for their perceptions" (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 138). Systemic questions are a communication technique to identify what is happening between the individual elements in a social system. In contrast to a direct question, for

example, “Why do you have this problem?” which can usually be answered straight forwardly (Tomaschek, 2006), indirect or circular questions are different in a systemic context . They are indirect ‘eye-openers’, which irritate people and challenge existing thinking patterns. In addition, they “are appropriate to gain information (exploration) and to give information (intervention). ... In particular questions are asked referring to the constructions of reality of the persons involved and to the patterns of communication” (Barthelmess, 2005, p. 160). The challenge of a systemic, constructivist practitioner is to explore the meaning of communication not only relevant to an individual, but for a human system.

To continue the example mentioned earlier of the salesman with the bad sales performance, the responsible sales manager could use a non-systemic direct question and ask: ‘Why is your performance so poor?’ A possible response could be that the salesman blames the company, competitors, or the product. As an alternative the manager could test a circular question. He has the hypothesis that the salesman has the potential for a higher performance, but somehow he blocks himself. Therefore he asks: ‘Imagine, that you are a key-account customer of our company. What could your salesman do differently to improve the attractiveness of the company in order to intensify the business relationship?’ The salesman is invited to put himself in the key-account customer position and to answer the question from this perspective. The manager can use the answers in the further conversation to work out an action plan. Further possible alternatives are the perspective of

the superior, colleagues, or a business consultant. All questions from this variety of perspectives can also be combined.

In a systemic context questions are important techniques that are applied with a specific intention. 'Why-questions' should be avoided, because they are often past-orientated, have a touch of an inquisitive investigation, and satisfy more the curiosity of a systemic practitioner than the finding of new perspectives.

The following table depicts a selection of systemic questions and illustrates these by examples. The systemic questions are based on the study of Steinkellner (2005) who transferred these from systemic psychotherapy (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007) to leadership.

Table 2-3 Examples Systemic Questions

1) Opening Question:	
Opening	<p>“How should the meeting be, so that it will be a good meeting for you?”</p> <p>“What has changed to the positive since our last meeting?”</p>

2) Questions on construction of reality:	
Context of mandate	“Who had the idea for this conversation? Who initiated this meeting?”
Opening of the problem package	“What do you do exactly, when there is a problem with the marketing department?”
Descriptions around the problem	<p>“For whom is the problem bigger, for you or your employees?”</p> <p>“Who identified this at first as problem?”</p>
Dance around the problem	“Do your colleagues also take umbrage at your conversation technique with the customers, or only the marketing department?”
Explanations of the problem	“How do you explain that we have been having supply difficulties for two months?”
Meaning of the problem for the relationship	“How would the relationship change between both departments, when the supply difficulties end?”

3) Questions, which make differentiations clear:	
Classification	“Who is most happy and who is least happy about the success of your project?”
Scale	“If I give you two tendencies: one wants to change the conditions of our customers, and one will maintain the actual conditions – what percentage of you want the change? And what percentage wants to maintain the old conditions?”
Consensus	“Do you see this exactly like Mr. X, or would you agree to Mr. Y. Or would you disagree with both?”
Comparison of subsystems	“How do you see this as a colleague? Does Mr. A team up better with colleague B or colleague C? Has A more conflicts with D or E?”

4) Questions on construction of possibilities:	
Construction of possibilities	“Assume, you had no boss, what would you do then to solve the problem?”
Exception of the problem	“How often (how long, when, where) does the problem not occur?” “How can you do more of this, which you have done in non-problem occurring times?”

Resources	<p>“What do you like about your department?”</p> <p>“What is your department doing well?”</p>
“Miracle Questions”	<p>“Assume that your problem is solved: how would you realize this?”</p> <p>“Who would realize at first that a problem is solved? Which employee? Which customer? Who else?”</p>
Problem-orientation	<p>“How can other employees support you in making the problem worse or in maintaining the problem?”</p>

5) Problem- and solution scenarios:	
Benefits when maintaining the problem	<p>“If this problem would be solved, what would be better and what would be worse in our company?”</p>
“As-if”	<p>“Assume that the conflict with department X is solved. Would your department be committed to back you up in the same way?”</p>

Derived from Steinkellner, 2005 pp.286 - 300

Appreciation, as a systemic intervention, means that a systemic practitioner directs attention on strengths, resources or solutions rather than on mistakes (Radatz, 2008). Steinkellner points out the significance of appreciation in the following way: “A superior ought to express her fundamental appreciation toward the employees in every conversation with employees. Almost every

small articulation of the leader can be seen as a linguistic offer, to perceive “reality” in a specific way” (Steinkellner, 2005, p. 302).

Compliments are a possibility for a leader to express her appreciation of the qualities of an employee. Appreciations should be authentic and should not mean ‘playing games’ with an employee. “It is not about positive colouring of everything, but first and foremost to promote a relationship and a conversation with the employees in a positive and appreciative way” (Steinkellner, 2005, p. 302). In a therapeutic context appreciation means the “effort for all participants in a therapeutic cooperation to find appreciative descriptions, which look behind apparently destructive behaviour for a potential constructive contribution. Solutions only have endurance, when everybody gains” (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2012, p. 39). Transferred to leadership this means that the basic attitude of a leader should be appreciative even in problematic situations. If the behaviour of an employee is in conflict with the goals of the company, at least the genuine effort for change of the employee could be appreciated. Thus the employee could be elevated in a positive change process.

Reframing is a systemic intervention for “changing the frame of reference around a statement to give it another meaning” (Molden, 2007, p. 260) or “an incident is given a different meaning, so that it is put in a new frame, which changes the meaning of the incident” (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 177). “Particular leadership situations are appropriate for reframing, in which ... employees criticize particular behaviour (or attitudes) of their colleagues (or other for the company important persons or groups). These behaviours,

attitudes or situations can suddenly appear meaningful and assume a different, more positive meaning, when they are reframed” (Steinkellner, 2005, p. 303).

Reframing can be illustrated by the metaphor of a glass of water that is filled to fifty per cent. It can be considered as a problem because it is half-empty or as something positive because it is half full. The perspective is essential.

Reframing is changing the perspective from the negative, problematic evaluation to a more positive. The object, the glass of water does not change, but only the construction of reality.

The following premises have to be considered when using systemic interventions in leadership (see Kasper, Mayrhofer & Meyer, 1999, p.190 in Steinkellner, 2004, pp. 282-283):

- Interventions can only be inspirations. Whether they are internalized by the system, depends on the structures of the organization.
- Acceptance is a necessary, but not sufficient condition. Authority and power increase the acceptance of interventions.
- “Trial and error” is a basic principle of systemic interventions: The manager constantly develops hypotheses over the operational logic of systems, and reviews these with his or her interventions.
- A central condition for the efficiency of interventions is their possibility of connection. Interventions have to consider the possibilities and limitations of the intervened system.

- Interventions should in principle increase the possibilities of the system. They are also alternative, new proposals, which are outside the usual and existing patterns of interaction.
- Every intervention creates a tension between conserving and change and should be not concentrated on one side of this relationship only. Every change proposal of a manager should also communicate, what can and should stay equal in the organization.

The sphere of systemic interventions is not action, but language. It includes both inner dialogues of a systemic leader in his psychic system, for example the silent formulation of hypothesis, and the communication between people within the social system. Systemic interventions are not a “problem-oriented approach” (Tomaschek, 2006) to investigate what happened in the past and to explore possible reasons. Rather the objective is to provide a new perspective to a challenge, to build a possible picture of the future, and to mobilize the existing resources. The systemic practitioner ‘works’ in the construction of reality of the participants in the leadership system. She does not bring in her own ideas and recommendations insisting on their implementation, but provides support for self-support.

In the literature there is the impression that systemic interventions are a one-way-road between leader and participants in the defined leadership system. Traditionally, the systemic practitioner uses these interventions to perturb or to inspire the system. However, it is also possible for a systemic leader to apply these interventions to himself and thus to influence his own

construction of reality, which again has an effect on the leadership system (Schmidt, 2012b).

2.3.3.3 Summary Systemic Interventions

Systemic interventions are communication techniques to perturb the autopoiesis of a living system. The objective is to support a more appropriate level of self-organization. However, a leader cannot be sure of the result of the perturbation, because a living system is constantly changing its inner state of organization and thus is not controllable. Appropriate systemic interventions in leadership are, for example, systemic hypothesis, systemic questions, appreciation or reframing. Systemic interventions should be solution- or resource-oriented. As a leader is also part of the living system, systemic interventions have an effect on him. In the next section the author gives an overview of 'systemic attitudes' in various systemic fields.

2.3.4 Systemic Attitude

In general, "the inner attitude of human beings is closely related to personal values, patterns of thinking and perceptions" (Saller, Sattler, & Förster, 2011, p. 240). Furthermore it can be described "as a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols (Himmelfarb and Eagly (1974) in Himmelfarb & Eagly, 1974; Hogg & Vaughan, 2008, pp. 149,150). In a systemic context the inner attitude includes both the connection of the systemic practitioner to himself, and to others while working with people. A

mental attitude can be characterized as something stable in contrast to short-lived perceptions or feelings. However, it is not something fixed and attitudes change over time. A mental attitude determines how people experience their subjective reality. In the various literatures on systemic fields such as therapy and counselling, coaching, consulting, and leadership descriptions of specific, systemic attitudes can be identified. As the author is a certified systemic coach, he is familiar with systemic theory and practise in this specific field. Systemic coaching is a face-to-face support of people often in a business context. To provide the reader with a broader picture of a systemic attitude, the author reviews on the one hand, literature about systemic therapy and counselling. Both of which have prepared historically the ground for systemic coaching. On the other hand, the author includes systemic consulting and leadership, which are related to systemic approaches in business organisations.

In the following, the author provides an overview of systemic, constructivist attitudes in literature. The objective is to find similarities within the different systemic fields and commences with a review of systemic attitudes in the context of psychotherapy and counselling.

2.3.4.1 Systemic Attitude in Psychotherapy and Counselling

In systemic psychotherapy the central element “is an unconditional attitude of esteem and respect towards one’s client.” (Mücke, 2011, chapter 2.1). This is not one form of positive thinking, sweet talk or flattering, but also includes the negative and uncomfortable aspects of the client. The therapist accepts the

whole person with all facets and thus appreciates “not only esteem and problem-solving actions, but also harmful and hurtful actions leading to guilt and obligation” (Mücke, 2011, chapter 2.1). Being a systemic, constructivist practitioner means having a deep respect for human beings. In the centre of all efforts are the people.

According to von Schlippe and Schweitzer (2007) systemic psychotherapy and counselling are more than the appliance of systemic theory and systemic techniques. The important factors are the person who works systemically, and the context, in which is worked systemically. Systemic practitioner and systemic context are connected together by a set of premises and attitudes. In the following list von Schlippe and Schweitzer (2007) provide an overview of these which are then explained in more detail:

- Extension of choices
- Formulation of hypotheses
- Circularity
- From an all-party position to neutrality
- From neutrality to curiosity
- Irreverence – no respect towards ideas, but respect towards people
- Therapy as perturbation and inspiration
- Resource-orientation – solution-orientation
- Customer-orientation

Extension of Choices

'Extension of choices' refers to the ethical imperative of von Foerster. He formulated: "Act always so as to increase the number of choices" (von Foerster, 2003, p. 227). The consequence is that "everything which restricts the number of choices (taboos, prohibition of thoughts, dogma, right-/wrong judgements) is in conflict with systemic work" (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 117). Systemic attitude means being open-minded and exposing the self to new challenges and changes.

Formulation of Hypotheses

In contrast to classical science, the formulation of hypotheses has a different function in systemic work. It is not the process of approximation to a truth by accepting or rejecting the hypothesis, but "the value of a hypothesis is determined by the question, whether it is useful.... It is not about finding the one right hypothesis. Rather a variety of hypothesis leads to a variety of perspectives and possibilities" (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 117). Working with hypothesis means the acceptance of a multi-perspective world and the search for pragmatic solutions.

Circularity

Circularity is "the attempt to describe the behaviour of the elements of a system as a feedback loop" (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 118). From a systemic perspective there are no causes, but only interactions. Thus it is in contrast to linear-causal thinking, which can cope only to a limited extent with complex and dynamic issues.

From an All-Party Position to Neutrality

All-party position means “not to have a one-sided position towards persons within ethical limits (e.g. therapies with more than one person), as well as towards positions, ideas, forms and contents of reality constructions” (Schiepek, 1999, p. 68). It is the quality of a systemic practitioner to appreciate all positions within a social system. Neutrality is closely related to an all-partial position. It does not mean that the therapist should give up his or her personal opinion, however any opinion should not be presented in a dogmatic form in the systemic dialogue.(von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 119). Both all-party position and neutrality create a climate of acceptance and appreciation of all clients. Nobody is blamed or judged, thus reactive behaviour as a consequence of criticism is avoided.

From Neutrality to Curiosity

“Neutrality favours an attitude of respectful curiosity in opposition to the certainty of causality and the moral ‘one-up’-position” (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 121). Curiosity is a passive quality of openness to the construction of reality of clients. It is listening rather than talking. “Therapists and counsellors can observe symptoms of a lack of curiosity: boredom and psychosomatic symptoms (headache, sweating, high blood pressure, dorsal pain) while working” (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 121). If this happens the connection with the client is disturbed, and the systemic therapist has to find a way to re-connect him- or herself with the client and to re-establish a position of curiosity.

Irreverence – No Respect towards Ideas, but Respect towards People

Systemic thinking means, on the one hand irreverence to ideas and on the other hand respect for people (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007). The systemic practitioner challenges dogmas or rigid thinking patterns of the client, but never the client as person.

Therapy as Perturbation and Inspiration

Systemic therapy includes both the perturbation of comfortable dogmas and inspiration to new perspectives (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, pp. 123-124). The objective is a change of the construction of reality of the client, which is more appropriate and supportive in comparison to the actual, problematic situation.

Resource-Orientation – Solution-Orientation

Resource- and solution-orientation “is the assumption that every system has all resources, which are necessary for the solution of a problem available – however it does not use them yet” (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 125). The attitude of the therapist is to encourage and support the client to find his or her own solutions using the existing resources. These could be, for example, problematic situations in the past, which the client has already mastered. By reminding the client of his existing strengths, he or she could use the energy of resources from the past to solve today’s problems.

Customer-Orientation

Customer-orientation means that the therapist, as a provider of a service “has to offer exactly what clients demand, and not what they need according to the opinion of experts” (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007, p. 125). The client is not the ‘needy person’ who is dependent on the wisdom of an ‘omnipotent’ systemic professional. Both therapist and client are equals in the therapeutic process.

The ‘German Society for Systemic Therapy, Counselling, and Family Therapy’ (DGSF, 2012) has formulated ethical guidelines, which also include statements of the systemic attitude of their members. These correspond essentially with the preceding statements of Schlippe and Schweitzer. However, in addition these ethical guidelines also contain suggestions concerning the self-centred care and self-responsibility of the systemic practitioner. “Reflective professionalism includes the alert handling of personal and professional resources and their care” (DGSF, 2012). The counsellor has to know his or her own limits of resilience, and to recognize signals of overexertion.

The DGSF (2012) suggests opportunities to relieve institutional and individual stress and difficulties, finding a balance between their own roles as counsellors and the clients’ requests. In addition, it suggests a confrontational, reflective outside perspective; such as the participation in supervision or training, and the intervision between colleagues. While supervision is guided by an experienced and qualified expert who provides

feedback and support to participants, intervention means that systemic practitioners support each other and reflect together as colleagues on the same professional level. The counsellor has not only the responsibility for the client's process, but also for his or her own inner processes. Mücke recommends an effective self-management strategy for the systemic practitioner. "During the therapeutic process, the counsellor needs to actively ensure that he feels comfortable. If the counsellor feels bad, this can be used as a source of information for what he [or she] requires in order to feel better again" (Mücke, 2003, p. 399). Counsellors have to develop an attitude of awareness for their own personal needs. Moreover, it is not possible for a counsellor to fulfil all expectations and objectives of all participating clients at the same time in a consultation. An attitude of an all-party position or neutrality is indeed important for the systemic process, but often there are conflicting goals between the parties, which are mutually exclusive. A counsellor has to adopt an attitude of self-acceptance, even if it is not possible to satisfy everybody (Mücke, 2003, p. 400).

2.3.4.2 Systemic Attitude in Coaching and Consulting

Moving on to attitudes in the context of coaching and consulting, Tomaschek (2006) defines systemic coaching as a "1. person-orientated consulting regarding all questions of the professional context, and 2. the interaction of experts (coach – client). The aim of coaching is the collective (re-) solution of problems in a constructivist conversation" (Tomaschek, 2006, p. 11). Thus the coach is the expert for supporting the coaching process, and the client is the expert for his or her specific problem. The attitude of the coach is

appreciative and accepts the existing qualities and resources of the client. Both coach and client are on an equal hierarchical level in the coaching relationship. Saller et al. (2011) brings the position of a coach to the point 'I am O.K. – you are O.K.!' The attitude of a systemic coach "tends to result in constructive communication at the same level. It is shaped by openness, optimism, benevolence, and respect for the other person" (Saller et al., 2011, p. 242). The coach does not present a 'perfect' solution to the problem, but supports the client in finding his or her own answers. Radatz (2008, p. 16) describes systemic coaching as "consulting without advice".

Saller et al. (2011) provide a number of characteristics of systemic attitudes, which are supportive in the coaching process. These are "respect, recognition of the reality of the coachee, curiosity, appreciation, humility, self-confidence, neutrality, multi-perspectives, patience, solution-orientation and confidence in the existing resources of the coachee" (Saller et al., 2011, p. 244).

"The efficacy of the coach is the result of an inner attitude towards human beings and the situation. This attitude has to do with presence and the capability to act according to a situation" (Knauf, 2004). Presence is found in Gestalt psychology and is a passive quality of an individual; being in contact with the other as well as oneself. Scharmer, Jaworski, Flowers, and Senge (2004, pp. 13,14) describe presence as "being fully conscious and aware of the present moment", as "deep listening, of being open beyond one's

preconceptions and historical ways of making sense”, and as “letting go of old identities and the need to control”.

Pohl and Fallner (2009, p. 73) maintain that in coaching an “open, situational-flexible and self-congruent attitude is advantageous. This means the attempt to be open to as many levels of perception as possible with alert senses”. Before the coaching session the coach has to get into contact with him- or herself and to develop self-awareness. During the coaching session the coach has to sustain this self-awareness and simultaneously be receptive for the communication process with the client.

Radatz uses Heinz von Förster’s ‘part-of-the-world-attitude’ to describe systemic coaching: “We are part of the system, which we describe; and by acting, we always influence the whole social system in which we participate and take part in” (Radatz, 2008, p. 18). The coach forms together with the client a social system in which the coach is, at the same time, both source and receptor of impulses.

According to radical constructivism, truth is always subjective and individual-specific. Schwing and Fryszer (2012, p. 327) claim that this understanding of truth demands a respectful and curious humility. Neither coach nor client, or anyone else has the one perfect answer to a problem or challenge.

While systemic coaching is person-oriented, systemic consulting is organisational-oriented. “Systemic consulting aims to initiate, guide and

support long-term, sustainable processes of learning and renewal with the goal of making systems (organisations) better able to survive, prosper and increase their efficiency” (Königswieser et al., 2005, p. 22).

Königswieser et al. (2005, pp. 42,43) suggest that a systemic attitude in consulting is the balancing of paradoxes and contradictions between different poles. These are:

- Reflecting and learning from feedback while, at the same time, being spontaneous and intuitive
- Being self-confident yet modest
- Learning, experimenting, discovering, being curious and open yet at the same time respecting clear meta norms, distinctions, knowledge and position at the process level
- Being affected and getting involved but at the same time maintaining distance and composure
- Combining a sense of responsibility with a playful approach
- Giving security but also providing constructive irritation
- Including both hard facts and soft factors
- Changing yet conserving
- Slowing things down without reducing efficiency

Seliger (2009) mentions two additional criteria, which have to be balanced. Firstly, “respect versus disrespectfulness...is a constant challenge to the attitude of the consultant. How much respect and appreciation does the customer need, and how much irritation can be coped with” (Seliger, 2009, p. 90). Secondly, “the distance [of the systemic consultant] has to be great

enough to enable a new perspective in the system of the customer, and at the same time it must be small enough to sustain the contact” (Seliger, 2009, p. 90).

The author reviewed the systemic attitude in psychotherapy, counselling, coaching, and consulting. All of these systemic fields have in common that they are based on respectful and supportive relationships between systemic practitioners and clients. Systemic therapists, counsellors, coaches, and organisational consultants are usually engaged for a specific purpose and their engagement will be finished when the objective is achieved. In contrast, leadership in business organisations is often a long-term commitment, and the leader is accountable for the economic results. The next section provides an overview of systemic attitudes in leadership. It commences with reflections on the differences between ‘systemic management’ and ‘systemic leadership’, and the author’s way of coping with these issues.

2.3.4.3 Systemic Attitude in Leadership

Leadership theory provides manifold definitions of leadership (cf. Ford et al., 2008; Neuberger, 2002). There is not ‘the one true definition’, but many delineations and approaches. Ford et al. point out that “notwithstanding the absence of definition, mainstream researchers and practitioners assume that because there is a word ‘leader’ (or ‘leadership’), there must be an objective reality described or denoted by such a word” (Ford et al., 2008, p.24). The same can be said for the term ‘management’. As the author believes in personally or socially constructed realities, which assume multi-perspectivity, he abdicates from a critical discussion whether the terms ‘leadership’ or

'management' denote something in the ontological world and what it is exactly. Instead the author presents in a naive and non-reflected way two definitions of management and leadership, which are adequate to his life experience in business. This avoids an overload of the practitioner research project with current theoretical discussions.

“Management is concerned with achieving results by effectively obtaining, deploying, utilizing and controlling all the resources required, namely people, money, facilities, plant, and equipment, information and knowledge” (Armstrong & Stephens, 2004, p. 5). While the term management includes all resources of the organization, “leadership focuses on the most important resource, people. It is the process of developing and communicating a vision for the future, motivating people and gaining their commitment and engagement” (Armstrong & Stephens, 2004, p. 5). The author focuses his study on working with people in leadership.

Borrowing from the ideas of Tomaschek (2006) in the context of coaching, systemic, constructivist leadership can be defined as a person-orientated leadership style in regard to all questions of the professional context, and the interaction of experts (e.g. leader – employees). The aim of leadership is the collective solution of problems in a constructivist conversation. Hence, a leader is the expert for creating the process of supporting people in achieving the company's objectives, whereas employees are the experts for solving the specific problems within their fields.

Systemic leadership stresses the importance of people, who experience their subjective reality. Pinnow points out that “systemic leadership sees the whole issue, including aspects that are not immediately apparent. Other approaches consider only the obvious, measurable processes, problems and results, following the simplified principle of cause and effect. They assume that human behavior and decisions are mainly conscious and rational and can be controlled” (Pinnow, 2011, p. 118). Pinnow uses the metaphor of an iceberg to illustrate the relationship between the recognisable and hidden parts of an organization. While the “rational, observable aspects” cover only 15 per cent of the ‘iceberg’, the “affective, concealed aspects” embrace 85 per cent. Therefore the latter “determine the direction of the iceberg. They are unconscious, irrational, informal and include structures of power and influence, as well as group dynamics, emotions, relationships, individual needs, convictions, values and cultures” (Pinnow, 2011, pp. 118,119). Indeed, a leader has to be competent in the ‘hard factors’ of management such as company planning, formulation of strategies, or controlling. However, more important for the efficacy of systemic leadership is the mastering of the ‘soft factors’, the leading of people in the direct encounter.

Steinkellner refers directly to the criteria of Schlippe and Schweitzer (see 2.4.1) in order to describe the basic attitude of a systemic leader. These include extension of choices, formulation of hypothesis, circularity, neutrality, curiosity, irreverence, leadership as perturbation and inspiration, resource-orientation and solution-orientation, and service-orientation (Steinkellner, 2005, p. 317). In contrast to Schlippe and Schweitzer, Steinkellner does not

include all-partiality in a systemic attitude. Furthermore Steinkellner points out “neutrality within a leadership context can be applied only to a limited extent. Although whenever possible, an attitude of neutrality should be adopted” (Steinkellner, 2005, p. 317).

Achouri formulates systemic imperatives for practitioners. These imperatives are not a description of a systemic attitude in leadership, but they have the quality of recipes. These recipes can be directly applied to leadership (Achouri, 2011, pp. 275-279) and give a taste of characteristics of systemic leadership. Listed below are examples of how such imperatives are related to leadership practise:

- Support freedom and self-responsibility, independent minds, capability of criticism and the competence to solve problems in your employees.
- Don't search for mono-causal blaming of others, but try to discover and understand the developmental processes behind them.
- Your success as a leader depends to a great extent on the expectations of the employees. Ask them for their expectations.
- Support decentralised decision-making.
- Support diversity in a team.
- Support cooperation, not competition.
- Do not try to motivate your employees. People can only motivate themselves.

- Do not strive for permanent growth, but for sustainability and thus for a long-term survival of the company.
- Do not strive for personal elites, but for institutional elites, which favour an extraordinary performance.
- Allow yourself to perturb the meaningful and the productive by creating a framework of structural changes which includes also lateral thinkers and critics as mediums of instability.
- Moderate, challenge, interpret, support, integrate and summarize. Do not focus on critique, but share your observations and offer feedback.

The question arises how can systemic thinking and acting be learnt or trained. Poerksen is sceptical about this being possible or even desirable. He argues that “the systemic models of thinking, which expressly claim to offer universal orientation, require years of intellectual training and in due course undermine securities and destroy aspirations towards truth. Perhaps only a small number of people can stomach these consequences” (Poerksen, 2004, p. 165). In contrast Sterlin points out that “systemic thinking can only be learned through one’s work; it cannot be instilled into others; it needs time to gather experience and to make mistakes” (Poerksen, 2004, p. 164). First and foremost it is Sterlin’s view of what is necessary for systemic thinking and acting which is preferred in this study, as this offers the potential for the personal self-development of the leader in a systemic fashion.

2.3.4.4 Summary Systemic Attitude

The author reviewed systemic attitudes in literature about therapy, counselling, coaching, consulting, and leadership. As the systemic approach was originally developed in therapy and counselling, the most comprehensive descriptions of a systemic attitude are found in these areas. The other systemic fields mainly adopt these concepts. Significant is that in systemic literature only few references to a specific mental attitude in leadership can be found. Consequently Steinkellner transfers qualities of a systemic attitude almost identically from therapy and counselling to leadership.

2.3.5 Summary of the Literature Review

In this literature review the author presented two humanistic, psychological approaches to leadership. The strengths and weaknesses of authentic leadership are discussed. Thereafter the theoretical foundations of systemic, constructivist leadership are given. This includes systemic concepts such as autopoiesis, trivial and non-trivial machines, radical constructivism, and systems theory. Next selected systemic interventions were presented, and attitudes in various systemic contexts are examined. The literature review indicates that there is indeed an understanding of the significance of the systemic attitude in therapy, counselling, coaching, and consulting. In contrast, the systemic attitude in leadership literature is of only secondary importance. The next section presents a research design, which enables an in-depth exploration of the systemic attitude in leadership contexts.

3 Research Design

3.1 Introduction

Social research can be categorized either as a positivist or as a phenomenological approach. Positivism assumes an objective reality, which can be observed and measured by the so-called quantitative methods. In contrast, from a phenomenological perspective, the researcher explores the experiences of people and their meanings in a qualitative way (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991). While positivist, quantitative or “scientific researchers reduce their perspective and limit their appreciation so as to produce repeatable results that conform to ‘scientific facts’, qualitative researchers bring humanity, subjectivity and creativity back into focus” (Barber, 2009, p. 66).

The epistemology of this research project is radical constructivism. It focuses on the individual’s construction of reality and how people experience their world. Thus radical constructivism rejects the idea of an objective world, which is accessible to people. “It is the insight that we cannot transcend the horizon of our experiences. Experiences are all we can work with; out of experiences we construct our world. Thus, there are no mind-independent entities on which our cognition is based” (Riegler, 2001, p. 1). Radical constructivism does not only contribute to systemic theory, but also depicts an epistemology in research.

According to Von Glasersfeld, there are two illusions in science. Firstly, there is an illusion of objectivity, because “the tacit assumption persists that a theory that continues to fit experience and to yield satisfactory results must in some way reflect the structure of an independent reality” (Von Glasersfeld, 2001, p. 6). However, a researcher does not have access to a reality that is independent of the own experience. What she perceives as real and objective is for the most part a construction of her mind. Hence there is only the subjectivity of the researcher, and nothing objective, which describes a mind-independent reality. Secondly, there is the illusion that objects, which are isolated in the experience of a researcher, have to be identical with those other researcher have composed. However, as there is no mind-independent reality, different researchers can perceive the same objects differently. Therefore von Glasersfeld suggests substituting the terms ‘objective’ and ‘objectivity’ in science by ‘intersubjective’ and intersubjectivity’ (Von Glasersfeld, 2001, pp. 6-7).

The radical constructivist’s view of the world frees the researcher from ‘mental ballast’ such as dogma, beliefs, or other restrictions, which seem to be fixed or absolute. Thus the researcher emancipates him- or herself to find dichotomous results such ‘as true or untrue’, ‘yes or no’, or ‘right and wrong’. Instead of that viability and usability of the results are in the foreground.

In addition to radical constructivism, Gestalt psychology also influences the author’s epistemology doing research. The term ‘Gestalt’ originates in the German language. The English translation is “pattern, form, shape or

configuration” (Mann, 2010, p. 3). “As an approach it encapsulates a wide-ranging holistic vision focused upon direct perception of what a person is sensing, feeling and projecting out upon the world ‘now’. In this way it focuses upon the wisdom inherent in direct experience” (Barber, 2012, p. 1).

Roth (2014) provides a vivid description of what he understands by a direct experience:

Direct experience means an immediate experience. You see the world in a way which you have never seen before. It is like a curtain, which rises for a moment, and you view the magnificence of the creation. In a specific moment; everything is consistent, everything is interdependent. There are no questions, no doubts, no corrections. And yet you have only observed a dandelion or you have been kissed by a unique, sweet mouth, or you are running in the sunrise and for a moment you are the sun. And first and foremost there are no words. There are no terms. With the first term which emerges the experience is no longer immediate.

Gestalt psychology “fits within the general boundaries of what is called existential psychology – that is, it deals primarily with what is going on in the here and now rather than with the historical causes or analysis of behaviour, such as emphasized in the more classical psychoanalytic theories of psychology” (Herman & Korenich, 1982, p. 11). The Gestalt-orientated researcher focuses on the present. He or she is interested in thoughts,

feelings or behaviour in a specific moment. These are described without any analysis. For example the question “why?” is not relevant. “A Gestalt-informed researcher is more concerned with what is actually experienced and being felt, seen, and heard in the immediate environment, than what is thought or interpreted” (Barber, 2009, p. 19).

Radical constructivism and Gestalt psychology complement each other. While radical constructivism stresses the individual construction of reality, Gestalt psychology focuses on how these constructions are perceived and experienced in the moment.

In the heuristic research process, the author differentiates between three aspects of his personality: the practitioner, the researcher, and the author. While the practitioner is experimenting and immerses in his experiences concerning the research questions, the researcher reflects and conceptualizes these. Both the practitioner and the researcher are using the ‘I’ form to explore subjective experiences. From a more distant and impersonal perspective the ‘author’ documents the research project in a written thesis. Grammatically he uses the third person singular.

Heuristic research can be viewed as a special form of qualitative research, because not the experiences of other people, but those of the researcher himself, are the objects of the investigation. Three important aspects of this research methodology is summarized by Patton: “Heuristic research epitomizes the phenomenological emphasis on meanings and knowing

through personal experience; it exemplifies and places at the fore the way in which the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative inquiry; and it challenges in the extreme traditional scientific concerns about researcher objectivity and detachment” (Patton, 2002, p. 109).

Woldt and Toman (2005, p. xvii) suggest that “if a picture is worth a thousand words – in Gestalt terms an experience is worth a thousand pictures”. As the experience-orientation is of existential nature in the researcher’s life, “passion in the process of discovery distinguishes heuristic search from other models of human science” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 41).

Experiences are something subjective and personal, which can only be expressed by the person who has had the experience. An objective validation of a personal experience by other people is not possible. Due to this, a heuristic inquiry can be a slippery slope between the suspicion of an autobiographic fiction and a research methodology.

The author sought an alternative to the idea of technical rationality, which “is the heritage of Positivism, the powerful philosophical doctrine that grew up in the nineteenth century as an account of the rise of science and technology and as a social movement aimed at applying the achievements of science and technology to the well-being of mankind” (Schön, 1983, p. 31). Schön points out that “the model of Technical Rationality is incomplete, in that it fails to account for practical competence in “divergent” situations”. Instead he proposes “an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive

processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict” (Schön, 1983, p. 49).

Kolb criticises that “we lost touch with our own experience as the source of personal learning and development” (Kolb, 1984, p. 2). Positivism and rationality excluded personal experiences from the research process, and thus an important area of human learning potential. The author includes both subjective experiences and abstract reflexions in his research project. He integrates the phases of the heuristic research process in Kolb’s experiential learning cycle.

The author classifies his research project as exploratory. Exploratory research aims “to find out what is happening, particularly in little-understood situations ... [and] to generate ideas and hypothesis for future research” (Robson, 2002, p. 59). The literature review indicates that the object of research, the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader, is an unexplored territory. The author hopes to prompt impulses for further research projects. The research methodology “heuristic inquiry’ supports the exploratory character of this investigation, because it gives the researcher on the one hand, a high degree of flexibility and freedom, and, on the other hand, a methodological framework. “It is a method that can be best described as following your nose, but at the same time requires the highest degree of rigour and thoroughness” (Hiles, 2001, p. 5).

The literature review provides key concepts and ideas of systemic, constructivist leadership theory and practise. In addition, the author is a systemic practitioner who uses systemic concepts both in coaching and in leadership. His objective is to create a conceptual framework of experienced systemic, constructivist leadership, which is based on his theoretical and practical knowledge. Furthermore, this framework is the basis of the heuristic research process that investigates the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader. The conceptual framework provides the author orientation in the often abstract and heterogeneous pool of systemic concepts.

According to radical constructivism, a conceptual framework should not represent an objective or true picture of systemic ideas. Rather it has to be viable in the sense that it organizes the author's systemic concepts.

Therefore the conceptual framework can be understood as a mental map, which reflects the subjective construction of reality of the author.

3.2 The Conceptual Framework

The challenge of the author has been to make systemic, constructivist thoughts experiential in leadership practise. Theoretical concepts as introduced in the literature review, stimulate interested people to reflect on this topic. However, the author's intention in his study is to leave the abstract level and to make systemic, constructivist concepts experiential in leadership practise. He has been inspired by Luhmann's differentiation between biological, psychic, and social systems. The author adopted this concept and

transferred it to a bio-psyche-social model of experience systemic, constructivist leadership. This conceptualization shows how these subsystems are both separated and connected. All three subsystems can be experienced directly by a person. People have a body, which can be perceived. Thoughts are the elements of the psychic system and can be witnessed. And communication in the social system occurs when people encounter each other. The conceptual framework supports the practitioner researcher in developing a systemic, constructivist attitude. This is a prerequisite to exploring the qualities of the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader later in the study.

The author's intention was to describe it linguistically from a neutral third person perspective. However, this was not possible, because for a radical constructivist there is no separation between a subjective inside world and an objective outside world. Both are an integral part of an observer, who constructs his or her own subjective reality. Due to this the author leaves this subject/object split and switches to a subjective formulation expressed grammatically by the first person singular "I".

Consistent with the ideas explored in the systemic literature, I understand myself as a systemic, constructivist leader. As a constructivist, I believe that I am the centre of my subjective universe. There is no 'objective' separation between my 'inside world' and the 'outside world', but everything is a construct of me. Other people like stakeholders of my company may experience the same, but they are

black boxes for me. They are part of an ontological reality, which I will never experience directly. What I do know is that they are living systems, which create and organize the own reality just as I do.

Furthermore, people are non-trivial entities. Because our internal structure of operation changes constantly, future behaviour cannot be predicted from the past behaviour. The same input today can affect me totally different than yesterday depending on my inner disposition. Subjective factors of human beings such as moods, emotions, or former experiences stored in the memory cause this complexity. I experience reality as a whole (or Gestalt). However, I can focus my attention on subsystems, which then again become my whole reality in the moment of focussing my attention. I have learnt from systems theory that a useful distinction of subsystems is the differentiation between my biological system, my psychic system, and my social system. This is only one possibility for establishing subsystems, but there are others. The differentiation of subsystems is my personal construction of reality and has nothing to do with the ontological world or with other people. Nobody else can experience how my constructivist mind works.

My biological system is my body. It consists again of many subsystems as the neural system, the digestive system, or the blood circulation system, which keep me alive. As their organisational structure is autopoietic, they usually work autonomously from deliberate

interventions by myself. The health of my biological system is prerequisite for the existence of the other subsystems. My body has a physical dimension and is part of the ontological reality. However, I experience it only from within myself.

The psychic system is how I perceive the world. It is my consciousness. It operates with my inner dialogues and thoughts. These are stories, which I tell myself again and again and in the end they become myself at the moment of operation. Thoughts are short-lived and disappear immediately. They are connected to new thoughts and thus the operation of thinking continuous.

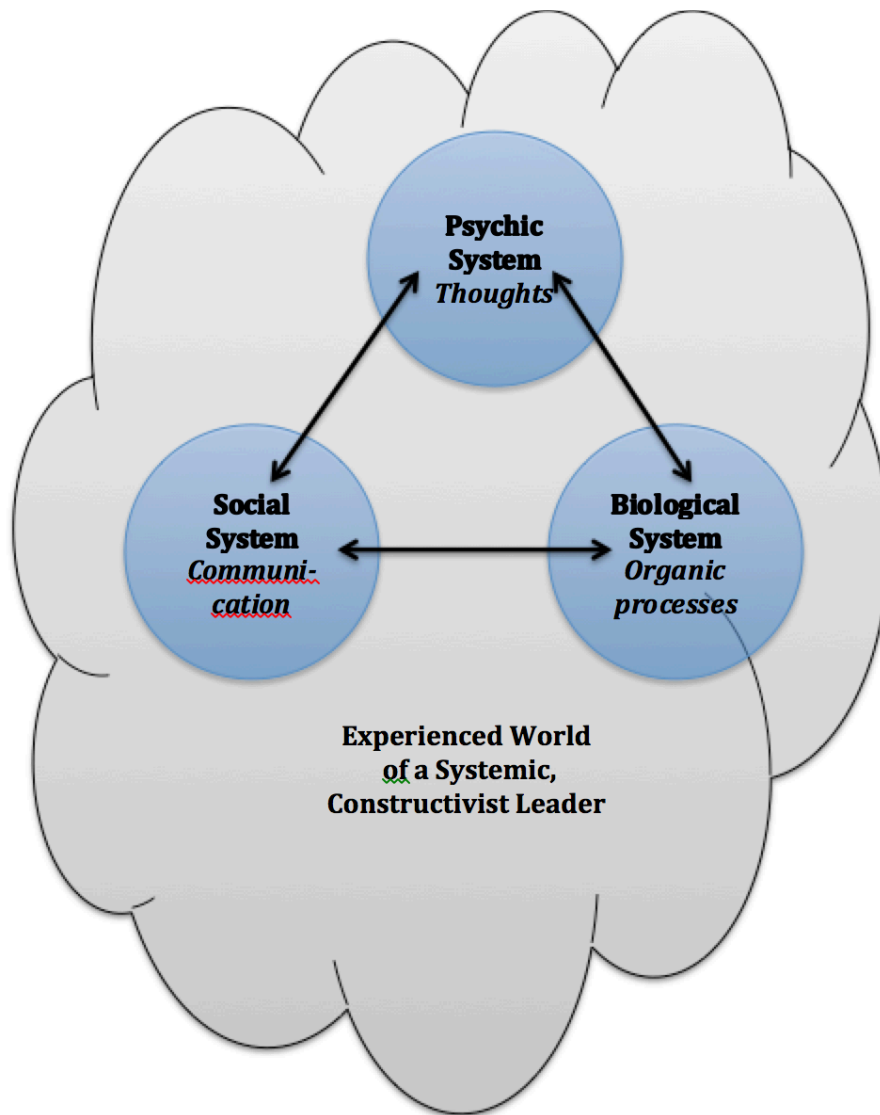
My social system is how I relate to other people. In systemic leadership I reduce the complexity by focussing on nothing but communication. I communicate with other people, and communication is connected to communication. Thus I construct my reality in a social system, in the same way as others. Communication, like thoughts is short lived and reflects a construction of myself.

All my subsystems operate independently, and are characterized by their own internal processes. They are structurally coupled and influence themselves indirectly.

In contrast to my 'experienced reality' is the 'ontological reality'. The ontological reality includes everything what exists, but can only be

experienced by my senses. Therefore, the sensitivity of my senses determines my subjective experience of the world.

Figure 3-1 Bio-Psyche-Social Model as Conceptual Framework



The following example illustrates how the subsystems of the bio-psyche-social system have an impact on each other and thus on the system as a whole:

Our company reports its financial performance quarterly to the banks. When the results are poor, I perceive it in my psychic system and experience a stress reaction. My body system reacts with an increased heart rate and emotions of anger or fear arise. I am nervous, and this again has an effect on my performance. I am likely to interact with people in an angry manner, because others in the system do not understand my problem. As a result this causes further impacts in the social system.

After the introduction of the bio-psyche-social system as conceptual framework of his studies, the author continues with a description of the research methodology 'heuristic research'.

3.3 Heuristic Research

Douglas and Moustakas portray the research methodology of this study as follows:

Heuristic research is a search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience. It requires a subjective process of reflecting, exploring, sifting, and elucidating the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. Its ultimate purpose is to cast light on a focused problem, question, or theme. (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40)

The objective of the author is to make systemic, constructivist leadership experiential and to explore the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader. "Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). The author started the process with a personal key experience, which changed his life, and which initiated his interest in systemic, constructivist leadership. It is "a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher" (Patton, 2002, p. 107).

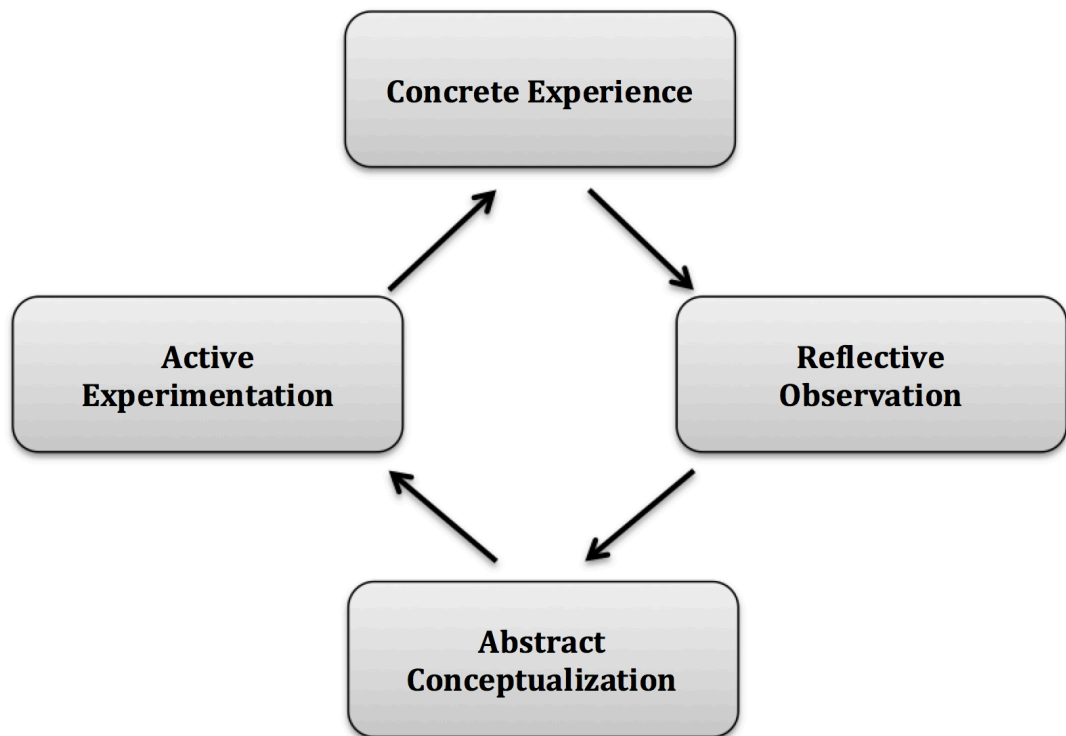
"Heuristic inquiry, similar to Gestalt, facilitates holistic attention towards the authority of inner experience" (Barber, 2009, p. 79). It is non-interpretative, because "interpretation not only adds nothing to heuristic knowledge but removes the aliveness and vitality from nature, roots, meanings, and essences of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19).

While in heuristic inquiry the central term is 'experiences' of people, in radical constructivism the expression 'construction of reality' of human beings is most significant. The author uses these formulations in his study to express how individuals perceive their subjective reality. Therefore he gives both 'experiences' and 'construction of realities' a similar meaning.

3.4 Integration of Heuristic Inquiry in Experiential Learning Cycle

This research project investigates the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader. The data collected and utilized are based on the experiences of people. The author does not explore a static object, but human experiences in living systems, which are dynamic and change continuously. As he is not a 'native systemic, constructivist leader', the challenge of this research project, for him, is to learn the qualities of being a systemic, constructivist leader and to investigate these at the same time. "Experiential learning encourages us to meet life in an open and inquiring way, to attend to the unique nature of our present relationships and to experiment with becoming the whole of ourselves, in service of personal development" (Barber, 2011, p. 2). On the one hand, the author has used several training and self-training opportunities to learn more about systemic, constructivist leadership. On the other hand, he applies and experiences systemic, constructivist leadership in his daily management practise, gains new understandings by reflection, conceptualizes these, and experiments with new insights to improve his practical skills (Kolb, 1976). So the author has started a continuous learning process in systemic leadership, which in turn is the prerequisite to investigate the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader.

Figure 3-2 Experiential, Learning Cycle

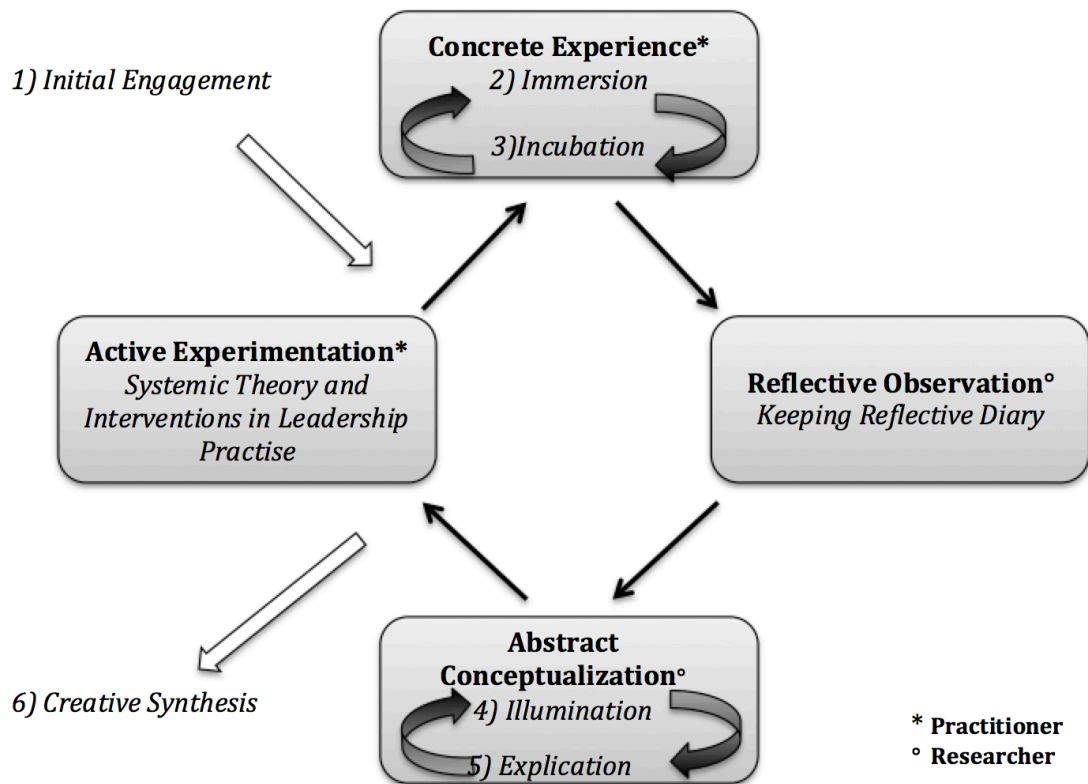


Derived from Kolb (1976, p. 30)

The author has integrated the stages of heuristic inquiry in an experiential learning cycle to combine both the experience-orientation and the learning-orientation of his research project. According to experiential learning theory “immediate concrete experience is the basis for observation and reflection. These observations are assimilated as theory from which new implications for action can be deduced. These implications or hypotheses then serve as guides in acting to create new experiences” (Kolb, 1976, p. 21). This process is illustrated in the experiential learning cycle, which consists of four stages; concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1976). One specific sequence can be seen as

one learning experience. It is repeated over and over again and results in deeper and richer knowledge of human beings.

Figure 3-3 Heuristic Inquiry Integrated in Experiential Learning Cycle



Experiential learning differentiates between single-loop and double-loop learning. “In single-loop learning, we learn to maintain the field of constancy by learning to design actions that satisfy existing governing variables. In double-loop learning, we learn to change the field of constancy itself” (Kolb, 1976, p. 21). In this research project prevailing assumptions and approaches to leadership are challenged. Thus double-loop learning experiences are an integral part of the exploration.

Kolb suggests that there are two primary dimensions in the experiential learning process:

The first dimension represents the concrete experiencing of events at one end and abstract conceptualization at the other. The other dimension has active experimentation at one extreme and reflective observation at the other. Thus, in the process of learning, one moves in varying degrees from actor to observer, and from specific involvement to general analytic detachment. (Kolb, 1984, pp. 30,31)

The author sees himself as a practitioner researcher, who combines management practise and management research within himself to gain new insights. 'Concrete experience' and 'active experimentation' of the experiential learning cycle reflect the practitioner part, while 'reflective observation' and 'abstract conceptualization' are more concerned with the researcher part.

In heuristic research, there are seven core processes which are techniques describing how a heuristic researcher can use personal experiences to generate data. These are explained in the following section to illustrate how the author has made sense of them. The aim is to demonstrate the rigour of the processes engaged, despite the autobiographic nature of this study. Scientific rigorousness and a research methodology, in which the researcher is both observer and producer of data, are not in contradiction.

3.5 Core Processes of Heuristic Research

3.5.1 Identifying with the Focus of Inquiry

Heuristic research investigates an existential question of the researcher. “Through exploratory open-ended inquiry, self-directed search, and immersion in active experience, one is able to get inside the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). The author examines the phenomenon the “mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader” from within. Salk describes this process as “the inverted perspective” (Salk, 1983, p. 7 in Moustakas 1990 p.15). Instead of exploring a phenomenon from a detached outside position, the author immerses actively in the experience in his leadership practice.

3.5.2 Self-Dialogue

Self-dialogue is “the recognition that if one is going to be able to discover the constituents and qualities that make up an experience, one must begin with oneself” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16). The author has trained himself in the technique of self-dialogue as part of his reflections. He started interviewing himself switching the perspective from the interviewer to the interviewee and vice versa. Although this method was a good start to observing himself and to developing awareness of his experiences, it was time-consuming and sometimes artificial.

Example 3-1 Self-Dialogue as Interview with Oneself

Interview 28.02.11

Interviewer (Klaus): What is important for you in Systemic Leadership?

Interviewee (Klaus): I think most importantly is the inner attitude. I try to be relaxed and to observe myself and the other person in the communication process. Systemic leadership is about listening, and not about talking. I give people the chance to formulate their ideas and points of views. This is important when you are in a meeting with a person or a group of persons.....

During his research the author has found new aspects how to develop the heuristic core process self-dialogue further. As he is experienced in ZEN , self-dialogue reminded him of working with koans. A koan “is a fundamental question about the nature of reality that a student works with during periods of zazen, or Zen meditation” (Loori & Kirchner, 2006, p. 1). A koan triggers something in the practitioner, but there is no logical answer. The author has experimented with using the research question as a koan. He continuously asks himself, what is the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader. Loori and Kirchner point out the merits working with koans:

In order to see into a koan we must go beyond the words and ideas that describe reality, and directly and intimately experience reality itself. The answer to a koan is not a fixed piece of information. It is one's own intimate and direct experience of the universe and its infinite facets. It is a state of consciousness! (Loori & Kirchner, 2006, p. 1)

This creative usage of the research question, as koan triggers in the author a process of inner dialogue, supports him in exploring deeper his research topic in more depth.

Example 3-2 Self-Dialogue as 'Koan'

31.03.13

What is the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader?

I am confused and angry. There are so many aspects to this question. And the terms are so abstract! I feel blocked and cannot think. But I should not waste time and should start. Due to this I begin with an intellectual answer. Mental attitude is my psychic or inner organization how I encounter people in life. Is this answer nonsense? The terms psychic and inner organization are absolutely artificial and have nothing to do with me personally. I don't like the answer. Therefore I begin with systemic, constructivist leadership. Systemic is about living systems and their principle of self-creation and self-organization, which is termed as autopoiesis. Constructivist means that I construct my personal reality. And leader is about how I influence other people to do what I want, especially in my job. **But what is the mental attitude of a systemic,**

constructivist leader? The answer has to be personal. I do not want to speak about abstractions and other people. I have to go into myself and explore the meaning. I am still confused and not satisfied with the time I am spending here. At the moment I am more focused on my anger than on the research question. At least I do know, what it is not. And that is exactly my momentary state of being or mood. Is a mental attitude really a mood? This is almost like a new riddle to solve. Mood is for me something impermanent and not stable, which is directly connected to inner states of myself, such as emotions. Systemic attitude is definitely no mood. **But what is the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader?** At the moment I am sitting in front of my notebook and do this ridiculous exercise without knowing, whether my supervisor or other readers of these lines declare me for insane. There is a lot of doubt in me. Now I am straying from the subject and have to return to my research question. **But what is the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader?** Perhaps it has something to do with others, is a social phenomenon. I am sitting here alone and it is difficult to gain access. Maybe I should stop here and connect myself with others and then to continue. However, this is also nonsense. Systemic attitude has to be lived together with others; I have to describe and formulate it myself. I am still angry. I should not use my anger to frustrate myself and to block myself, but as an energy to create something. That sounds positive and gives me a better feeling. The mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader has something to do with self-management. I remember my coaching trainer Christine. She said that before I work with other people I have to care for myself.

Perhaps this could be part of this mental attitude. Caring for myself, before entering in an encounter in leadership situations. I observe a relief in me. Perhaps this is a beginning. **But what is the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader?** This mental attitude starts with me. It is about how I construct my subjective reality. Nobody else can look inside of me. It is something very personal. But is a mental attitude a construction of reality? I feel insecure!

Self-dialogue is focused on the experience of the present. It includes the investigation of thoughts, feelings and behaviour, which are happening at that moment.

3.5.3 Tacit Knowing

The distinctive factor of a heuristic inquiry is that it does not only include rational knowledge, but also the subjectivity and the experiences of the researcher. The research question of the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader could be answered with a theoretical definition or a description of possible attributes. However, from the perspective of a heuristic researcher this would be on the surface. He or she is interested in deeper spheres of knowing. According to Polanyi, there is a knowing in human beings, which is beyond words: “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi & Sen, 2009, p. 4). And this discrepancy between the hunch of knowing and the capability to formulate it, is an integral part of the heuristic research process.

There is explicit and implicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is immediately accessible for human beings. It is conscious and can be applied to everyday life. It is the kind of knowledge, which is available, when there is a problem to solve. "In addition to knowledge that we can make explicit, there is knowledge that is implicit to our actions and experiences. This tacit dimension is ineffable and unspecifiable, it underlies and precedes intuition and can guide the researcher into untapped directions and sources of meaning" (Hiles, 2001, p. 3). Tacit knowledge should not be confused with unconscious knowledge. Human beings have access to tacit knowledge, but cannot always formulate it. There is a feeling that there is something, but it cannot be described or verbalized. Introspection and developing awareness for inner processes support the process of making the non-expressible expressible.

3.5.4 Intuition

The link between implicit or tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge is intuition. "Intuition makes immediate knowledge possible without the intervening steps of logic and reasoning" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 23). It comprises insights, which suddenly come up and cannot be planned. "Great powers of scientific intuition are called originality, for they discover things that are most surprising and make men see the world in a new way" (Polanyi & Grene, 1969, p. 118). The author's experience is that intuitive insights come up suddenly and have to be written down in a reflective diary. Otherwise they are forgotten and often lost. The author has developed a critical trust to his intuition, because he regards it as a means to transcend normal and usual

thinking patterns. Like in brainstorming, whatever comes up intuitively is not criticised or judged.

3.5.5 Indwelling

“Indwelling refers to the heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24). The author found two approaches to indwelling appropriate. On the one hand, he developed awareness for his research topic in his daily management practise. Then he has both a direct experience of his mental attitude while encountering other people in leadership contexts. On the other hand, he uses his time of reflection to explore his research theme. Then all contemplation starts with a key word or key sentence of the experience. “The indwelling process is conscious and deliberate, yet it is not lineal or logical” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24). The author searches actively within himself for the meaning of his research topic. He regards it as a part of himself and not as something a separate entity.

3.5.6 Focusing

In general, focusing is a mental technique of how to gain direct access to the knowledge of the body. It is like an inner dialogue between a person and his or her own body (Gendlin, 2003). Moustakas utilizes focusing as an introspective tool in the research process:

Focusing is an inner attention, a staying with, a sustained process of systematically contacting the more central meanings of an experience.

Focusing enables one to see something as it is and to make whatever shifts are necessary to remove clutter and make contact with necessary awareness and insights into one's experiences. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 25)

The author tested focusing in a guided session with a focusing trainer. In the centre of focusing is the felt sense, "which is not a mental experience, but a physical one. ... A felt sense doesn't come to you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (though often puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling" (Gendlin, 2003, p. 33). Similar to tacit knowledge, which signifies areas of human beings which cannot be verbalized, focusing investigates knowledge of the body which cannot be described in words. It is a subjective, introspective process of the heuristic researcher to delve deeper into an experience in order to find new insights. Gendlin (2003, pp. 43-50) describes six steps; how to train focusing. These are clearing an inner space, felt sense, handle, resonating, asking, and receiving. The following example illustrates how the author used focusing in the exploration of the mental attitude of systemic, constructivist leader.

Example 3-3 Focussing

I am on holiday together with my family and note in my reflective diary:
"Illusion of controlling the system my business: when I am absent, e.g. on a holiday, I always fear that something could happen in the company, and that I am indispensable. (05.08.12)". I use this entry to work with control

and fear in a focusing process.

I start with clearing an inner space. I sit relaxed and observe myself. I direct my attention on my thoughts and let them come and go without clinging. Then I focus my attention on my body. As I know that my belly is very sensitive, I build up awareness in this region. How does the belly feel at the moment? There is a little pressure in my stomach (= felt sense). Not much, but it is there. I observe it and wait. Then I ask myself the question of interest: " Why do I perceive loss of control as fear?" My belly tightens and I do not feel good. Something in me feels sad and paralysed. This body feeling expands to the whole body and drags me down. I observe this process and go to the next step, the handle. I am aware of the felt sense. It is unpleasant and I suffer. I am looking for a word or phrase to describe it. I focus my attention on my mind, but it is paralysed. Therefore I go back to the body and try to find a spontaneous phrase. What comes up is 'fear to fail'. It is like a light bulb moment for me. The next step is resonating between the felt sense and the phrase 'fear to fail'. I am feeling bad now, and I want to leave this uncomfortable situation and to gain insight into my problem. The more I go back and forth between the felt sense and the phrase, the more I accept the loss of control. It is there, but I also exist without being in control. I let the control go and relax. Then ask myself: What is this problem about? I have the concept that I should be always be in control of my life. And this paralyses me and triggers anxiety and sometimes panics. This insight relaxes me more. My mind remarks (in an inner dialogue) that I am in control of being not in control. However,

the body is releasing and I leave this unpleasant state of being. I enjoy the insight and the new body feeling. Finally I finish the focusing session. The process and its explication are written down in my reflective diary.”

3.5.7 The Internal Frame of Reference

The internal frame of reference refers to the people who experience the quality, which is being explored. “Only the experiencing persons – by looking at their own experiences in perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and sense – can validly provide portrayals of the experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 26).

Because of that in heuristic research so-called co-researchers give the primary researcher feedback.

If one is to know and understand another’s experience, one must converse directly with the person. One must encourage the other to express, explore, and explicate the meanings that are within his or her experience. One must create an atmosphere of openness and trust, and a connection with the other will inspire that person to share his or her experience in unqualified, free, and unrestrained disclosures.

(Moustakas, 1990, p. 26)

The author, being the primary researcher, shared experiences in conversations with systemic professionals. These experts were encouraged as co-researchers to respond spontaneously in a brainstorming manner.

Both researcher and co-researchers explored particular topics together. The sharing of their experiences provided the researcher with further insights.

Heuristic inquiry focuses on the internal frame of reference of people.

Subjective experiences are directly connected to the internal world of individuals. They have to be explored from this inside perspective. An external frame of reference would investigate the research topic from an outside position. Thus subjective experiences of people would be excluded. The next chapter illustrates how the author integrated the heuristic inquiry in the experiential learning cycle in his exploration.

3.6 Phases of Heuristic Research

3.6.1 Initial Engagement

Initial engagement is the beginning of a heuristic research project. “The task of the initial engagement is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal compelling implications” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27).

The researcher investigates a topic, which has personal relevance, and which creates the critical energy to motivate him or her for the project. Hiles (2001, p. 5) points out that “in heuristic inquiry, the research question chooses you, and invariably the research question is deeply personal in origin”. “The engagement or encountering of a question that holds personal power is a process that requires inner receptiveness, a willingness to enter fully into the theme, and to discover from within the spectrum of life

experiences that will clarify and expand knowledge of the topic and illuminate the terms of the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27).

3.6.2 Concrete Experience: Dance between Immersion and Incubation

“The immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question – to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). “Immersion of this kind is more impulsive than deliberate, more wandering than a goal, more a way of being than a method of doing” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 48). The heuristic researcher internalizes the research questions and they become an integral part of daily life. As all experiences are relevant, there can be situations or incidents, which are unpleasant and painful. The active confrontation with difficult and intensive situations is also part of the heuristic inquiry.

“Incubation is the process in which the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). While in the immersion phase, the researcher has actively searched for the meaning of the investigated experience, incubation means to stop this process. Without the research question in mind the researcher “allows the inner workings of intuition to clarify and extend his/her understanding of the question, while awaiting the tacit knowing that percolates to consciousness from a deep well of subconscious inner experience” (Barber, 2009, p. 78).

The basic element both of heuristic research and the experiential learning cycle are concrete experiences of human beings. Coghlan and Brannick describe experiences as following:

Some of your experiences are planned, others are unplanned. Some are what is done to you by others. Some experiences are cognitive; they occur through the intellectual processes of thinking and understanding. Some occur in feelings and emotions. At times you may feel excited, angry, frustrated, sad, lonely and so on. Other experiences may be experienced in the body – excited energy, embarrassed blushing, tightness in the stomach, headaches, ulcers or sickness. (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007, pp. 33,34)

Experiences depict the subjective reality at a specific moment. Critical to access one's own experiences is to develop awareness for oneself. Awareness directs the attention of human beings on what is happening in the here and now without evaluating, judging, or conceptualizing. It is a direct experience of life in a specific moment, and has to be differentiated from life experience, a resource to solve challenges by accumulated past experiences.

The author has realized that techniques from Gestalt psychology supports him in connecting himself with the present and thus to his direct experience. Especially three questions supported him to focus his attention on the here and now:

1. What do I think now?
2. What do I feel now?
3. What I am doing now?

These are utilized in the form of self-dialogue as core process of heuristic research. Important is the 'merger' with the Gestalt questions. They have not to be answered on a superficial level like the phrase "How are you?" ... "Fine!". Rather a Gestalt question follows a deep look inside what is happening there: What thoughts are in my mind right now? Is there a dominant emotion in my body and where it is exactly? Does this emotion influence my basic disposition now? How do I gesture with my hands? Am I fully aware of my communication partner or am I distracted?

In the immersion and incubation phase of the heuristic inquiry the researcher develops and applies systemic leadership skills in his company. While immersion is the active search for insights, incubation is a more passive phase of letting go. As the author is a manager, he often has to focus on specific tasks and responsibilities in his job. Especially in busy and challenging time periods in business, the research project has to be put on hold. However, this does not mean an interruption of the inquiry, it is continuing on a more subtle, often unconscious level. Both phases 'immersion' and 'incubation' alternate continuously, depending on the specific life situation.

3.6.3 Reflective Observation

The author collects data of the heuristic research process by entering all relevant experiences in a reflective diary. These include critical events, insights, and reflections. “Attending to experience is the first step to learning” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007, p. 34). Keeping the reflective diary is like brainstorming. Every new insight is documented without censoring and judging.

In a Gestalt way, the author includes his direct experiences of the research subject in the study. Insights are gained by developing awareness of the immediate sense perceptions in a specific moment. However, there are two challenges to capture a direct experience. On the one hand, a direct experience of a phenomenon cannot be transferred one-to-one into language. There are often tacit aspects which cannot be formulated. On the other hand, a direct experience is only existent in the moment of arising. The next moment a direct experience is replaced by a new one. Direct experiences are a continuous flow of sense perceptions. As there is always a time gap between experiencing a phenomenon and entering it into a written account, this time gap should be as short as possible in order to minimize distortions.

Important is that the collection of data does not disturb and influence the leadership practise. Keeping notes in leadership situations is often not possible or appropriate. For example, if the author is in a meeting with employees, who are in a conflicting situation, the transcription of personal

experiences would irritate the group thus distorting the process of investigation.

The distinction between private and professional spheres of life is difficult and artificial. Impressions from the company also affect the private life and vice versa. The author does not define limits or restrictions in advance, which experiences are of private nature and inappropriate to document and to be published. He is aware of possible conflicts and integrates these in his personal experiential learning process.

3.6.4 Abstract Conceptualization: Dance between Illumination and Explication

The fundament of the illumination is the organizing of personal experiences and new insights. It is “a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question” (Moustakas, 29). Clustering does not mean the analysis or sifting of specific experiences. It is rather a process to condense the insights and to reduce complexity. Illumination includes looking inside, being aware of inner states, and observing thoughts. Receptiveness and open-mindedness support this process, while stress and being busy have an inhibiting effect. If new themes are recognised, they will be included in the research process. Thus “illumination opens the door to a new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery of something that has been present for some time yet beyond immediate awareness” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 30).

In the explication phase of the heuristic research process, “the researcher attempts to examine fully what has awakened in consciousness, in an attempt to familiarise him/herself with the layers of meaning that surround the phenomenon being studied” (Barber, 2009). Explication is grounded on the insights of the illumination stage, in which specific themes and qualities of the phenomenon were clustered. “Additional angles, textures, and features are articulated; refinements and corrections are made. Ultimately a comprehensive depiction of the core or dominant themes are developed” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31). Important is the attention on the whole or the ‘Gestalt’ of the experience. Explication exceeds the linguistic capabilities of human beings and “utilizes focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure, and recognizes that meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal frames of reference” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31). This stage is about searching for answers and meanings to the research question. Fundamental to this are the experiences depicted in the reflective diary. The author reads these time and again, focuses his awareness to relevant topics, and clusters these to reduce complexity. He records the data in an additional reflective diary, which he refers to as ‘illumination/explication journal’.

In the explication phase, the author lets the insights from the illumination sink in and observes the effects on him. If a new understanding or comprehension of an experience arises, then this is added in the ‘illumination/explication journal’. Abstract conceptualization is the interwoven process of illumination and explication to gain and assimilate new insights.

3.6.5 Active Experimentation

In the stage of active experimentation, the practitioner researcher tests his or her new insights, from reflection and conceptualization, to focus the attention on practise. It is a trial and error approach of testing and experiencing what happens in real-life business situations in the encounter with other people. This is the end and the beginning of a new cycle of experiential learning.

3.6.6 Creative Synthesis: The Outcome

The presentation of data at the end of a heuristic research process is the creative synthesis. “The creative synthesis encourages a wide range of freedom in characterizing the phenomenon. It invites a recognition of tacit-intuitive awareness of the researcher, knowledge that has been incubating over months through processes of immersion, illumination, and explication of the phenomenon investigated” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52). The creative synthesis is an arranged composition of the researcher’s experiences in respect to the research question. It gives the reader a taste of the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader.

3.6.7 Validation of Heuristic Research

Validity in science is “the degree to which what is observed or measured is the same as what was purported to be observed or measured” (Robson, 2002, p. 553). It is a statement of trustfulness of research. Moustakas (1994, p. 21) distinguishes human science research from “traditional, natural science, quantitative research theories and methodologies”. In the following

he gives an overview of qualities of a human science research such as heuristic inquiry:

1. Recognizing the value of qualitative designs and methodologies, studies of human experiences that are not approachable through quantitative approaches
 2. Focusing on the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts
 3. Searching for meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and explanations
 4. Obtaining descriptions of experience through first-person accounts in informal and formal conversations and interviews
 5. Regarding the data of experience as imperative in understanding human behaviour and as evidence for scientific investigations
 6. Formulating questions and problems that reflect the interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher
 7. Viewing experience and behaviour as an integrated and inseparable relationship of subject and object and of parts and whole
- (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21)

Heuristic inquiry can be classified as a postmodern concept to human science:

Postmodernity can be viewed as a cultural movement for which such strong criteria of validity no longer exist (since the connection between

'reality' and human constructions has been dismissed). The idea of progress has nothing to refer to, because there is no standard against which to judge an innovation of theory, practice, product or policy that would enable one to see that it is an improvement over what previously existed. (Smith, 2008, p. 22)

The reality of peoples' experiences is subjective, individually or socially constructed, and relativistic. The ideas of 'objectivity' and 'truth', which are the motivation of a positivist, scientific approach, are regarded as an illusion in a postmodern research methodology. Instead, the human science researcher explores phenomena in terms of the lived experience of participants in an attempt to understand the existential life of people.

Heuristic research investigates the subjective experiences of a primary researcher, who has delved deeply into the exploration of a personal relevant problem and who has undergone the whole heuristic research process completely. The researcher's experiences are validated in sharings with co-researchers. The objective of validation in heuristic research is not doing a quantitative evaluation of the investigated phenomenon that is repeatable. Rather "the question of validity is one of meaning: Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32).

The research methodology “heuristic research” is an eclectic approach to understand the world. A rigid holding to specific scientific paradigms would inhibit the creativity and energy released by this methodology. Therefore a balance has to be found between open-mindedness to new approaches in humanistic research and traditional, scientific requirements about validation. The next section presents how data were collected.

3.7 Methods of Data Collection

The author’s experiences and personal insights were collected in a reflective diary over a period of 5 years. In January 2010 the author started a reflective diary to document his personal development in systemic, constructivist leadership. The author used it for brainstorming, recording intuitive ideas, and reflections. All insights and experiences were documented in this diary as they arose. They were spontaneously and intuitively entered without censoring and analysing. For example, this could have been in the morning while eating breakfast, in the car or train, while working, or on holiday. Therefore permanent access to the reflective diary was necessary. As all data were stored in a virtual cloud, insights were able to be entered via the mobile phone, tablet computer, or notebook. All data were synchronized in the virtual cloud automatically. As the author was often under time pressure, the structure and orthography were of secondary importance, and were improved later. The most important thing was to capture the meaning of a specific experience at the time of occurrence.

Example 3-4 Reflective Diary

Reflective Diary 06.11.12

- S. and A. alleged my weaknesses in leadership. I cannot be always neutral or all-partial. Management means making decisions. Neutrality does not mean that I do not have the responsibility.
- My intention is to be in all-partial position, especially in conflicting situations between stakeholders.
- I have to balance different aspects: there is no one right way.
- Contact: being in contact with myself (body, mind) and with others (communication = contact by formulating my thoughts).
- Contact requires awareness for my judgements of other people.
- I feel stressed and busy. I get into contact with myself or with people, feel connected and relax.
- Being in contact with myself before I encounter other people. I hold the contact during the encounter.
- Vulnerability: Being authentic means opening myself to others and also sharing feelings and weaknesses.
- Radical Constructivism: I am anxious to lose all security in my life. It is an existential fear. I have to be aware of this fear. It cannot be discussed away, but awareness stops the circling of thoughts and thus I relax.
- Being in the sauna: when it's hot in the sauna or cold in the ice-pool I come out of my thoughts and relax. Then I am in contact with my biopsychic system.

Reflective Diary 28.10.12

- My psyche is my system of cognition. It is constantly differentiating. Interventions mean changing the mode of differentiation, but not reality itself.
- Constructions of realities mean working with subjective differentiations.
- The body can only be in the here and now (see neural system). The body is structurally coupled with the psyche by awareness.
- Training Systemic Leadership: awareness of differentiations. The statement „I am sad“ is a differentiation between two states „sad“ and „not sad“. The differentiation is something very personal and does not depict an objective reality. It is a description of reality (see Satir).
- Problem: dichotomous thinking: either „sad“ or „not sad“, but what about fuzziness? What is in between? Can it also be described with words?
- The stories, which I tell myself (thoughts, internal communication), define what I am (see Schlippe).
- My challenge: Getting in contact with other people takes time. I have to focus my attention on myself and on other people. And I have to give myself and the others time to get in contact with each other: deceleration instead of acceleration.
- Paradox: How can I be authentic without hurting others?
- I have so much positive and negative energy and I have the power to get in contact with both.

- Systemic Leadership means confronting myself with change (inside and outside the system) and not to have the illusion of stability.
- Qualities of Systemic Leadership are contact and focussing of attention and energy.

At the beginning the reflective diary seemed to be a burden for the author. Besides all his other tasks and challenges in his job, he needed additional time to write down his insights and reflections. However, after a while, the author learnt to appreciate the reflective diary. On the one hand he had to force himself to take a short timeout for the entries. Thus he could decelerate his life, relax, and focus his attention on himself instead of all the other things that had to be done. On the other hand the author was able to develop a depth to his reflections, which he had never achieved before. Experimenting with the core processes of heuristic research such as self-dialogue, intuition or focusing connected the author with himself and facilitated personal insights about being a systemic, constructivist leader.

As the reflective diary was extensive and unstructured, the author had to reduce and condense his insights. Therefore he listed topics in the illumination stage which were relevant to him concerning systemic, constructivist leadership. Sources were the literature review and his personal insights from the reflective diary. After many loops of matching, 28 appropriate buzzwords were identified. These buzzwords will also be used later as 'a priori codes' in the data analysis:

All-partial, Appreciation, Authentic, Autopoiesis, Attention, Awareness, Blaming, Communication, Complexity, Contact, Control, Construct, Emotion, Energy, Inner Dialogues, I-messages, Listening, Neutral, Not-knowing, Non-judgemental, Objectivity, Presence, Resource-orientation, Respect, Self-coaching, Solution-orientation, Systemic, Uncertainty

After defining buzzwords depicting topics of the attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader, the author screened his reflective diary and reduced the volume of text to the essential ideas.

Table 3-1 From Reflective Diary to Illumination/Explication Journal

Source	
Reflective Diary	119.835 words
Illumination/Explication Journal	9.613 words

These comprise about eight per cent of the original text in the 'Illumination/Explication Journal'. Technically the text search function of the 'WORD' programme supported this process.

Example 3-5 Illumination/Explication Journal

All-partial Position/Neutrality

1. An **all partial-position** is not **neutrality**. **Neutral** means not to

support a specific position. **All-partial position** is the attempt to understand all positions of the others. It is the idea that a specific perspective is the subjective truth for that person. An **all-partial position** creates the common ground for a solution, which is acceptable for all. It has not to be the best, but a viable solution (29.03.13).

2. An **all-partial position** is an attitude that all perspectives are o.k. (10.07.12).
3. If there is a conflict between my employees, I do not judge and make a decision, but support a process of finding a solution. I prefer an **all-partial position** (not **neutrality**). **All-partiality** requires time, but gives me the possibility to understand and appreciate all perspectives. It is different from avoiding or postponing a decision and thus a conflict, because I support a solution process (30.03.13).
What is when there is a conflict between an employee and myself?
Then I give her the time to share her perspective. Then I share my perspective (**all-partial position**). Finally, I make a suggestion or ask for a suggestion to find a solution (06.11.12).
4. Are an **all-partial position** and my role as a manager in conflict? Do I have to integrate or to intervene? Sometimes it is difficult for me to accept **all-partiality**, especially when I have the idea that my knowledge or my values are superior to that of others. I have to manage my impatience and drive to act (25.01.13).
5. S. and A. alleged my weaknesses in leadership. I cannot be always **neutral** or **all-partial**. Management means making decisions.

Neutrality does not mean that I do not have the responsibility (06.11.12). I feel angry and frustrated because I do not want to be a weak leader. However, independent which decision I make to solve the disagreement, one of my conflicting employees will be angry. The best solution is a personal encounter which I mediate (25.01.13).

6. **All-Partiality** does not mean that I have no responsibility (6.11.12). My intention is to be **neutral**, but in the end I am responsible as an owner and manager. I have legal restriction, sales targets by manufactures, and I am personally liable by accepting personal bank guaranties for loans. How can I be **neutral** when I am under this pressure? Is **neutrality** in my situation suppressing of problems? (25.01.13)
7. I am always part of my leadership system. I am never **neutral** (18.08.12).
8. What is, when I try to be in a **neutral** position, but become angry or anxious? How can I cope with this situation without repression of my emotions? Can I always be neutral, non-judgemental,, etc. and be a moderator? Is this an idealistic goal, which can never be achieved? (26.07.12) How can I manage my impulses to be **all-partial**, for example, when I am angry? (25.01.13)
9. I am **neutral** as long as the others do not play games with me. When I am angry, I have the tendency to give up my **neutrality** (10.11.11).
10. Despite perceiving myself as "**neutral**", I always influence the leadership system by being part of it (14.05.10).

The illumination/explication journal represents the essential personal insights and reflections of the author, which are derived from the reflective diary, clustered in relevant topics in the illumination stage, and deepened in the explication stage.

3.8 Summary

The epistemology of the research project is radical constructivism. It focuses on the individual's construction of reality and how people experience their world. Thus radical constructivism rejects the idea of an objective world, which is accessible to people. Furthermore, this exploration is Gestalt-oriented using methods to identify perceptions and experiences in the present. A conceptual framework makes systemic, constructivist theory experiential for the author in leadership contexts. The heuristic inquiry investigates the personal experiences of the researcher in regards to the research topic. Peculiar to the study is the integration of the phases of heuristic inquiry in Kolb's experiential learning cycle. The next chapter continues with the analysis of the data and the presentation of the findings.

4 Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter explains how data in the illumination/explication journal were analysed. In order to make sense of the volume of data generated a technique was needed which enabled the identification and categorization of salient themes. The author adopted a 'template analysis' in order to achieve this. Template analysis is a method to structure data depicting both in-depth exploration as well as a wide range of coverage:

The term "template analysis" refers to a particular way of thematically analysing qualitative data. The data involved are usually interview transcripts, but may be any kind of textual data, including diary entries, text from electronic "interviews" (e-mail), or open-ended question responses on a written questionnaire. Template analysis involves the development of a coding "template", which summarises themes identified by the researcher(s) as important in a data set, and organises them in a meaningful and useful manner. (King, 2013)

There are two kinds of coding possible: hierarchical coding and parallel coding (King, 2004). Hierarchical coding is the order of higher and lower codes to rank data. Parallel coding does not prioritize data, but clusters similar data on one level. As the author works with personal experiences, he looks for similar meanings, and thus utilises parallel coding.

Template analysis is a flexible approach, which is compatible to the heuristic research methodology. "The essence of template analysis is that the

researcher produces a list of codes defined a priori, but they will be modified and added to as the researcher reads and interprets the texts” (King, 2004, p. 256). The final master template was developed in the following manner:

1. Definition of ‘a priori codes’ using the 28 buzzwords previously identified (see above 3.7).
2. Applying the a priori codes to the illumination/explication journal.
3. New relevant codes are added and irrelevant codes are removed.
4. Developing a master template: Can specific codes be allocated to qualities of mental attitudes (e.g. systemic attitude, constructivist attitude)? Can identified mental attitudes be structured in categories (e.g. core attitudes as generic term for systemic and constructivist attitude)?
5. Presentation of the outcomes of the template analysis .

The following table 4-1 gives an overview of the codes defined a priori and their modification respective extension in the research process.

Table 4-1 Development of A Priori Codes to Modified Codes

	Codes defined a priori	Codes modified
All-partial	X	X
Appreciation	X	X
Authentic	X	X
Autopoiesis	X	X
Attention	X	X
Awareness	X	X
Blaming	X	
Chance		X
Communication	X	X
Complexity	X	X
Contact	X	X
Contribution		X
Control	X	X
Construct	X	X
Direct Communication		X
Emotion	X	X
Energy	X	X
Factual		X
Inner dialogues	X	
I-Messages	X	
Listening	X	X
Neutral	X	X
Not-knowing	X	X
Non-judgemental	X	
Objectivity	X	
Presence	X	X
Perspectives		X
Reality		X
Relational		X
Resource-orientation	X	
Respect	X	
Self-coaching	X	
Self-Organization		X
Solution-orientation	X	
Systemic	X	X
Truth		X
Uncertainty	X	

The search for appropriate codes was an iterative process. The process stopped, when new codes could no longer be found. The search function of the word-processing software facilitates the process of coding and working

with templates. A defined code is entered for search and then the relevant data appears in the side bar. The examination of the text started with a key term, e.g. 'observer', and was expanded to similar forms such as 'observation' or 'observe'. When various codes were together in one sentence or one text segment, an overlap arose. Then the researcher had to make a decision how to cluster it. The key factor in the decision was the consideration of meaning. The code, which best expressed the meaning of the illumination/explication journal, was allocated to the relevant cluster.

4.1 Findings of the Template Analysis

Based on the template analysis it was possible for the author to identify a master template (Table 4-2). The master template consists of 27 codes, which describe 12 specific mental attitudes, and four categories.

Table 4-2 Master Template

Categories	Mental Attitude	Codes
(I) Core Attitudes	(1) <i>Systemic Attitude</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Autopoiesis 2. Change 3. Control 4. Complexity 5. Contribution 6. Self-Organization 7. System
	(2) <i>Constructivist Attitude</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reality 2. Truth 3. Perspectives 4. Construct 5. (1) Communication
(II) Operational Attitudes	(3) <i>Systemic Not-knowing</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not-knowing
	(4) <i>All-Partiality</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All-partial 2. Neutral
	(5) <i>Active Listening</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (2) Communication 2. Listening
	(6) <i>Relational and Factual Levels</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relational 2. Factual
	(7) <i>Direct Communication</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct communication

(III) Psychological Growth Factors	(8) <i>Authenticity</i>	1. Authentic
	(9) <i>Appreciation</i>	1. Appreciation
	(10) <i>Emotional Alertness</i>	1. Emotion
(IV) Meta Attitudes	(11) <i>Awareness</i> <i>Double-Awareness</i>	1. Awareness 2. Presence 3. Contact
	(12) <i>Focusing of</i> <i>Attention/Energy</i>	1. Attention 2. Energy

The outcome of the template analysis is an overview of relevant themes linked to extracts of personal experiences. It enables the identification of salient factors and themes, which contribute to a new understanding of the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader. In the next sections the master template is explained in further detail taking each of the 12 mental attitudes in turn.

4.1.1 Core Attitudes

4.1.1.1 Systemic Attitude

The term 'systemic' is related to living systems of people such as those involved in business organisations. The author used the codes 'autopoiesis', 'change', 'control', 'complexity', 'contribution', 'self-organization', and 'system' to identify a systemic attitude. The challenge of this exploration was to make abstract ideas such as human systems experiential. The author searched for

possibilities to transcend the systemic theory and to make it relevant to his leadership practise. As a result of this he built a hanging mobile with pictures of himself and people in his personal leadership system. This demonstrated how an impulse, for example a change of the author's positions, had an effect on the whole system. However, the use of the device of the hanging mobile is limited, because it is a non-human system consisting of photos, threads and rods. Therefore the author decided to build up a mental model to experience a human system that reflects his personal life situation.

First of all I would like to differentiate between human and non-human systems. For example, a computer is a non-human system in an office. I initiate contact with the computer, touch the keyboard, look at the screen, and move the mouse on the pad. Then a secretary comes into the office. I make contact with her, welcome her, and talk with her about a task, which she needs to do. The contact with people in comparison to a lifeless object such as a computer is completely different. Human beings are complex, they seem to be black boxes to me, I am often unable to predict the result of an encounter, and my emotions are involved. Next I visualize myself connected with many people. Some I know, some I do not know. Some are in direct contact with me in a specific situation, some are not. However, all people are connected with me and with one another. If ask my secretary to do a specific job, then something happens in the whole human system. It does not only concern the relationship between my secretary and me, but also the relationship

amongst other employees with whom she speaks regarding the task, people who are directly and indirectly involved. I, qua leader, initiate something with the outcome that the whole human system is affected (22.11.14).

The author has recognized that reflecting about human systems in this way assists him to overcome linear-causal thinking in leadership. He has realized that the basis of organizations as human systems, are people and their relationships. The author has had to learn how to cope with the change and the unpredictability of human systems. In contrast to non-living systems such as a coffee-machine, a waitress who operates the coffee machine is a living system, which organizes and steers itself according to the principles of autopoiesis (see above 2.3.2.3). In a non-trivial way the internal processes of the waitress change constantly so that the effect of an input can never be predicted (see above 2.3.2.4). Unlike the coffee machine, which is a trivial machine, it repeatedly performs the same processes of making coffee, until it breaks down.

Systemic Leadership means confronting myself with change (inside and outside the system) and not to have the illusion of stability. I have to accept uncertainty of the autopoiesis as permanent state in the system (06.09.11). My actions often do not achieve what I intended. In an autopoietic system I am part of the self-organisation and the consequences of my interventions (e.g. instructions) are not predictable and are uncertain (08.01.12).

Systemic, constructivist leadership is the comprehension of human systems as never-ending change processes. There is no fixed centre of reference, but only transformation.

I feel like a variable in the system, who is constantly being changed by the dynamics of the autopoiesis (20.09.13). I cannot withdraw from change. Change will occur in one-way or another, because it is the system, which has a direct effect on me as a leader. All my attempts to resist change result in more difficulties than accepting it (08.07.13).

Instead of denying change, systemic constructivist leadership is about accepting facts or situations, which have happened and thus are given.

Within the research project there was a time period, when the author was in doubt about his role as a leader of his company. The following question came up how to influence people and organizations when the fundamental principle is autopoiesis.

Leadership is the fiction that I control a social organization. However, it is not controllable, because of its complexity and dynamics. (04.04.12)
Control of an autopoietic system is an illusion. (18.09.12) Nobody is almighty to steer or control an autopoietic system (31.08.12). What is then my function as a manager? Am I a victim of the circumstances in the system? (03.01.13)

The author has assessed his role of being a leader who steers the system company as an illusion. His supposition was that leadership does not exist because of self-steering and self-organizing forces. In quintessence, a human system would function autarkic from a leader. This idea triggered in the author a passive, even fatalistic attitude. A cognitive dissonance arose within him about the real drivers of the organization: I am the leader of people in the organisation, but I have no power to change anything. This culminated in the conviction that there had to be not only an intelligence of the leader as a person, but also an intelligence of the system.

I think there is an intelligence of the system, because the system company organizes itself without being steered. If I or any other person leaves the system, then the autopoiesis would continue (18.09.13). Is the intelligence of the system more important than the intelligence of the leader? (24.09.13)

The author tried to solve this dilemma by envisioning himself as an inside observer, who is an integral element of the system company. Thus he affects the system, is affected by the system, and becomes part of the autopoiesis.

Systemic Leadership does not mean 'no leadership', but I am, as leader, part of the self-organization (04.10.12).

The leader is not a victim of the system, but a contributor to the system.

I give into the system my contribution. I am not a victim of the system (30.04.13). My contribution to the performance of the organization is only a partial aspect. I indeed contribute to the results, but I am not the one who can steer every element (02.04.13). My contribution as leader is to find out what the needs of the system are in order to develop it in a certain, desired direction (08.07.13).

The contribution of a leader to the system is an active input, which is part of the autopoiesis. Thus the leader is both driver of the system and being driven by the system. The mechanistic self-understanding of a leader as determinant or controller of a system is substituted by a systemic, constructivist self-perception as a contributor to the system.

Systemic, constructivist leadership does not mean that I as a leader do know the right direction, but that I take over responsibility for decisions, and that these are the product of several perspectives (07.04.13).

A leader has to make decisions, because it is often part of his or her role in management. Furthermore legal obligations require taking over of responsibility. Nevertheless a leader has only a limited influence on the systems. Blaming specific members of the system as being the cause of failure is futile. In a mechanistic world picture it is possible to identify specific causes of problems. If these are fixed then the problem is solved.

A systemic, constructivist understanding of the world means leading the interaction of people, and not specific individuals.

The notion that the leader is not the only driving force of a human organization also means giving up the idea of being indispensable and irreplaceable.

Sometimes there is no need for me to do anything! The system organises itself; as grass grows in nature without my effort (03.01.13). I believe in the power of autopoiesis. Things are happening without me and I can relax. I have to abandon the idea that I have to organize everything and that I am the creator of my company (29.11.12). I believe in self-organisation, not in anarchy (without a steering principle). This relaxes me, because it frees me from the drive to permanent control. Control of an autopoietic system is an illusion (18.09.12).

The confidence in the autopoiesis of a human organization means, for the leader, letting go of the compulsion to control and allowing things to organize themselves. At the same time the leader should be alert to what is happening.

I don't hold the power in my hands, but I am alert. And I do what I can, but I cannot do everything (02.04.13).

This systemic attitude towards leadership takes on a burden of false understanding of responsibility and associates leadership with easiness, flow, and relaxation. From the author's experience these states promote creativity and intuition, because the leader is not blocked by the attempt to control the uncontrollable.

4.1.1.2 Constructivist Attitude

Radical constructivism is a specific perspective how to understand and interpret the world. Codes such as 'reality', 'truth', 'perspectives', 'construct' and 'communication' point to constructivist ideas.

One fundamental assumption of radical constructivism is that there is no objective reality or truth, which is the same for all people.

It is my basic assumption that everybody has his or her own construction of reality with which he or she lives (08.07.13). Does truth exist? I do not believe that. There are only personal truths, which are manifested by utterances. And there are specific conventions and rules, which have been agreed upon. But what is true or false? I gave up the term eventually (05.04.13).

While doing the research project, the author was deeply moved and impressed by the ideas of radical constructivism. At the beginning it was just a theoretical concept, which sounded promising. However, while exploring systemic, constructivist leadership, the author internalized radical

constructivism more and more. Statements from Erich Von Glasersfeld (2002, p. 1) such as “What we make of experience constitutes the only world we consciously live in” and “But all kinds of experiences are essentially subjective, and though I may find reasons to believe that my experience may not be unlike yours, I have no way of knowing that it is the same” intruded deeply in the author’s perception of reality. Thus an original abstract idea of what radical constructivism is shaped the author’s perception and understanding of the world. In the following the author gives an example of how he personally experiences radical constructivism, which he uses as a kind of ‘meditation’ to delve deeper into it.

To acquire access to a radical, constructivist perception of the world, I focus my attention on an object and observe it, for example a vase of roses. I see the red colour of the flowers, smell the sweet rose-scent, feel happy when I think about my wife’s last birthday when my gift was fresh roses, and remember the pain when a thorn cut me when I was a child. This all comes to my mind when I observe this vase of roses. However, my construction of reality is unique and can only be experienced by me. Then I think about other observers of the same vase of roses and how they would construct their reality. Do they smell the same? Does the colour hold the same intensity, as I perceive it? Which past associations could be triggered in their mind? The more I reflect on different people’s constructions of reality, the more I realize that an object in the ontological world is different for all observers

depending on the perception of their senses, past experiences and other personal factors (07.09.13).

It is impossible for everyone to achieve an objective view of the world, as reality is subjective and personally constructed.

My life qua as a constructivist is determined by the meaning I give to my subjective reality. Before I was born there was nothing in my subjective reality. My constructed universe did not exist. Then, my birth, education, and personal development, gave meanings to my life. There are biological, psychic and social phenomena, which determine my perception of the world. These include all aspects of my personality. Other people are important, but in my subjective world I do not see them how they really are, but how I perceive them to be. This dynamic process began with my birth, has continued and will continue during my lifetime, and ends presumably with my death. I cannot know this for certain as I have not yet experienced the future. The consequence is to focus on the present and what I experience today, and not become lost in my past, my future expectations, or my metaphysical constructions (01.12.14).

Radical constructivism is an existential attitude to oneself in the world. The consequences of leading people as a constructivist are significant.

There are often many possibilities of subjective realities (6.10.12).
People have different perceptions of the same ontological reality.
(3.10.12). I have to be aware that people may experience my problems
in a totally different way, because my personal situation and
perspective have no relevance for them (19.09.13). My perception of
reality and that of others has nothing to do with an outside 'ontological
reality'. Everybody personally constructs his or her own 'subjective
reality'. I cannot orientate myself to a non-accessible 'objective reality',
but to the difference of how others and I experience 'subjective
realities'. It is about differences and relations, not about absoluteness
(07.11.12). It is not important how things are, but my construction of
reality sees them (21.09.12).

As realities are constructions of the mind and often do not correspond to an
ontological or 'real reality', many problems are consequently a construct of
the mind.

Many problems are not 'real' or 'existential', but my construction of
reality. They are independent of the ontological reality (13.01.12).
My subjective perception is my reality, and the subjective perception of
the other is reality for that person, of course, and if there are no or few
parallels, this leads to fights and who is now right and who is not. There
is simply more than one reality and this is very subjective (07.04.13).

If a leader uses constructivist knowledge actively, then he or she has the potential to change his or her attitude to existing challenges.

My stress and troubles are a product of my mind! They are self-imposed or self-induced. In order to learn more about my constructions of reality, I am looking in my inner world to find out how I am in this moment. What is important as a systemic, constructivist leader is that I do not solely demand change from others, but I start with myself. Only by changing myself, can I change the world. And this is the starting point in leadership (03.12.14). If I want to change the world, I have firstly to change my construction of reality. Change starts with working on my construction of reality and continues with that of others (18.09.13).

From a radical, constructivist position learning means to recognize oneself.

If I want to understand people better, then I have to understand myself first. It is like looking into a mirror, in which I see myself. I have to ask myself, what has a phenomenon to do with my construction of reality (25.05.13). The others are part of my construction of reality. From my inside perspective it is often difficult to differentiate between the other and myself. Understanding the other means understanding myself and understanding myself means understanding the other (28.01.12).

For a leader constructivism means realizing the own construction of reality before working with people. Change is also changing oneself and not only others.

The author often felt like a prisoner, who is captured in his own construction of reality.

It feels like being a prisoner of my construction of reality: I cannot leave it, because I have no direct access to the ontological world (29.09.12).

The notion that my experienced reality is not the 'absolute reality', but only my own construct, shakes the fundamentals of my personality.

There are feelings of fear and self-doubt in me, because there is no longer anything which is fixed and secure (12.11.12).

The author was shaken to the fundamentals of his personality, because his view of the world changed significantly. He was unsure whether his experiences were real or just an 'artificial' construction of reality, which could correlate with the ontological world or not. This uneasiness triggered a transformation process within the author. He questions the values and orientations he had learnt in the past, and which had been the result of his own socialisation process. Could they continue to be the guidelines in a world of relativity? Immersing into radical constructivism means to question prevailing patterns of thinking and knowing, as these patterns are only one of many possibilities.

Neither others nor I know what is true or false or right or wrong. I lose the respect for prevailing theories and opinion leaders. Everything is a question of the perspective or the individual construction of reality (20.08.11). Constructivist insights have challenged my past socialising processes, which were essentially shaped by my parents, teachers, church, university and other institutions of authority. I have often adopted their views of the world and dogmas without reflection. Radical constructivism questioned my prevailing picture of the world and initiated existential doubt in me (07.09.13).

Existential doubt, feelings of fear, and insecurity did not only limit the author, but also opened new perceptions of his experienced world. Instead of being fixed on his own subjective view of the world, he has learnt to appreciate the perspectives of others. The author has cultivated an understanding that other people's perspectives are equally relevant to them as his own perception is to him. Hence all perspectives need to be respected.

The author gradually has developed a new understanding of multi-perspectivity. This was not only a danger or threat to his position as leader, but also liberated him from being stuck in fixed patterns in his leadership role. Genuinely accepting other perspectives of stakeholders means more choices and thus the possibility to assimilate oneself better in a fast-changing and complex world.

As I have given up the notion of an absolute truth, I feel more relaxed. There are no universally valid values, which I have to follow, but only individually constructed realities. This idea provides me freedom in my life. I do not have to stick to the old, but can be open to new opportunities. This gives my life more easiness (12.11.12).

Not sticking to the own 'subjective truths' but to be open for the perspectives of others provides a feeling of relaxation and freedom. The world does not appear narrow and constrained, but opens itself to the leader.

A business plan is also a construction of reality.

Business planning is only one possible construction of reality of the future, which should not have to be confused with reality itself (15.11.12). My power has to be in the present, not in ideas of a future or a reconstruction of the past (1.11.12).

The following example illustrates how a business plan can be perceived in systemic, constructivist leadership.

As a manager of a company there is a ritual of an annual planning process. The banks demand this as a part of the financial reporting system. In the last years the requirements for these plans have become astringent. As a result the planning processes have become more complicated and time-consuming. From a radical, constructivist point of

view all business plans is constructions of realities. They depict one of many possible futures and exist only in the mind of the planner. It is not possible to control the future by corporate planning, because no plan can depict complexities of the human systems 'company' and 'market'. Therefore planning should be understood as a perturbation of existing assumptions, which have never been questioned and have always been taken for granted. Planning has nothing to do with anticipating the future, but is a technique to change thinking in the moment of planning (05.11.13.).

Communication is one key term of systems theory. People do not transmit units of communication from a sender to a receiver. Communication is a mutual process of selection, utterance and understanding (Luhmann, 1992). The mechanistic sender-receiver communication model is substituted by a dynamic co-creation of communication by people. "The meaning of a message is always defined by the receiver of the message, never by the sender" (Schmidt, 2012a, p. 113).

If I communicate with others, they determine the meaning of my utterances. My challenge is to find out what they have understood. My intention and meaning as sender of a message has no relevance (30.08.12). I can never say that the other has to understand this in a specific way. However, I can train, practise, and optimize my communication skills so that misunderstandings are as few as possible. (03.06.13).

The challenge of a systemic, constructivist leader is to develop communication skills to find out by permanent feedback loops what the other has understood. Next are presented operational attitudes which support this process.

4.1.2 Operational Attitudes

In the following part the author depicts the operational attitudes, which transfer systemic, constructivist insights to leadership practise. Codes are 'not-knowing', 'all-partial', 'neutral', 'communication', 'listening', 'relational', 'factual', and 'direct communication'.

4.1.2.1 Systemic Not-knowing

'Systemic not-knowing' is a mental attitude, which follows on the systemic, constructivist self-perception of a leader, being not the determinant or controller of the system.

Systemic Leadership means that I operate from a psychological space of unknowing: open to the dynamics of a conversation without prior planning or structuring, believing in one's intuition, building up of energy (5.10.12).

'Systemic not-knowing' means that a leader suppresses her knowledge and is thus open to others. Techniques to implement this are working with

hypothesis or systemic questions. Instead of formulating “You have a problem in your department and I expect that you solve it as quickly as possible” a systemic hypothesis would be: “I assume you have a problem in your department. Please tell me what is happening. I want to learn more about the situation”.

Systemic not-knowing enables the leader to work within the construction of reality of the other person, independently of the leader’s own mental concepts.

If I want to initiate change, then it would work only in the construction of reality with the person whom I am in contact with, and never on my own (08.07.13).

A systemic question, such as: “Assume you are the boss, what would you do to solve the problem?” enables the leader to step back and to use the problem solving competence of others. Instead of fixing the problem himself with his knowledge the leader supports the process of finding a solution. Systemic leadership means that stakeholders such as an employee or a complaining customer are the specialists for the actual problem or situation, while the leader is the specialist to support the solution process. ‘Systemic not-knowing’ is utilizing in an intelligent way, an artificial ‘ignorance’ of the leader to work with other people. This gives the stakeholders more freedom to express themselves and to provide their personal contribution to a solution.

The operational attitude of 'systemic not-knowing' has nothing to do with professional incompetence. It is a problem solving competence of a leader. Stakeholders should be inspired to use their own resources to find solutions.

Systemic not-knowing does not mean that I have no knowledge.

However, I hold back my knowledge to give others the possibility to contribute to a solution (2.11.12).

'Systemic not-knowing' liberates the leader from an attitude of always pretending to know what to do in a world full of change and complexity. Instead the leader has the possibility to admit and to communicate his insecurity and self-doubt.

Not-knowing is being aware and accepting my insecurity when working with limited knowledge (08.09.13).

From a systemic, constructivist position not-knowing is not a sign of incompetence or lack of capability, but the acceptance of the self-organization of the company. The leader has the chance to use her/his insecurity to obtain a broader picture of a situation.

4.1.2.2 All-Partiality

All-partiality is a mental attitude, which a systemic, constructivist leader uses in communication with other people. It is closely related to the constructivist

idea of multi-perspectivity, the idea that there are as many subjective realities as there are people involved.

An all-partial position is an attitude that all perspectives are o.k.
(10.07.12).

All-partiality means that a leader is aware that his own position is only one of many possible. It is the acceptance and appreciation of the opinions and perspectives of other people. In management practise this is not always easy.

Sometimes it is difficult for me to accept all-partiality, especially when I have the idea that my knowledge or my values are superior to that of others. I have to manage my impatience and drive to act (25.01.13).

Nevertheless, all-partiality does not mean giving up the position of leadership. The challenge of a leader is that he does not use his formal authority to 'push his or her solution', but to hold back. Such an attitude would expand the possible choices of how to act, by including the perspectives and resources of others.

Being all-partial in leadership means that I as leader also have my own position and opinion (08.10.13). All-partiality does not mean being indiscriminate, having no own position, and being a walkover. However,

all-partiality involves the absorption what there is from all sides, acceptance, and giving space. When I am in the role of a systemic leader, then I also become a party. I am not neutral (30.04.13).

It is artificial and contradicts the nature of human beings to assume a position of non-partiality, in which the leader is like an 'empty cup'. People are full of projections, judgements, opinions, own objectives, etc. Because of that an inner tension could arise between the systemic attitude of all-partiality and one's own position as a leader, especially when the leader believes herself to be right. All-partiality has to be differentiated from neutrality.

An all partial-position is not neutrality. Neutral means not to support a specific position (31.03.13).

In contrast to neutrality, all-partiality is the genuine attempt to understand the position of other people. It is more than saying 'yes, you are right' to the other, but means internalizing the other's view of the world, which he or she communicates. It includes building up of rapport and the empathetic absorption of the others emotions.

An all-partial position creates the common ground for a solution, which is acceptable for all. It has not to be the best, but a viable solution (29.03.13). All-partiality requires time, but gives me the possibility to understand and appreciate all perspectives. It is different from avoiding or postponing a decision and thus a conflict, because I support a solution process (30.03.13).

In contrast to a therapist, counsellor, organisational developer or coach the systemic, constructivist leader has not only a responsibility for the solutions-process, but he is also accountable for the economic achievements of a company.

All-Partiality does not mean that I have no responsibility (6.11.12). My intention is to be all-partial, but in the end I am responsible, as an owner and manager, for the success of the company. There are legal restrictions, sales targets, and my personal bank guarantees for loans. How can I be all-partial when I am under this pressure? (25.01.13).

The leader uses all-partiality to integrate people in the solution process. However, often the formal role of a leader in the organization requires a final decision. It is not possible as leader to be a moderator or facilitator supporting others all the time.

When I make decisions, which create both winners and losers, then the objective of my professional mission is in conflict with a pure systemic, constructivist approach... Especially under pressure I cannot always be all-partial, appreciative, and care for everybody. In the end somebody has to determine the direction. And often from my perspective as a leader I seem to have an advantage in knowledge or a different perspective on the whole (05.04.13).

The more time there is for finding a solution, the easier it is to initiate an all-partial process. However, if a quick decision is required, especially in urgent circumstances, then the leader has to give up the all-partial position and make a decision. Otherwise an important opportunity could be missed.

4.1.2.3 Active Listening

Active listening is an attitude to work within the construction of the reality of other people and to implement all-partiality in leadership practise. It is “a person’s willingness and ability to hear and understand. At its core, active listening is a state of mind that involves paying full and careful attention to the other person, avoiding premature judgment, reflecting understanding, clarifying information, summarizing, and sharing” (Hoppe, 2011, p. 6).

If I listen actively to others, then I come closer to their construction of reality. This is a process of approximation between the other and me. However, both constructions of reality will never be adequate. I have to consider that there is always a gap (19.09.13). I listen and give others time to formulate their ideas and to express themselves. I avoid interrupting and giving input of my own ideas. Instead, I summarize and repeat the formulations of the other. For example “I have heard that” or “I understood that”(09.10.12).

In systemic, constructivist leadership active listening is fundamental, but it is often difficult to apply. Time pressure and action-orientation to achieve specific targets make it challenging for the leader as the following extract

demonstrates:

I am sitting in a meeting with an employee who complains about the service quality of another department in our company. I feel stressed, because many tasks have to be carried out today. In addition an important customer will arrive in 15 minutes. I listen to my employee and feel bored. I have a different opinion about his complaint, and think that this guy should deal with his own deficits first, before complaining about others. I recognize my impatience, my disinterest, and my tendency to blame this person. These thoughts come up again and again while listening. It costs me quite an effort to stay in contact, and to regain it once lost. Active listening is exhausting because it requires my full attention. On the one hand I have to be open for the input of the other person. On the other hand I have to hold back my own opinion and struggle with my inner reactions. It is important that my employee remains unaware of inner processes and thoughts. He should think that he has my full attention. This eases the situation for the employee because he has the possibility to express himself. He has the opportunity to communicate what is on his mind. And despite my inner conflicts I learn a lot about the other person's perspective (15.11.14).

Active listening means giving the other person the possibility to share his or her construction of reality. The leader has to be open for the utterances of others and to be fully focussed. Despite the tendency of human beings to evaluate or judge the things heard, the leader has to be silent and to offer

the other a space for communication.

In his leadership practise the author had identified 'avoiding rehearsing' and 'penetrant waiting' as supporting tools in active listening.

I am developing awareness for my rehearsing of possible answers when others speak. Rehearsing means losing the contact in communicating with others (17.08.13).

Avoiding rehearsing is the effort of the leader to stay in contact with others without preparing possible reactions and answers while the other talks.

'Penetrant waiting' means offering the other more time to share his or her construction of reality, even if the break feels artificial and uncomfortable.

After my communication partner has stopped talking, I offer additional space for response by being silent. This pause is sometimes embarrassing and feels uncomfortable. Both the other and I want to leave this situation. But I hold the tension. Then, after a while, often new information is delivered by the other (22.10.12).

It is important for the leader not to give in to the temptation to interrupt and to hold the tension of the break, allowing the other to disclose new information.

4.1.2.4 Relational and Factual Levels of Interaction

A rational approach to business and management often excludes subjective factors such as emotions, opinions, personal likes or dislikes. Leading a human system means to be open to everything exposed or hidden. Human encounters can be differentiated between a relational and factual level. While the factual level has to do with rationality such as the achievements of goals or the compliance with defined standards, the relational level of human interaction is the result of personal factors of people. Pinnow (2011, p. 118) gives the following overview:

Table 4-3 Factual Level and Relational Level

Factual Level	Relational Level
Strategy, planning, controlling, organization charts, job specifications, processes	Distribution of power, group dynamics, interactions, value system, roles, needs, expectations, fears and motivations, conflict potential, culture

Source: Derived from Pinnow (2011)

The differentiation between factual and relational level is an important tool for a systemic, constructivist leader in working with human systems. It is a prerequisite to solving challenges in a leadership system in an efficient way.

The next extract shows the importance of clarifying the personal factors

before solving a problem on the factual level.

It is worth looking at what is fact and what is feeling (25.05.13). There are situations in which it is not enough to look on the factual level. I also have to see the relationship. And when I have clarified that, then I can act on the factual level.... I cannot resolve the factual level, without firstly resolving the relational level. Indeed, both levels are interdependent (30.04.13).

A leader has to distinguish between the relational and factual level. For example, if an employee and a customer have a conflict, then at first the relational level has to be clarified. When both react angrily towards each other, the task of the systemic, constructivist leader is to create a space in which communication about facts is possible. The leader has to avoid being infected by the emotions of the adversaries, and resist joining in their encounter on the relational level. Instead he has to stay connected with himself and the others using techniques like active listening to calm the situation. Only when this has been achieved, then a solution-oriented work on the factual level can begin.

I believe that the relational level has a much bigger impact, and often the differences are only on the relational level, and not on the factual level (07.04.13). Relational- and factual levels are always connected together. (02.04.13). In a difficult meeting with conflict potential I differentiate between a relational and factual level. For example, if a

representative of a supplier demands high sales targets, which are unacceptable to me because from my perspective they are unrealistic and unachievable, I tend to blame him on a relational level. I make him personally responsible. However, from a systemic, constructivist point of view, I have to consider that the representative may also be under pressure from his superiors who are pushing him to achieve his goals. Therefore I have to express that I respect the other as a person, but I cannot agree to his demands. Thus we can appreciate each other on the relational level as human beings whilst disagreeing and arguing on the factual level (21.12.14).

Systemic, constructivist leadership means developing awareness for relational and factual levels between human beings. Both are difficult to grasp, because they are interwoven and interconnected.

4.1.2.5 Direct Communication

Direct communication connects people together and makes communication more personal.

Often people do not speak together, but about each other. They see themselves as 'its' (=things), not as persons. I have to support a field of direct encounter between people and thus direct communication. For example I had a meeting with two employees, who had a conflict. When one complained about the other and he reported to me, then I asked him to speak directly to the other concerned party (09.10.12).

Direct communication forces people to be in contact with each other and to take over personal responsibility for their statements. The author supports these processes by encouraging people to use I-messages in the conversation.

I ask others to formulate their statements in the first person singular, and not to hide behind an abstract 'you' (24.08.12).

Especially in situations in which emotions are in the foreground and people avoid each other, direct communication has the ability to support solutions.

4.1.3 Psychological Growth Factors

Rogers (1967, pp. 61-63) identified "conditions which facilitate psychological growth". These are congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic understanding. The author found out that they also supported systemic, constructivist conversation in leadership. Congruence means being authentic, not playing a role or games. Unconditional positive regard is the appreciation of the other person. And empathy is "sensing what people are feeling, being able to take their perspective, and cultivating rapport and attunement with a broad diversity of people" (Goleman, 1998, p. 376). The following illustrates the author's experiences and reflections of Rogers' approach to systemic, constructivist leadership.

4.1.3.1 Authenticity

Authenticity has two aspects. On the one hand, it is about developing authenticity within oneself as a leader. On the other hand, it is how to communicate authenticity in others.

What does authenticity really mean? How can I find out whether my actions and behaviour are authentic? Who evaluates this? Me myself or others in the leadership system? Does authentic mean that there is something like an 'authentic self' which never changes? Is authenticity something public or more private? (21.12.14)

There are many questions about authenticity. For the author the first step to develop authenticity is being aware of what is happening within him. It is a constant self-searching and reflection of his inner life. Advantageous is to keep a reflective diary and to write down what is in the foreground in the moment. By expressing inner states and processes self-search is deepened.

Authenticity means finding appropriate answers in myself. It is a process within me, and not a fixed state. It is how I perceive and evaluate the world in a specific moment. I have to work on myself, develop myself, and often need to leave my comfort zone (25.12.14).

Developing authenticity is not only about my nice sides. It includes also my hidden sides such as phantasies, desires, and needs, which cannot be communicated in society because of social norms.

However, also the parts which I find embarrassing and which I believe others would condemn belong to my authentic self. Important is that when I ask myself the questions “Who is in me?” or “Who I am?” all aspects of my personality have to be included (26.11.14).

The development of authenticity of a leader includes all aspects both rational and irrational. There are no taboos because authenticity cannot be compartmentalized into acceptable and non-acceptable parts.

Active self-searching and developing awareness for who I am gives me a glimpse of my authentic self. However, what happens if I do not perform the act of self-searching? (15.12.14)

The author wonders what is the difference between exploring the own inner world and living in an unreflected way.

Exploring myself with the help of a reflective diary, for example in the morning before I begin my work, slows down my life. I reduce the speed of my thoughts which often circle around the same topics again and again. Writing down these thoughts reduces the complexity of my inner life. Not everything is relevant, but only that which is in the foreground. And this is my authentic self in the moment. The exploration of my authentic self has a braking effect and relaxes me (20.11.14).

Yesterday I had no time to reflect about my authentic self.

Retrospectively I perceived that day as stressful and exhausting. I was

in a flow of work, but not in a nourishing and productive way. Rather it can be described by being ruled by necessities and tasks. I had the impression that I felt like a puppet on a string. Everything was being performed on autopilot. I reacted automatically to challenges without using my individuality and my creativity (22.11.14).

Authenticity connects the author with himself. He learns more about his automatisms, reactions, and daily routines and thus develops awareness for who he is in a specific moment. This knowledge about oneself is prerequisite to communicating authentically with people in the leadership system. However, what is authentic communication and is authentic communication possible?

For me, being authentic is when what I formulate and how I act is congruent (05.04.13). Meetings without straight, authentic communication are a waste of time, I do not have to be polite, I want to support the system (20.04.12). I say what I feel and what my position is. My communication is short, to the point, and authentic. No 'rhubarb, rhubarb' and nice talk (13.05.12). Being authentic means opening myself to others and also sharing feelings and weaknesses (6.11.12).

The leader has to communicate directly what he wants. This may include also feelings such as fear and anger or weaknesses. This opening makes the leader vulnerable for the sake of a more intensive and deep relationship.

This is in contrast to how leadership is commonly understood, which is built on the idea of rationality. However, rationality is a limited aspect of human beings.

Authentic communication includes all human facets. The author experiences authenticity as a way of connecting himself more closely to the other people in the leadership system. Thus a trustful atmosphere is created. However, he asked himself whether there are limits of authenticity and if yes where are they? And does withholding aspects of inner authenticity mean that the leader becomes inauthentic? An inner conflict could arise between the possibility to be authentic and the danger of hurting another person.

I have to handle the paradox of how I can communicate authentically without hurting others? For example, instead of saying “You are wrong!” I formulate “From my perspective you are wrong!” Thus, on the one hand, I communicate my position authentically; on the other hand I make it clear that my perspective is, perhaps, only one of many other possible perspectives. This provides the other space to articulate his or her own position (16.08.13).

There are situations in which the author does not feel well or motivated. For example, in a sales meeting it could be inappropriate to share a low-energetic state. The result could be that the others in the meeting are also affected by this negative disposition. In these cases the author forces himself to role-play.

Sometimes I am role-playing, when I feel down or exhausted. Then I pretend to feel good, e.g. for the sake of a motivating meeting.

However, such communication does not fulfil my own requirements of being authentic. I feel scorn for myself and that makes me angry (25.01.13).

Applying his knowledge and reflections for developing authenticity, the author has to ask himself what is there in the foreground in a specific moment. When he as a leader is exhausted, then being drained is part of his authentic self. The same is valid for building up energy in a meeting to motivate other people and the anger at being not authentic. As outcome of his reflections and self-development process the author has learnt that a leader can avoid being unauthentic if he or she is aware of the inner life. This is the essential process of building up authenticity. And what is implicitly or explicitly communicated depends on the leader. There is no one right solution. Rather a leader has to look inside him- or herself and to follow his or her intuition, in deciding on what is suitable in a specific context. If sharing negative moods, concerns, doubts, or worries are contra-productive and the results would not promote a solution process, then role-playing could be a viable alternative. And when the inner state changes to a more positive and energetic condition, then this becomes the new authentic self in that specific moment. What is important is that the leader is aware of what is relevant and in the foreground in a specific moment.

4.1.3.2 Appreciation

In systemic leadership appreciation is not flattering or sweet talk, but the authentic appraisal of existing strengths or competences of people.

I appreciate existing competences of people and communicate this. Even in a disastrous or hopeless situation, there is mostly an existing competence, which can be appreciated (03.09.12). As a systemic leader the appreciating, supporting part in complex issues is important (03.06.13). Appreciations have to be justified. I have to tell the other what I appreciate, and not only that he did well (07.04.13).

Appreciation stimulates self-motivation of all involved in the human system.

I focus and appreciate the things I like, about others and myself, and work with this energy (27.10.12). Appreciation is inspiration to intrinsic self-motivation of others (28.06.12). According to systemic leadership, people can only motivate themselves. Authentic appreciation of existing positive characteristics or past performances could support self-motivation (24.03.13).

Appreciation is like an 'energetic' perturbation of the system and hence stimulates change. The author learnt in his study that appreciation worked manifold in his leadership role. Firstly, he can appreciate his own performance, for example by writing down five successes from his own past. This leads to a higher energy, which the leader can use to work with current

problems. Secondly, appreciation of the strengths of other people in the human system supports them in achieving an energetic state in which challenges could be better overcome. And thirdly, a higher energy of the others has also a stimulating influence on the leader himself.

I noticed appreciation as a central point of leading employees. If a part in the system does not feel appreciated, then he or she will sabotage the system (05.04.13).

A leader who appreciates all elements in a human system avoids a blockade of those who don't feel recognized. The author's experience is that the idea of the appreciation of all elements in the system can also be applied to the bio-psyche-social model. No sphere has to be denied, neglected, or devaluated. The body with all its functions is important. Even 'negative emotions' such as anger could be reframed as a positive energetic state. The same is the case for the psychic system and the social system. All existing phenomena have the potential to be appreciated and used in a creative way as a resource.

4.1.3.3 Emotional Alertness

Human beings experience their subjective reality as a whole or a Gestalt. The author uses the differentiation of bio-psyche-social subsystems to develop awareness for specific parts of the whole. Emotions can be assigned to the body system and shape essentially how people experience their subjective world.

Emotions colour my experience of reality: I have to consider my emotional state and mood and that of other people. My mood depends on my emotion (19.12.12).

In the literature review the idea of structural couplings of systems was elucidated. Every system develops itself autonomously, but can be perturbed or irritated by another system. Awareness of these bio-psychic couplings is important for a leader, as it enables him to be in contact with himself. Moreover, these couplings arose in bio-social subsystems. For example, when a stakeholder in leadership situations is angry and she communicates her anger, then this communication as part of the social system has an effect on the biological system of the leader. The body system reacts by building up the emotion anger. Thus, the experienced world of the leader changes.

Peculiar about emotions is that they are only relevant in the moment when they emerge. Yesterday's emotions have no relevance to the experienced reality of a leader in the present.

Emotions are only relevant in the moment when they arise (13.05.10). Yesterday there was so much anger in me. From today's perspective, I cannot reconstruct my emotional state at that time. I feel good now and that is my reality at this moment (30.12.10). My emotional cocktail is mixed anew every day (07.04.13).

Significant is only the prevailing emotion in the foreground. The leader has to ask himself which emotion is in the foreground now colouring his experienced world. The author has trained himself to developing awareness for five basic emotions in order to increase his awareness of his inner states in leadership situations.

I distinguish between anger, fear, sadness, pain and joy. I train myself in developing awareness of the emotion in the foreground (19.09.13).

These are emotions, which come up again and again in specific situations. Particularly fear and anger are challenging. For example, the fear not to fulfil one's own expectations and to fail in business has been a repetitive pattern of the author.

The author experimented with a reflective journal to work with his emotions. He found it a good exercise to write down in emotionalized situations what is happening inside him.

I am anxious. The emotion fear dominates my experience of the world. Writing down my thoughts when I am in an anxious state is helpful. It increases my awareness of the emotion fear and thus reduces my circling of thoughts around this emotion (10.08.12).

Emotional alertness means developing awareness of the constant changeability of emotions.

Emotions come and go (02.01.11). It is astonishing how quickly emotions change during the day. There were some lows today, and now I am flying. It is good to have the insight that emotions come and go ... (30.10.10).

The insight that in a given moment the prevailing emotions are short-lived and change constantly means that the author develops an easiness and distance for his emotions. Emotions are coming and going. He perseveres to avoid being stuck and paralysed in specific emotions. On the contrary, working with own emotions can utilize the inner energy of a leader.

Emotions can give or withdraw energy to the bio-psychic-social system (26.09.12).

A leader who has developed awareness of her emotions can actively use these. She is no longer a 'slave of the own emotions'. Important is not to be identified with the own emotions, but to be an observer of the inner conditions.

However, I try not to be identified with my emotions (12.01.12). I do not want to be a slave to my emotions, but observe them and develop awareness of them (14.02.11)... and when I am down, I should not become too attached to undesired emotions! (30.10.10)

Emotions are there and should not be classified as negative or positive. They should be accepted as they are and not judged.

I have to be aware of my emotions independently of whether I like them or not – I am only an observer – emotions change constantly (30.04.10).

Significant for a leader is to stay in contact with his emotions, feeling them, and not repressing them. And this includes being in contact with the own emotional state. For example, losing contact to his anger may result in leading without being aware of the own inner system. Acting out the anger unconsciously often triggers behaviour which the leader later, in a different emotional state, regrets.

Instead of being a 'slave of the own emotions' the metaphor of an inner witness reflects awareness in leadership.

Identification with my emotions leads to compulsive acting, which limits my freedom. For example, awareness means that I am able not to act out of my rage immediately, but to observe this rage from the perspective of a witness. And the inner witness is very important for my existence in a systemic, constructed reality (05.04.13).

The inner witness describes the systemic, constructivist concept of second-order cybernetics. The leader is not driven by her emotions and reacts

immediately, but holds back for a moment and develops awareness for what is happening within herself by self-observation.

I observe emotional changes in me and find out whether they have something to do with me, with the other person, or are triggered by our relationship (02.04.13). When I react to other people's emotional behaviour, I relax and try to stay in contact with myself (19.09.12). When I am angry, I react differently compared to other emotional states, for example joy. I have to recognize my current emotional state and to reflect how it influences my behaviour at that moment. Thus I have choices (30.12.11).

Alertness to one's own emotions gives more choices. The leader has not to react immediately, but takes his time to observe what is inside him and to use this information as additional knowledge for an appropriate reaction in a specific situation. Self-observation and being in contact with oneself is like an emotional feedback loop.

Systemic leadership is the integration of emotional feedback loops within myself (23.03.13). It is not about suppressing emotions or conditioning myself to react in a specific way. It is about developing choices. That means when somebody makes me angry I have three possibilities:

- 1) I react emotionally and attack the other person
- 2) I express my anger "You make me angry" and speak about my anger without attack
- 3) I accept the emotion anger in me and do nothing (24.01.12)

Emotional alertness is a real challenge in leadership situations. As the emergence of specific emotions cannot be planned, the work with the own emotions is a continuous process of the author.

4.1.4 Meta Attitudes

The author has identified the qualities 'awareness'/'double awareness' and focusing of 'attention'/'energy' as meta attitudes. Meta attitude means that they are not only relevant in a specific context such as leadership, but in all life situations. They influence the whole personality and thus the self. Meta attitudes are similar to the core attitudes 'systemic' and 'constructivist'.

However, core attitudes of systemic, constructivist leadership originate in systemic, constructivist thinking. 'Awareness' or 'focusing of energy' are not directly related to the systemic, constructivist perspective perceiving the world, but are useful and supportive working with oneself as leader and with other people.

4.1.4.1 Awareness – Double Awareness

Awareness is a meta-attitude in systemic, constructivist leadership. It is a quality, which connects the leader with him- or herself and others in the present. Codes are 'awareness', 'presence', and 'contact'.

I am aware of what is happening right now and accept that without judgement. Systemic awareness is a passive quality (23.08.12).

Awareness means that I come closer to others as well as to myself (06.09.12). I am aware and accept what is happening in the moment (19.10.12).

Awareness does not need any preparation, but can be developed at any moment. If the author is captured in circling thoughts about a theme, and he realizes that, then awareness can be a step to reconnect the author with himself.

I can develop awareness of the present at any moment. By self-observation of my body (breath, emotions), my thoughts, and my communication, I am able to connect myself with the present (06.09.13).

Learning awareness is more than a technique of how to lead more competently people. It is firstly a method used to learn more about oneself.

The author uses the following questions to develop awareness for his bio-
psychic-social system.

There are three questions which I use as a resource to develop
awareness for my three subsystems: Biological Awareness: "What I am
feeling now?" / Psychic Awareness: "What I am thinking now?" / Social
Awareness: "What I am communicating now?" (05.09.12)

These questions can be asked at any time when the author has the
impression that he is not connected to himself any more.

It is essential that a systemic, constructivist leader develops awareness for
his own needs, desires and requirements.

It is important that I am aware of my own needs, and based on these
needs I can act (30.04.13).

Awareness is the prerequisite to deal with change in systemic, constructivist
leadership. Awareness means being in contact either with oneself or other
persons. It is a shuttling between the inner world of the leader and people in
the outside world. Being in contact is the prerequisite for leadership.

Double awareness is a special quality, which transcends the awareness for
oneself and others. There is no longer a shuttling between being aware of

oneself and the others, but experiencing both at the same time. The following excerpt gives a taste of double awareness.

I observe how I am in contact with others and at the same time I observe how I am in contact with myself. My attention shuttles between the other and me. If both occur simultaneously, observation and self-observation, then I am in a state of double inner and outer awareness (07.06.13).

Systemic constructivist leadership is the effort to leave a mechanical view of the world and to be open for the changes, complexity, and relativity of the human system. The leader is an inside observer who is both influencing the system and is influenced by the system. He can be seen as a variable that changes constantly. However, awareness has a special quality in volatile human systems. Awareness is the possibility to be in contact with oneself and others at any moment. Thus awareness becomes a constant in a world of change and insecurity. Awareness is also a feedback loop to oneself. It is like experienced second-order cybernetics, which is the permanent connection with oneself.

As a constructivist I believe that there is no absolute reality, but only my subjective constructed reality. Therefore I have not to decide between truth or non-truth, because these are often questions of the perspective. Rather I have to choose whether I want to live a life of

awareness, connected to myself and others, or a life determined by others and circumstances in unawareness (14.12.14).

Transferred to leadership, awareness is one essential attitude which influences and develops the leader's own self. The other is 'focussing of attention' or 'focussing of energy' and this is elaborated upon in the next section.

4.1.4.2 Focussing of Attention and Energy

Focusing of attention is the second meta attitude of systemic, constructivist leadership, which the author has identified. While 'awareness' is a more passive quality, which connects a leader to himself or herself, 'focussing of attention' is actively directing energy to specific aspects of the system. The author identified the codes 'attention' and 'energy' describing this mental attitude.

The term 'focusing of attention' can be attributed to Gunther Schmidt, who is one of the hypo-systemic pioneers in Germany. The author finds the hypo-systemic approach promising and important, but also has the impression that it exceeds the scope of this thesis. Therefore he provides a short introduction. A deeper exploration is reserved for future projects.

"How a human being perceives his reality is the result of the way in which he directs his attention. A phenomenon is not a relevant reality for an observer, as long as he does not focus his attention on that particular phenomenon"

(Schmidt, 2012a, p. 183). The way human beings construct their reality is by focussing of their attention and thus their energy. Schmidt points out that this concept can be found “in the Shamanic tradition of Hawaii where it is summarized by the saying: ‘The energy flows, where the attention goes...’ Where the attention is focused realized physiology, thinking, and emotions happens” (Schmidt, 2012a, p. 51). Every perturbation in systemic leadership can also be understood as a focussing of attention and energy on a specific phenomenon.

Leadership is not steering and controlling my company, but focusing my energy on supporting the self-organization. (23.08.12). I focus my attention on specific aspects of my bio-psychic-social system and thus redirect my energy (27.09.13).

The systemic, constructivist leader has to develop awareness for energetic and non-energetic states in the leadership system. And with these he has to work actively.

I have to find out: What drains my energy? What provides me with energy? How can I refocus my attention on the energy? How can I change destructive thoughts? (06.10.12) I have to feel the energy, and to work with this independently, whether it feels comfortable or not (05.10.12). I relax and observe my energy. Is my energy level high or low? Who or what gives me energy and who or what takes it away? As leader, I have to build up my energy and the energy of other people

(16.11.10). I have to be constantly in contact with the energy
(27.09.13).

The leader has a choice to focus his attention on specific experiences.

I do not focus my attention on apportioning blame, judging, analysing. I
am searching for constructive solutions and using existing resources
(22.04.12). I don't waste energy in trying to find out who is right or
wrong, but direct all energy into looking for a viable solution (13.04.12).

Focussing of attention reduces complexity in the system.

I focus my attention on specific parts of a system. Thus I reduce
complexity. All parts have the potential to provide me with resources
and strengths. I have to make a choice what is relevant for me in that
moment and what is not (27.06.12).

The template analysis identified a master template with the four categories
'core attitudes', 'operational attitudes', 'psychological growth factors', and
'meta attitudes', which in turn consists of twelve mental attitudes. This part
gives an in-depth overview of the personal experiences of the author within
the field of systemic, constructivist leadership. In the next section systemic,
constructivist leadership in action is illustrated in three examples.

4.2 Examples

The following three real-life examples should provide an idea of how systemic, constructivist leadership is experienced in management-practise.

The first example is about refocusing the attention from problem-orientation to solution-orientation. Secondly, an instance of how to solve a customer complaint in a systemic, constructivist conversation is presented. Finally an example of a feedback talk with an employee who has not achieved his sales targets is provided.

4.2.1 Self-Coaching

I felt down, because I thought about the problems in my company. The quality of our meeting was poor, my staff busy with power struggles, and the customer satisfaction survey was below average. My perception of reality was characterized by focusing on these problems. I felt bad in this problem trance and my inner dialogues were rather destructive. It was like a spiral of unpleasant thoughts, which strengthened itself. These inner dialogues triggered emotions such as anger and fear within me. Anger at my employees, because they do not realize the difficulties of the car market or understand our struggle to survive as company. And fear, because I was worried about the consequences, if we could not solve our problems. My subjective experience of reality at that time was depressive and I felt paralysed. I was stuck in my emotions anger and fear, and in my negative thoughts. My situation seemed to be hopeless at that time.

When I recognised this destructive pattern in me, I wanted to break free. I developed a method to refocus my perception to a more energetic level,

which should give me the strength to tackle my problems actively. This method was originated in systemic coaching. However, I could personally apply this to myself as a self-coaching technique in leadership. I took my diary and wrote down what was happening within me. What were my thoughts and emotions? I noted all the inner stories and the emotions, which seemed to have captured me. Thus I built up awareness of my inner state. My thoughts slowed down gradually and I became aware of their repetitive patterns. I was able to reconnect myself to my bio-psyche system. The next stage was building up energy to refocus my energy away from the negative to more powerful resources. I asked myself what positive achievements I had had in the last 5 years. The turnover had been growing continuously, we were appointed by the car manufacturer to a direct dealer in 2010, our company earned money every year, and we had many qualified and motivated employees who supported the company. Focusing my attention on these achievements from the past provided me with positive energy. To manifest this, I wrote these positive resources down in my diary. Then my experienced world had changed completely. Fear and rage had dissolved. They were replaced by a positive feeling, which came from recognizing my past achievements. Then I used this energy to establish an action plan; how I wanted to solve my challenges at that time (07.06.11).

4.2.2 Experience of the Complaint of a Customer

I was working in my office when a member of staff M. came him. He was emotional distressed and told me that he wanted to leave the company. Immediately I became emotionalized, too. I looked into myself and became

aware of both anger and fear within me. These emotions were accompanied by thoughts such as: “Why did he not knock on my door? That is impertinent”; “I hate this kindergarten. He is a grown-up person and should be able to solve his own problems”; “If he wants to put me under pressure, he should go. Then I would have one less employee to pay”; “He cannot go. I need him in the workshop”. There were many thoughts circling in my mind. The thoughts and the emotions reinforced each other. I was aware that this mode limited my choices to act by paralysing me. Due to this, I focused my attention away from the dominating psychic system with the circling thoughts to the emotions of my biological system. I tried to be aware of my anger and my fear: “What was the fear? What was the anger? How could I differentiate between both?” I felt uncomfortable and had the drive to avoid these emotional states. Nevertheless, I tried to be connected with them. The thoughts gradually slowed down. My breathing decelerated and it became deeper. I felt more relaxed and connected with myself.

Then I utilized this energetic level and asked M. what had happened. He explained very emotionally to me that a customer, fleet manager A. had entered our workshop, and had checked the work of our mechanics. M. told him that he should leave the workshop immediately due to security regulations. However, A. replied that he would stay, otherwise our company would lose him as fleet customer. Furthermore he pointed out that customers were allowed to enter workshops of our competitors. I listened to M. and observed a conflict arising in me, because I was in a position, in which I could only lose. Whatever my decision was, in favour of my staff member or

fleet customer, one of both would lose face. I perceived hopelessness within me. With a classical decision “you are right, and you are wrong” I could not have solved this double bind.

From the past I knew that there was often a latent conflict between M. and A. If there was a problem, fleet-manager A. attacked M. very aggressively. And M. usually reacted by being unfriendly or rejecting the problem. As well A. as M. were fighting on the personal level.

I told M. that on the one side I could understand his anger; on the other side I shared my fears that we would lose the customer if we were to ban him from the workshop. Therefore I suggested an immediate meeting between A., M., and myself in our conference room. M. was not satisfied, but he agreed.

I proceeded to the conference room. I was the first. Both M. and car-fleet manager A. entered together. It was obvious that M. and A. were very angry and both expected a decision from me as the responsible manager. I looked into myself for the prevailing emotion and discovered fear. The fear I could fail in this attempt to find a solution. I took a deep breath, thus connecting with myself and asked both A. and M. to sit down. As the atmosphere was full of aggression, I avoided friendly small talk. Instead, I directly asked car-fleet manager A. what had happened. Immediately he started complaining that he was absolutely dissatisfied with our service and that the behaviour of M. was unacceptable. I listened carefully to A. without interrupting him. I

stayed in contact with A., M. and myself. When he was finished, I replied that from his position I could understand him. I gave a short summary of what I had heard. Being in this all-partial position transcends the cognitive understanding, and also includes a resonance or rapport with the other parties. A. was angry, and I had to make his anger my anger. This was authentic. Then I thanked him and appreciated his open remarks. Afterwards I turned to M. and I could still feel his anger. On the one hand I tried to remain connected with my anger; on the other hand I needed distance not to lose myself in this emotion. I repeated the core statements of A., told M. that I perceived his anger, and asked him to describe the situation from his perspective. M. explained that there were security instructions, which he had to follow and that an exception was not possible. I felt a negative energy building up, because the fleet-manager's face was becoming increasingly red with rage. Despite this 'clash of emotions', I relaxed myself by focusing on my breathing. Looking inside me, there was a lot of fear and anger. My goal was to stay in this all-partial position despite the emotionally charged situation and to avoid a clear-cut decision at that moment.

As both had the possibility to share their perspectives and I, as the 'decider', tried to understand both the emotions slowly cooled down. My hypothesis, that a dispute on the relational level, and not on the factual level had been settled, was confirmed. The workshop manager was not usually so pedantic concerning rules. I had the idea to redirect the attention of my expected decision. I appreciated the safety consideration of M. and the need of control

by A. Then I focused on the common past of our companies. Both had worked together well for many years. Therefore we should find a solution together, which would be acceptable for both A. and M.. At that point the atmosphere became more relaxed. I asked M. whether he could make an exception for the fleet-manager, because A. was also an expert. As the emotions had cooled down M. told me that in general he has to insist on his position, but an exception would be possible. However, A. should wear special safety shoes, which are a directive in the workshop. I asked A. whether this would be acceptable for him and A. said yes. Finally I thanked both for finding a solution together and offered an additional meeting whenever necessary (04.07.12).

4.2.3 Feedback Meeting with Employee

A sales performance report indicated that our company would not achieve the sales target. As a consequence, the car manufacturer would increase our wholesale prices of cars next year. The calculated financial loss would be high. I was angry, because I felt that I was very engaged to promote this car brand, but the responsible salesman A. was lazy. I blamed him personally for not making enough effort to sell cars. Instead of active acquisition, he preferred to stay in his office to wait for customers. I had the impression that he avoided the connection with people, which is essential in selling cars. My business partner and other sales people in our company shared my opinion. Therefore I arranged a feedback meeting with him. In this meeting, salesman A., manager B., a new member of the sales team C., and I participated. I moderated the meeting. I began by

explaining that we had not sold enough cars and that we would suffer a high financial loss next year. Furthermore I reminded salesman A. that he was responsible for the brand. I told him that I was angry about it. I observed my anger and I observed the others in the room. As there was no reaction, I continued with the statement, that from my perspective, salesman A. had failed and in future our company could not afford such a poor performance. However, I made it clear that this was my subjective perspective, and that other views would be possible. I did not attack salesman A. personally. I then continued by appreciating his knowledge and lengthy business experience. I gave an example of the time I was impressed when we visited fleet customers together, how he handled these. Thus I tried to focus the energy away from the problem of not achieving the sales targets, to possible resources to find a solution. After completing my remarks, I gave A. time to respond and to clarify his position. At that point a discussion started. I invited everybody to contribute authentically to the discussion and to make clear his position. My task was to support the communication process, so that a discussion on a factual level was possible without any personal attacks (27.06.12).

4.3 Creative Synthesis

The peculiarity of this exploration is that the author shares his inner experiences directly and authentically. The outcomes cannot be applied to make general statements about the mental attitude of systemic constructivist leaders. The author is aware that this kind of presentation is experimental. However, it conforms to established heuristic research methodology. As

previously explained (see above 3.6.6), the creative synthesis is not only a presentation of data, but also an arranged composition of the researcher's subjective experiences investigating the mental attitudes of systemic, constructivist leadership. Furthermore it elucidates the transformation process of the author's self while conducting the research project.

The process of heuristic research has been a personal challenge for the author. Progress was not linear, but consisted of ups and downs, forward steps and backward steps, and was perceived sometimes as an emotional roller coaster. Heuristic inquiry contained the researcher's whole being in the exploration. The author was both researcher and researched object. He was simultaneously producer of data, collector of data, and analyst of data. The integration of heuristic inquiry in the experiential learning cycle pushed the author into personal change processes. Theoretical concepts such as 'autopoiesis' or the differentiation between a 'subjective' reality' and an 'ontological reality' are indeed enlightening and fascinating to know, but frequently have no implications in practise. In contrast, the approach to this research project has made systemic, constructivist insights personal experiential to the author, and thus relevant to leadership practise.

The metaphor of a person jumping from a cliff into the ocean illustrates how the author has experienced the process of research. At the beginning of his project, he saw himself as the observer of a person jumping off a cliff into the ocean. The observer and the jumper were separate entities. Watching the jumper was exciting for the observer, because it looked dangerous.

However, the observer always remained at a safe distance. Nothing could

happen to him. Then the observer switched his perspective and position. In the same way as the author became a player in the experiential learning process; the observer became the jumper himself. There was no longer a safe distance any more. Instead he was standing anxiously on the rock overcoming his inhibition to jump. The jumper leaped from the cliff and dived into the ocean. He felt both the excitement of flying and the danger of risking his life.

The author experiences the term “mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader”, even after an intensive investigation over years, as a challenge. He feels a split between the person who has the experience and the experience itself. For this reason, instead of reporting in the third person singular, he uses the more intimate and personal ‘I-form’ to present his insights in this creative synthesis. This reflects the capacity of the author to describe the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader from within his own personality. Corresponding to the metaphor of a person jumping from a cliff, the split between experience and experiencer is transcended.

The researcher has identified nine personal reflections that have captured for him, the most important insights of his experiential learning and transformation process while conducting this study. These personal reflections are built on the identified twelve mental attitudes of a systemic, constructivist leader, and depict how the self of the author is affected and transformed. In addition the conceptual framework of the study, the bio-psyche-social model of experienced systemic, constructivist leadership, is

further developed into a mental tool, which supports the utilization of this approach in leadership practise.

4.3.1 Not Controller, but Contributor

I have to give up the idea that my formal position as a leader in the organization enables me to control other people. The attributes of self-steering and self-organization of human systems expose the idea of 'leadership control' as an illusion. At first my self-image and self-perception of being a leader was offended and hurt. Ideas like being a 'victim of the autopoiesis of the system' came into my mind. However, while doing this study, I have learnt that despite not being, myself, in control of a human system, I am nevertheless a contributor to the human system. Systemic interventions are a possibility for me to influence or perturbate the human system without being able to predict the outcome. As I am accountable for my management decisions, I have to find ways to cope with the cognitive dissonance between my responsibilities and duties of being a leader, and the insight that I am unable to control a human system.

4.3.2 Experienced Reality is my Construction

How I experience and perceive the world is not how the world is, but my subjective construction of reality. As a leader I have developed the insight that my perspective to know and evaluate things is only one of many possible. Even if I believe that I am right and have the drive to push my 'personal truths' on others, I have to hold in and to remember that reality is

multi-perspective. I can never be sure whether my perspective is superior to that of others. Therefore I have to develop respect for how other people 'construct their experienced realities'.

4.3.3 Utilizing the 'Bio-Psyche-Social Model'

The biological subsystem refers to my body conditions, the psychic subsystem concerns my thoughts, and the social subsystem is how I am connected to other people. All three subsystems are a construct of my mind and do not reflect anything in the ontological reality. Other people cannot see how I use the bio-psyche-social model in my leadership practise. I utilize the bio-psyche-social model to perceive and work actively with the inner states of the three subsystems.

If I am disconnected from myself because I feel stressed, pushed by other people, anxious or furious, usually in my psychic system the thoughts are circling around a specific topic. I have to think the same thoughts again and again, and have the impression that this problem-orientation determines the world. If the psychic system is filled with destructive thoughts, then this has immediate consequences for the biological and social system. If I think about the problem of how to achieve my company goals in a challenging situation, then the mental operation is connected with emotional states of the body such as: the fear to fail, or the anger towards persons who seem to be responsible and thus have to be blamed. Circling thoughts and emotional reactions of the body influence the social system directly. It makes a

difference, whether I am, as a leader, in a relaxed and open-minded state, or whether I cannot think clearly because I feel blocked by my mind and body.

One possibility to reconnect me with myself is the focus of my attention on my biological system. I observe my body to see if there are tensions which are connected to a specific emotional state, for example pressure in the stomach area as an expression of fear. Connection with my body system has, even in challenging situations, the effect that I relax. This relaxation decelerates circling thoughts in the psychic system, which again has a positive effect on working with people in the social system.

Awareness in the handling of my emotions is particularly supportive in this regard. If I am in an emotionalized state, for example, because I am fearful of the consequences of a failed project, then I often react in a knee jerk manner which is devoid of self reflection. I become paralysed and remain stuck in this emotion. If I am angry, then my tendency is to react to other people out of this anger. As a result, I have only one possibility to encounter myself and other people. Hence, reducing my choices of action or alternatives. I become a 'slave to my emotions' reacting in a specific way to others who know which buttons to press in me. In leadership situations this reactive mode limits my possibilities to work with other people. Reactive behaviour means transferring my inner state to the situation or the other party. When I am furious and react to an employee by attacking him, then this has an effect on the wider social system which includes myself as a member of that social system. The 'inner witness' is aware of this tendency to respond

automatically, reminding me of the need to reflect first, and observe what is happening within me. Is there 'joy', 'anger', 'fear', 'pain' or 'sadness'?

Developing awareness of these emotions and other inner states means deceleration and hence allowing time for alternative behaviour to develop.

For example, if I am angry, I have at least three choices:

1. to withstand the anger until the emotion evaporates,
2. to leave the scene and thus retreat,
3. to attack the other person expressing all my anger.

Important for me in my leadership practise is to train these choices and to have alternatives of action depending on the specific situation. In the same way as I develop awareness for my body system, I have the possibility to develop awareness for my thoughts in the psychic system, and my communication in the social system. Failure to practice will result in the emergence of my old ways of thinking, i.e. knee jerk responses.

4.3.4 The Inner Witness

The idea of an 'inner witness' is a metaphor which captures the processes of reflexive self-awareness. In reflecting on my subjective construction of reality, I use awareness as a constant feedback loop to perceive what is happening in the moment. It is like witnessing what I experience. Thus I become connected to myself. The metaphor of an 'inner witness' illustrates this state of self reflection. It realizes how I construct my reality in a given moment and hence my body conditions, thoughts, and communication with

other people. The three Gestalt questions are an excellent tool for me to develop awareness at any moment: 'What do I think now?', 'What do I feel now?', and 'What do I do now?' I answer these in an inner dialogue. The result is the development of awareness for me at any time.

4.3.5 Connection to Myself (Inner Awareness)

As I consider my experience of being a systemic, constructivist leader, I perceive an intensive closeness to myself. I am aware of what is happening in my biological and psychic system. This focusing on me decelerates my fast and complex life. It is like finding a fixed point of reference in a world of constant change. Being aware of a specific moment and thus being connected with myself means reducing complexity and perceiving the wholeness of my entity as human being. I become relaxed and develop from this relaxation clarity and inner strength to work with people in leadership situations.

4.3.6 Connection to Others (Outer Awareness)

Connection to myself means for me to be in my inside world. However, part of my existence is also the connection to others in the outside world. It is the social system which is an interchange of communication between others and me. I am never alone in this world, but always an integral part of a social system. Awareness for the outside world connects myself to others.

4.3.7 Connection to Others and Myself (Double Awareness)

Having developed awareness for myself and others, I experience that my attention shuttles between my inner world and the outer world. Either I focus on myself and I am connected to myself or I focus on others and I am connected to them. Both states alternate constantly. Besides developing awareness for my inner and outer world, as a leader I have to be aware of the process of shuttling between both worlds. For example in meetings, I have to develop awareness for myself, for the other, for myself, for the other and so on. A state of double inner and outer awareness occurs, when the shuttling slows down or stops, and I am connected with my inner and outer world, or in other words with myself and the others, at the same time.

4.3.8 Unconditional Acceptance of My Inner States

After being connected with others and myself, it is important to be aware of my momentary inner state. Whether these perceptions are pleasant or unpleasant, give energy or withdraw energy, are emotionalizing or distant, have to be accepted unconditionally. Thus wishful thinking is avoided, as I do not escape into mind games about the past and future, but remain in the present. I am aware of my construction of reality in the here and now, and use the existing inner states to work in an authentic way with people in leadership situations.

4.3.9 The Inner Focal Point

While developing awareness and acceptance for my inner and outer states are more passive qualities, focusing of attention and thus energy is an active step. I do not only observe what is happening in me, but I try to direct my 'inner focal point' to a more desired state. If I use the bio-psyche-social system, then I have the possibility to redirect my attention from circling thoughts about a problematic topic from the psychic system to my body system. Then I focus my attention on my breath, and thus get out of the paralysing loops in the mind. Furthermore, I can apply this technique in combination with systemic interventions. If my energy is captured in a problem-oriented mode, then, after I become aware of this state, I refocus my attention on existing resources or possible solutions. By this switch I leave a problematic, often limiting and paralysing state and enter a more powerful inner state.

4.4 Summery

The collected data in the author's illumination/explication journal were analysed by use of a template analysis. The author identified twelve qualities of the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader. To illustrate systemic, constructivist leadership in management practise the author provides three examples. In a creative synthesis, he formulates nine personal reflections of his experiences relating to how systemic, constructivist leadership has an impact on the leader's self.

5 A Theory of Systemic, Constructivist Leadership

5.1 Introduction

This chapter conceptualizes a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership that will integrate existing theoretical and practical knowledge, which has already been used in systemic fields such as therapy, counselling, coaching, and consulting. Moreover, this theory has to satisfy the insights into the self-experiential learning process of the author. The following provides a general introduction of significant concepts, which have to be included in a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership.

1. Living systems organize themselves according to the principles of autopoiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1980). They are self-referential in that the internal operations determine the processes in the system. Thus they are operationally closed, and external factors from the environment have only a potential to irritate indirectly, but never a direct impact (Neuberger, 2002).
2. Human systems are 'non-trivial machines'. They cannot be determined by cause-effect rationality, because the internal structure of living systems is constantly changing (von Foerster, 2003).
3. How human beings experience their subjective world is a construction of reality, but it is not reality itself (Von Glasersfeld, 2002).

4. The role of an observer is fundamental. He or she determines reality and gives meaning to it by the recognition of and the description of differentiations (Berghaus, 2011). Consequently different observers create different systems or realities. A single optimal way of differentiation does not exist (Luhmann, 1992).
5. As the observer is included in the observation, there is always a blind spot, which the observer does not see. This blind spot excludes certain phenomena from the observation (Berghaus, 2011). The introduction of a second-order observer, the observing observer, closes this blind spot. On the one hand, the second-order observer can be another person who gives the first-order observer feedback about possible blind spots. On the other hand, the observer and the second-order observer can be one person, who is entering the process of self-reflection (Neuberger, 2002).
6. Awareness as a relaxed perception of the whole person (Perls, 1973) deepens the reflection by including the inner world of human beings.
7. Human systems can be subdivided into biological, psychic and social systems. Each subsystem is determined by its own internal operation (Luhmann, 2013). Biological systems can be characterized by organic processes, psychic systems by consciousness, and social systems by communication (Fuchs, 2012).

8. Communication is the synthesis of information, utterance, and understanding (Luhmann, 1992). In systemic, constructivist practise, the receiver determines the understanding and thus the meaning of a message, and never the sender (Schmidt, 2012a). Therefore the sender needs communicative feedback loops to find out the kind of meaning the receiver has given to the message.
9. The systemic practitioner has to show unconditional esteem and respect for all aspects of the personality and actions of human beings (Mücke, 2011).
10. Choices are extended by avoiding all types of limiting restrictions, dogmas, and judgements (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007).
11. Circularity and feedback loops of behaviour have to be considered in social systems (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007).
12. Systemic practitioners have to offer what people need, and not their own ready-made concepts (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007).
13. The systemic, constructivist relationship is a meeting of equal experts: the systemic practitioner is the expert for the solution process, and people are the experts for their specific problems in the workplace (Tomaschek, 2006).
14. The presence of the systemic practitioner and his or her acting according to the concrete situation is vital (Knauf, 2004).
15. The systemic practitioner has to cultivate self-centred care and responsibility for him- or herself (DGSF, 2012).

Systemic leadership is not a question of leadership theory or leadership style, but a question of mental attitude (Steinkellner, 2005). Whilst engaged in a self-experiential learning process the author identified twelve mental attitudes of systemic, constructivist leadership.

Two core attitudes, the systemic attitude and the constructivist attitude, capture the fundamental values of this approach. While the 'systemic attitude' is concerned with the experience of autopoiesis, the self-steering and self-organization of human systems, the 'constructivist attitude' is involved with people's construction of their subjective realities.

In addition to systemic attitude and constructivist attitude there are five operational attitudes by which systemic, constructivist insights are transferred to leadership practise. These are:

1. 'Systemic not-knowing'. This is an 'artificial ignorance' of a leader which facilitates openness to the complexity of human systems.
2. 'All-partiality'. This deals with the multi-perspectivity of human beings.
3. 'Active listening'. This is a communication skill which encourages people to open themselves and to share their construction of reality.
4. 'Relational and factual level of interaction'. The differentiation between 'relational level' and 'factual level' elucidates the importance of clarifying personal factors before people are ready to interact and cooperate together on the business topic.

5. 'Direct communication'. This means taking over responsibility for oneself in communication by using I-messages. Moreover, the leader encourages people to participate in a personal and direct encounter between each other.

Inspired by the ideas of Carl Rogers (1961), which have influenced systemic approaches, a number of Psychological Growth Factors were identified which support systemic, constructivist conversation in leadership.

1. 'Authenticity' means congruence between a leader's mental position, communication, and actions.
2. 'Appreciation' is the genuine recognition of resources and strengths of people.
3. 'Emotional alertness' deals with the importance of emotions in constructing subjective realities of people and therefore impacts on relationships in leadership situations.

Additionally the two Meta attitudes 'awareness' and 'focusing of attention' were identified. These denote qualities, which concentrate on inner processes within a leader.

The experiential learning process indicated that the twelve mental attitudes of a systemic, constructivist leader transform the self of the leader. To explore these existential changes of a leader more deeply, the author has added one further cycle of reflection in a creative synthesis. The results of

which are nine personal reflections, which emphasise the importance of the inner world of a leader in this transformation process. These are:

1. 'Not Controller, but contributor'. The idea that leaders have the potential to control human systems is an illusion. The contribution of a leader is his or her indirect influence on human systems through perturbations the outcome of which is unknown.
2. 'Experienced reality is my construction'. Leaders have to be aware that they experience the world not how the world is, but as subjective constructions of reality.
3. 'Utilizing the 'bio-psyche-social model''. This mental model enables leaders to perceive and work actively with inner states.
4. 'The inner witness'. This metaphor captures the processes of reflexive self-awareness of leaders.
5. 'Connection to myself'. Leaders have to develop an inner awareness for their biological and psychic processes.
6. 'Connection to others'. Leaders have to develop an outer awareness for other people's interactions and communication.
7. 'Connection to others and myself'. This is a state of double awareness in which leaders are connected with themselves and others at the same time.
8. 'Unconditional acceptance of my inner states'. Leaders have to develop awareness for both their pleasant and unpleasant inner states. Nothing should be excluded or suppressed.

9. 'The inner focal point'. Leaders are able to focus their attention and thus energy in order to accomplish a change in their experienced reality.

Based on the mental attitudes and personal reflections, the next section presents a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership. Firstly, the importance of the inverted perspective to leadership is described. Secondly, systemic, constructivist perturbations are introduced which initiate a transformation process of a systemic, constructivist self. Finally, the qualities of a systemic, constructivist self will be discussed critically.

5.2 Systemic, Constructivist Leadership: An Inverted Perspective

While traditional leadership theory generally describes leadership from an outside perspective, for example advantageous traits or beneficial behaviour of a 'successful leader', a systemic, constructivist perspective can be grasped as an inverted perspective to leadership. In systemic, constructivist leadership the essential idea is that the self is a product of a specific leader in his or her subjective reality. Therefore a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership has to fit into the subjective world of a leader and to explain it from there. Consequently a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership had to be formulated grammatically in the first person singular 'I-form'. Then the 'I' does not represent the 'I' of the author of the study, but that of an interested reader who is open to slip into the inverted perspective of a systemic, constructivist leader and to grasp this approach from there. However, this communicative tool could be confusing. Hence the author

decided to use a compromise. In the headlines describing systemic, constructivist perturbations, the inverted 'I' of the leader is used. In the explicating text of the section the author chooses the traditional third-person singular form to explain the theory. This compromise should satisfy both scientific standards and should be an appropriate form of depicting the results of the study.

5.3 Systemic, Constructivist Perturbations

In the following the author introduces systemic, constructivist perturbations. The objective of these perturbations is to initiate the development and cultivation of a systemic, constructivist self in leaders as human beings. They do not represent any kind of scientific truths, but are catalysts, which are able to initiate change processes in human beings (cf. Mücke, 2011). The headlines are provocative statements reflecting the introverted perspective of a systemic, constructivist leader.

5.3.1 'I' am the Inventor of my Subjective Reality

The pivotal point of any systemic, constructivist theory about human beings requires an individual who experiences his or her world. Everyone constructs his or her own subjective universe starting with the birth of a person and terminating with death. The perception of a subjective reality is always connected with a living individual who is experiencing it. A human being has no direct access to an ontological world that is separated from him or her (Von Glasersfeld, 2002). Rather a person constructs his or her own

subjective reality by perceiving the outside world with the five senses visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, gustatory, and olfactory. These connect the person indirectly to the ontological reality, but do not reflect reality itself. Hence reality can be characterized as invention or a dream (cf. Segal, 2001). Depending on the sensitivity of the senses, impulses are delivered to the brain. These impulses are cognitively processed resulting in the construction of the subjective reality of a person. For example; cognition includes the function of the memory; logical, emotional, and social intelligence; problem solving capacities; or language skills. Depending on many variables, which are innate or nurtured, every individual human being lives in his or her own subjective reality.

How a leadership system is defined depends on the leader as an observer who focuses attention on specific aspects of that system. It is important to emphasise here that a leader should not be limited to the taken-for-granted leader-follower relationship, but that he or she integrates all relevant stakeholders of the business organization in the system. For example; these can be employees, customers, shareholders, representatives of suppliers, banks, or tax authorities. The leader as constructor of his or her own reality makes the choice which elements are important to include and which are not. In leadership the work with subjective, constructivist realities has several consequences.

A leader is the centre of his or her subjective universe, which exists simultaneously with that of other people. Therefore sensitivity concerning the constructions of reality of others is crucial.

A leader, who realizes that he or she has only an indirect access to an ontological reality, may experience existential doubt. Many assumptions, opinions, dogmas or judgements on how to make sense of the world, learnt in the individual socialising process in the past, seem to dissolve. Instead, a space opens which can be filled with critical reflection about phenomena and hence the possibility to explore new approaches arises. Accordingly the number of choices of a leader will increase, because he or she will not be captured in traditional and entrenched ways of thinking and acting.

Problems are often a construct of a human mind. Both the leader and other people in the leadership system create something, which they experience as a problem. As a result a leader has to find out what his or her personal part in a construct is, what the role of the others is, and what further factors should be considered.

Past and future are also constructs of the mind. Previous events experienced by the leader in the present are constructions of the mind from today's perspective. The leader has to realize that memory is not like a video-recorder which captures past events as they happen. Similarly, the future is a construct in the leader's mind, maybe a picture of a possible occurrence.

Leading people requires developing a critical mistrust and doubt about phenomena with the label past and future. To find out how things are needs to be explored in the present.

Leaders, who make the decision to internalize constructivist and subjectivist insights into their personality, have to be aware that this perspective is not

the only one with which to perceive and interpret the world. Some people may find alternative approaches more useful, whilst others may have never had the possibility or ambition, to delve into a constructivist epistemology.

A further perspective of how subjective realities are created is communication amongst people. Communication is the exchange of information between people, which is not only limited to oral language, but includes all kind of human interchanges such as body language, emotional expression, or odour. Communication is constantly taking place, even when a person believes he or she is not communicating (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1985). There are many possible interpretations of the various natures of communication. Communication as a construct is not a one-to-one transfer of information from a sender to a receiver. Rather people in the leadership system construct together the meaning of the communication. Therefore a leader cannot determine what others, in a leadership context, understand (cf. Schmidt, 2012a). Hence a leader has to install feedback loops to find out the temporary constructions of reality of others. These include both active qualities such as; systemic questions and passive qualities such as; active listening or systemic not-knowing.

5.3.2 'I' Give up the Illusion of Objectivity

As a leader can only relate to his or her own constructions of reality, and never to reality itself, he or she has to give up the idea that the experienced reality is a depiction of an objective reality, which is the same for everybody. All human beings construct their individual, subjective reality. Thus

experienced reality in the relationship of a leader and other people in a leadership context does not refer to something objective. Hence the leader has to give up the notion of objectivity and substitute it with intersubjectivity, the interchange of subjective perspectives between people (cf. Von Glasersfeld, 2001).

In leadership, intersubjectivity means developing respect for other people. A leader never knows whether own construction of reality, or that of the other is more viable. Absolute, unconditional respect from leader for others on a relational level is a prerequisite for any encounter in leadership. Due to this an appreciative attitude is important (Mücke, 2011). Dissent and confrontation have to be resolved entirely on a factual level. Thus systemic, constructivist leadership means learning to distinguish between a 'subjective relational' and an 'objective factual' level.

Intersubjectivity also means that a leader has to question his or her perceived monopoly of superior knowledge. Especially in today's complex world that is continuously flooded with new information, a single person cannot process all new inputs. Consequently, leadership can be described as an encounter of experts (cf. Tomaschek, 2006). The leader is the expert for the process of leadership. He or she creates the framework in which leadership happens. While the leader supports people in achieving the objectives of the organisation, the led people are the experts for resolving their specific work-related problems.

If there is no absolute, objective truth on which a leader can build his or her power, then the acceptance of multi-perspectivity may be useful. The leader should be open to not only own subjective point of view, but also to that of the other people. By being accepting of own limitations, a leader is able to develop a mental attitude of all-partiality. The leader sees own point of view as only one of many possibilities. Being open to the perspectives of others increases possible options by extending the knowledge base, thus using the intelligence of the human system organization.

5.3.3 'I' Trust the Intelligence of Human Systems

On the one hand, the leader is a living system him- or herself, with a physical body and a psyche (cf. Fuchs, 2012), on the other hand the leader is an element of the living system, 'business organization'. Living systems steer and organize themselves by the principles of autopoiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1980). They are operationally closed which means that all activities happen within the system, and that the external environment has only the potential to perturbate the system, but never intervenes directly (Neuberger, 2002). Thus the leader and all people in the leadership context form together a human system that organizes itself from within.

A systemic, constructivist attitude in a leader refers to the realization that impulses do have not a cause-effect impact, which can be isolated to a

specific part of the system. All inputs have an effect on the organization of the whole system. The understanding of a leader of being part of an autopoietic system means that he or she is a contributor to the self-organization, but not the person who determines what is happening. Any belief of being in control of a human system is a construction of reality of a leader and in the end a personal perspective, which is independent from what is happening in the organization. The leader initiates a process, but the outcome of any instruction or intervention of a leader is not predictable. The operating process in the system is often outside of his or her immediate perception. For example, there is a time lag between an impulse of the leader and the reaction of the system. The leader will be affected by the outcome, however it depends on the 'intelligence of the system' when. The possibility to fail in an autopoietic system is always latently present, because a leader is only a contributor to self-organization of the system. Due to this, in a leader the feeling of powerlessness and existential doubt can arise. The leader may ponder on whether autopoiesis as an intelligence of a social system is more relevant than the intelligence of the individual intelligence of a leader.

The acceptance of systemic intelligence of the organization in addition to the personal intelligence of a leader means that a leader has to find out what the human system and, respectively the people in the system, need. A leader should not be prematurely entrapped into using interventions. Instead the leader has to be present (cf. Knauf, 2004; Scharmer et al., 2004) and to be open for the specific situation. This enables the leader to decide

spontaneously and intuitively, what actions are required to support the intelligence of the system.

5.3.4 'I' Exist as a Variable in a Non-Predictable World

Human beings are non-trivial entities (von Foerster, 2003). They consist of processes, whose internal structures change constantly. Thus the same input at a specific moment has a different effect on people depending on their momentary internal state. The variability of people makes them comparable to black boxes containing innumerable unknowns, thus their actions, reactions, and behaviour are difficult to predict. In human systems at all times anything can happen.

The leader as a human being and as constructor of a subjective universe is him- or herself a non-trivial entity. Personal factors such as mood, temper, resilience to challenges, or motivation determine his or her inner processes. Hence a leader is not a constant in an ever-changing world, but also a variable. The leader, as a black box, meets other people who operate also as black boxes. Together they determine the dynamics of the system.

5.3.5 'I' Perceive Contradictions as Complementary

Leadership as a human skill means being open for any situation, being able to develop awareness for the variability in human systems; recognizing that there is not one best solution to challenges; accepting one's own vulnerability; living with paradoxes and contradictions. All of these processes happen within the inner world of the leader. The five operational attitudes and three psychological growth factors identified in the experiential learning

process of becoming a systemic, constructivist leader, are no recipes or concrete instructions of how a systemic, constructivist leader should think, communicate or behave. Rather they trigger conflicts, confusion, and turmoil within in the leader, which he or she has to face and to cope with. In particular, these contradictions are:

- Systemic not-knowing versus the drive to use own knowledge
- All-Partiality versus the need to express own perspective
- Active listening versus utterances of own position
- Considering a factual and relational level versus the idea of rationality in business
- Direct communication instead of indirect communication without personal contact
- Authenticity versus role-playing
- Appreciation versus manipulative flattering
- Emotional alertness versus exclusion of emotions in business

A systemic, constructivist approach is holistic and includes all possible aspects. One position can be right, the opposite position can also be right, or a viable answer can be somewhere in between. Therefore dichotomous solutions in human systems rarely exist. For example, classical systemic interventions such as systemic questions or reframing, indirectly perturbate a human system and can be appropriate in specific situations. However, if there is an emergency, it is critical that the leader instructs his or her staff directly what actions to take at that moment. Therefore a systemic,

constructivist leader should always keep an open mind to all choices. No possibility should be excluded. Then the result of this kind of leadership is that contradictions become complementary to each other.

5.3.6 'I' Acquire 'Double Inner and Outer Awareness'

Commonly people differentiate between an inside world and an outside world. The inside world consists of the psyche and functions of the body; the outside world is everything that is perceived as being external. People shuttle between the inside and outside world depending on how they focus their attention. 'Inner awareness', 'outer awareness', and the awareness of shuttling between both connect the leader to him- or herself. This study proposes, that all reality is subjective and is constructed within the mind of a human being. Therefore the differentiation between an inside world and an outside world is artificial, because the differentiation itself is a construct. This is supported by the Gestalt approach, suggesting that human beings experience reality as a whole and not in specific parts (Perls, 1973). A leader who encounters other people in a leadership context has to focus attention on what is in the foreground of his or her own perception in a specific moment. The Gestalt questions are tools to find this out:

1. What do I think now?
2. What do I feel now?
3. What I am doing now?

By using the Gestalt questions, a leader is able to attune him- or herself to own subjective universe. Systemic, constructivist leadership transcends the

constructs of an 'inner world' of a leader and an 'outer world' by the simultaneous development of a 'double inner and outer awareness'. In any moment a leader is both an observer of own inner states and an observer of how other people affect these states. This kind of self-observation means that the leader, as an observer, observes him- or herself. Metaphorically, the leader becomes a witness of own existence. 'Double inner and outer awareness' is a prerequisite to work with people effectively. Thus a leader is able to discover what a specific leadership situation has to do with him- or herself, with other persons, or the relationship between both.

5.3.7 'I' Lead By Focusing of Attention

While 'double inner and outer awareness' is a passive quality reflecting how the subjective world is experienced in a specific moment, 'focusing of attention' (cf. Schmidt, 2012a) is an active quality concerned with the question of how to work with human systems in the leadership context. Despite subjective reality being perceived as a 'whole' or 'Gestalt', the leader has the ability to focus attention and thus energy on specific parts of the whole, which then in turn become the new whole.

Two applications of how focusing of attention can be utilized in leadership are provided in the following. The first one is the utilization of the bio-psyche-social model; the second involves working with existing resources and possible solutions.

The bio-psyche-social model differentiates between the three subsystems of human beings; biological system, psychic system, and the social system.

This kind of splitting is a construct and arbitrary. Existing subsystems can be removed and new ones added depending on the person who is making the differentiation. The biological subsystem represents life and organic processes of the human body. They supply the basic conditions of human existence. The psychic subsystem is about the consciousness of human beings, referring to mental operations such as thoughts and inner dialogues. The social subsystem portrays how people communicate together and encounter each other. Utilizing the bio-psyche-social model means developing awareness for a specific subsystem, and then focusing the attention on other subsystems. Thus personal blockages in a subsystem can be resolved. For example, if a leader feels stuck and uncomfortable in a situation, then the first step is to develop awareness for a specific subsystem, which is perceived as a problem. If thoughts and inner dialogues circle around a particular theme in the mind, never-ending mental loops have the ability to paralyse the leader. The same thoughts occur over and over again, and there seems to be no way out. This condition makes it difficult to be open for other people. By developing awareness for this automatism, the leader realizes what is happening in his or her psyche. Then a refocusing of the attention from the psyche to the body system can slow down the mental loops of thinking. Focusing on breathing in a mindful way decelerates the thoughts, enabling the leader to relax and focus attention on the social subsystem, the encounter with other people. Mindfulness is a method of looking deeply into one's own self, to inquire and understand oneself by paying attention (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) to bio-psyche-social processes.

Within the theory being developed here, a leader can change this construct by focusing of attention. Systemic, constructivist leadership is both resource- and solution-oriented. By focusing attention on resources from the past a leader supports people in finding their pre-existing resources, which they have found to be reliable in the past. This energy is then used to solve existing challenges. Similarly, focusing of attention can be used to work with constructions of a possible future. The leader supports people in designing a mental picture of the desired state in the future, which provides the energy to solve a challenge in the present. Systemic questions such as the miracle question are communicative techniques to support these processes.

5.3.8 'I' have to Take Over Responsibility and Self-Care for Myself

The process of developing a systemic, constructivist self has a deep impact on the personality and social relationships of a leader. It affects the real life of human beings. A leader has to take over the responsibility for own change process and the possible consequences. Systemic, constructivist development involves all aspects of a person including the emotional life, psychic states, private thoughts, as well as health issues. If the change process is too overwhelming, then there should be possibilities for the leader to draw back in order to rest, to recover, and to continue with renewed energy later. Therefore the possibility of sharing his or her experiences and strategies with a facilitator, who is familiar with systemic constructivist theory and practise can be supportive to a leader. Appropriate facilitators are for example; trainers; coaches; or peers who are also in the change process. However, ultimately the leader has to take over the full responsibility for own

self-development process and to decide what changes and risks are acceptable, and when it is time to interrupt the process.

5.4 Qualities of a Systemic, Constructivist Self of a Leader

This study identified twelve mental attitudes of a systemic, constructivist leader. Nine personal reflections depict how the self of a leader is affected and transformed. The change process of a leader, how he or she assimilates systemic, constructive ideas, is indirectly induced by perturbations. In the following, the strengths and weaknesses of a systemic, constructivist self are critically discussed.

5.4.1 The Systemic, Constructivist Self is a Construct

The systemic, constructivist self of a leader, which depicts his or her subjective reality, is itself a construct. Due to this, the notion that something like systemic, constructivist leadership exists, has to be critically challenged. It is only one possibility of thinking and acting, inspiring a leader to develop skills that improve the work with dynamic, self-organizing human systems. Hence a leader is required to continuously verify his or her constructs of how viable they are in leadership practise.

5.4.2 The Systemic, Constructivist Self is a Variable

The systemic, constructivist self is nothing fixed, but varies depending on personal factors and states of the leader. For example, these can be mood swings, the emotional state at a specific moment, aspiration levels, resilience

to stress, and many more individual factors. Furthermore the personal self-development process makes the systemic, constructivist self a variable, because inspirations and perturbations transform it continuously.

5.4.3 The Systemic, Constructivist Self is Value-Free

Systemic, constructivist leadership means developing an attitude, which is anti-dogmatic and open to all kinds of contents. Metaphorically, a systemic, constructivist self can be compared to an empty bottle, which can be filled with all kinds of substances. The leader uses an attitude of 'systemic unknowing' or 'all partiality' to create this space. The toleration and appreciation of many different perspectives are characteristic of this approach. However, all specific contents are contributed by the people within the system. In how far this method is applied to manipulate people, depends on the leader and stakeholders in a specific situation. All kinds of misuse are equally possible as is the creation of a nourishing and fulfilling working environment.

5.4.4 The Systemic, Constructivist Self is Oriented to the Present

As the notions of a past and a future are regarded as constructions of reality in the present, a leader should be oriented to this present. The development of awareness provides a leader with the capability to realize, what the human system requires in any specific moment. Thus the leader has the ability to focus attention and energy on specific parts of the system to initiate change where needed.

5.4.5 The Systemic, Constructivist Self is both Rational and Irrational

From a Gestalt approach, human beings perceive their subjective reality as a whole. And this whole in the foreground includes all possible human aspects, both the rational and the irrational. The idea that human beings can be purely rational in business is a construct, which may be viable in specific leadership contexts. However, that construct of rationality excludes many aspects of a leader such as emotions, conditionings from the past, sexual attraction and rejection, or topics which are unconscious at the moment. The awareness of all aspects, which are relevant in a specific moment, provides a leader with the potential to develop a much richer picture of his or subjective reality.

5.4.6 The Systemic, Constructivist Self has to be Cultivated

Leaders who intend to take the opportunity of delving into systemic, constructivist theory and practise, have to constantly reflect on their change processes. This requires an intensive and sustained effort of the leader. However, whether the change process is virtuous or vicious, can never be predicted. Leaders, whose intention is to cultivate a systemic, constructivist self, have to consider that this process affects both own personality and that of other people. Thus not only the leader, but all stakeholders are affected. Leadership is the encounter of human beings in a leadership context. Due to the distinguished role of people and their needs for protection, the change process of the leader should be responsibly reflected and professionally accompanied. Therefore the author recommends that the training of systemic, constructivist leadership skills should be coordinated and certified

by a professional association such as the 'German Society for Systemic Therapy, Counselling, and Family Therapy' or the 'Systemic Society' in Germany. Both of the above already offer training standards and ethical guidelines for systemic therapy, counselling, supervision, coaching, and organisational development. These include practise, self-reflection, supervision, self-study and self-experience. An extension to systemic, constructivist leadership would encourage managers to participate in scientifically and ethically reflected programmes. Furthermore ethical reflection could deal with possible problems such as manipulation, gender issues, and the limits of the systemic, constructivist approach.

5.4.7 The Systemic, Constructivist Self is a Catalyst

The systemic, constructivist self of a leader is not isolated or separated in him- or herself, but also connected to other people in the leadership context. The leader creates a space in which the people in the organization are supported in finding their own answers. Systemic not-knowing, all-partiality, active listening, relational- and factual levels of interaction and direct communications are all operational attitudes to implement this. Being a catalyst means that the leader initiates change in specific parts of the systems, for example by using a systemic intervention such as reframing of a problem to a challenge. The effect is not limited to this part, but influences and changes the whole system resulting in the development of a hopefully more viable state of self-organization. The catalytic function of the leader is his or her contribution to the autopoiesis of the system.

5.4.8 The Systemic, Constructivist Self is Private

Systemic, constructivist leadership is a mental construct, which is cultivated and developed, in a self-experiential learning process. This process concerns the development of the personality of the leader and includes emotional ups and downs, existential doubts, and progress and setbacks. Therefore the process itself is very intimate and a leader should decide carefully with whom he or she shares the experiences. These can be persons of trust such as a trainer or coach who are involved as facilitators in the change process. Important is that those people share systemic, constructivist assumptions of leadership. It would be less appropriate to share specific details of the process of self-development with people who are not open to systemic, constructivist knowledge. For them, this approach seems to be strange and embarrassing. To militate against any irritations, the leader should keep his or her personal self-development process private in the working environment.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, nine personal reflections, based on twelve mental attitudes and a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership were presented. A unique aspect of this approach is that it is described from the inside or inverted perspective of a leader. The self of a systemic, constructivist leader is not a fixed state, but a process that has to be initiated and cultivated by perturbations. The resulting qualities of a systemic, constructivist self of a leader are critically discussed and both strengths and weaknesses are elucidated upon.

6 The Systemic, Constructivist Facilitator

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership was explained. One of the most important insights is that the self of a systemic, constructivist leader is not static, but a constant process of personal self-development. This process varies from individual to individual in speed, depth, and intensity. Facilitating people in developing a systemic, constructivist self and mental attitude is designed to support the process of self-change, and not the achievement of specific goals. In the following, inspirations are provided of how such a process of change and personal self-development could be created. Initially, the field of change through workshops is described. Next the requirements for participation are elucidated upon. Then the significance of a facilitator is explained. Thereafter examples of techniques and methods of how to design a workshop are provided. This is followed by reflections about the challenges of facilitating these workshops. Finally, the difficulties of evaluating the personal performances and progress are discussed.

6.1 The Field of Change

In this section a short overview is given of how a workshop in systemic, constructivist leadership could be structured and what peculiarities would have to be considered by a facilitator.

Fundamentally, a workshop in systemic, constructivist leadership has to be designed as an experiential learning process (cf. Kolb, 1984). The focus is

on gaining new personal experiences as well as intellectual knowledge. The objective is to develop a systemic, constructivist self and mental attitude in the participants.

As the process of self-development in human beings cannot be pre-determined and varies depending on the individuals involved and their specific life context, a facilitator has to develop awareness for the field of change, and flexibility in case adaptations are required. Consequently it is impossible to give a formula or recipe for how to create a workshop. Rather, a successful process in the field of change depends largely on the presence, intuition, and creativity of the facilitator.

The workshop facilitator must be a professional in systemic, constructivist leadership. He or she leads a group of participants, who experience together a process of change. As systemic, constructivist leadership happens in human systems, a workshop should also be created as a type of group training. For example, ten to fifteen participants experience this process over a one-year period together. Workshops could be organized to take place every two months over an extended residential weekend. The workshop should be an off-the-job programme, independent from the direct influence of any company or sponsor of the participants. Therefore a neutral seminar room in a hotel should be favoured to a company owned education centre. A neutral location has the advantage that participants leave their familiar environment with existing rules and conventions. Thus they can be more open to new and unknown insights and experiences. It would be

advantageous to minimize external communication such as emails, mobile phones, or social media during the workshops.

As group processes are intensive and unpredictable, the facilitator should work together with a co-facilitator. Alternatively, the facilitator could use assistants. These could be volunteers who have participated in a previous workshop and thus are experienced in the process. Their role would be to provide the facilitator with feedback from the group, to support group exercises, or to prepare the setting of the workshop.

Participants should be encouraged to bring in problems and challenges of leadership from their real-life situation, and use these in the experiential learning process. Openness and trust in the group is vital, a written agreement about confidentiality should be signed.

A profound change process does not happen entirely in the isolated timeframe of the workshop, but also continues afterwards. The transfer process of putting new skills, insights and experiences into practise is important. The participants are encouraged to develop awareness for personal change processes and to document them. Furthermore the establishment of peer groups has a positive effect on the individual change processes between the workshops. The participants themselves should organize the peer group meetings. As they often come from different cities and countries, the main criterion for forming the groups is the place of domicile. At least once between workshops the participants are

recommended to meet in order to share their experiences, to support each other, or to practise techniques learnt in in the workshop. The facilitator does not personally take part in the peer group meetings, but supports them by being available for questions. In all workshops extra time has to be scheduled for feedback and discussions of topics from the peer group meetings.

Example 6-1 illustrates a hypothetical schedule for a one-year workshop in systemic, constructivist leadership. And example 6-2 provides an overview of the design of a particular seminar day.

Example 6-1 One-Year Workshop in Leadership

Time	Action
Thursday to Sunday 08.01.15- 11.01.15 9:00-17:00	<p><u>First Workshop:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding human systems • The leader as contributor to the autopoiesis of the organization • Opportunities of change and uncertainty
Sunday 08.02.15	Peer Group Meeting
Thursday to Sunday 05.03.15- 08.03.15 9:00-17:00	<p><u>Second Workshop:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The constructivist perception of the world • The bio-psyche-social model as a mental tool
Sunday 12.04.15	Peer Group Meeting

<p>Thursday to Sunday 7.05.15-10.05.15 9:00-17:00</p>	<p><u>Third Workshop</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader • Systemic, constructivist communication • Training of systemic interventions
<p>Sunday 28.06.15</p>	<p>Peer Group Meeting</p>
<p>Thursday to Sunday 06.08.15.- 09.08.15 9:00-17:00</p>	<p><u>Fourth Workshop</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The systemic, constructivist self • Self-management and self-motivation of a leader • Clarification of roles and responsibilities of a leader
<p>Sunday 13.09.15</p>	<p>Peer Group Meeting</p>
<p>Thursday to Sunday 08.10.15- 11.10.15 9:00-17:00</p>	<p><u>Fifth Workshop</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gestalt approach in leadership • Self experience: Development of awareness • Importance of emotions in leadership
<p>Sunday 08.11.15</p>	<p>Peer Group Meeting</p>
<p>Thursday to Sunday 10.12.15.- 13.12.15 9:00-17:00</p>	<p><u>Sixth Workshop</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hypo-therapeutic approach in leadership • Training in focussing of attention/energy • Handing out of certificates

Example 6-2 Seminar Day

Time	Action
9:00 - 9:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meditation: Observation of inner states (see 6.4.2.)
9:15 -10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open Sharing of participants (see 6.4.3.)
10:00 - 11:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Theory: Systemic questions in leadership (see 2.3.3.2)
11:00 - 11:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Break
11:15 - 13:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitator demonstrates appliance of miracle question using a practical case from a participant
13:00 - 14:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Break
14:30 - 16:30	Group exercise: Training of the miracle question (see 6.4.7.)
16:30 - 16:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Break
16:45 - 18:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion and feedback

A good arrangement of the seminar room would be to have the facilitator and the participants sit in a circle of chairs, in which everybody has an equal position. From the systemic, constructivist perspective, the workshop is a meeting of experts. The facilitator is the expert for the change process of people, and the participants are the experts for their own inner processes to develop new leadership skills. If there are group exercises in the workshop, the circle of chairs can be rearranged in smaller circles for the subgroups.

6.2 The Participants

The targeted participants of the workshop are managers who want to improve their human resource proficiency and leadership skills. The mixture of participants should be as diverse as possible, so that a broad base of knowledge and experiences can be integrated. A mix of participants from different companies and industries has the advantage that participants are less likely to lose themselves by talking shop. Preferably the participants should be both male and female. Based on humanistic psychological ideals, the workshop can contribute to the improvement of gender issues in business. It is an opportunity for both male and female managers to appreciate the strengths of one another, to reflect about judgements and projections of the opposite gender, and to learn to work together in the most effective way. Furthermore, experienced participants who have attended workshops in the past could support the less experienced people in an assistant role.

The participants should apply voluntarily, and not be compelled by a superior or the human resource department; for instance to compensate for a negative score in a yearly evaluation process. The full personal commitment and openness of the participants to delve into a self-development process is required. Moreover, suitable participants need to be selected; they should have the intellectual potential to understand systemic, constructivist theory, they must be mentally able to cope with personal change processes, and they must have curiosity and willingness to adopt new perspectives. In

addition, there should be dissatisfaction with their current situation, so that the participants are motivated to begin and to persevere in the workshop as a means to change their situation for the better.

In order to assess the appropriateness of applicants, the facilitator informs them about the contents, structure, and processes in the workshop in advance. If there is interest, in-depth interviews with the applicants are conducted. Applicants who do not fulfil the defined conditions of admission are excluded before the workshop begins. A thorough selection of the participants is required, because in the workshop, all participants have an impact on one another, and thus individual learning processes are affected. Inappropriate applicants could paralyse or inhibit the dynamics of the group. The function of co-participants as 'psychological mirrors' is very important. In the relative safety of the workshop, participants are encouraged to reflect together providing each other with feedback.

6.3 The Facilitator

Facilitators are trained in supporting people to develop a systemic, constructivist self and mental attitude. They know from their own self-development process emotional ups and downs, existential doubt, or resistances to give up conditioned behaviour learnt in the past. In the same way as the participants of the workshop, the facilitators are also undergoing a change process, but at a more experienced level. On the one hand, the facilitators have to guide participants through the change processes in the

workshop. On the other hand they have to focus on their own self-development.

Facilitators have to live the systemic, constructivist approach authentically. Organizing and conducting workshops requires leadership skills to develop people. Often the dynamic of a group includes power struggles between participants, conflicts or discontentment. The facilitator can utilize these opportunities to be a role model of a systemic, constructivist leadership style and demonstrate operational attitudes such as all-partiality, active listening or emotional alertness in real-life situations.

As systemic, constructivist literature is often abstract and difficult to grasp, a facilitator has to select relevant and interesting concepts depending on the receptivity and the previous knowledge of the participants. The objective of the presentation of systemic, constructivist theory is to transcend a pure intellectual discussion, and to motivate people to delve deeper into their own experiential learning processes.

The facilitator is a catalyst for the self-development processes of the participants. He or she initiates impulses and situations that have the potential to trigger learning. It is essential that the facilitator creates a 'space of unknowing', in which he is open for the actual needs of the group in the learning process, and not to impose his or her own pre-fabricated concepts on the participants. Thus every workshop has to be customised.

Facilitators have to create a 'safe space' in which personal change processes can happen. Mutual respect, trust, confidentiality, and appreciation are essential. Perturbations such as " 'I' am the inventor of my subjective reality", " 'I' give up the illusion of objectivity", or " 'I' exist as a variable in a non-predictable world" initiate the development and cultivation of a systemic, constructivist self in leaders as human beings. Often the inner world of the participant is shaken. If a participant is overwhelmed by feelings and desires support, the facilitator has to offer guidance. For example, systemic, constructivist perturbations can cause latent problems or traumas from the past to resurface. Private and professional spheres of life could be in interaction. The contract of the training should explicitly inform participants that a self-experiential training in leadership may, in some cases, trigger uncomfortable feelings and inner turmoil. The following information is included in the contract: In case a particular participant needs additional support, the address and telephone number of a counsellor or coach is given. For example, if a participant has non-workshop related problems then the facilitator has to make clear that there are possibilities to deal with them, however a workshop in systemic, constructivist leadership is not the appropriate place. In a confidential talk the facilitator could recommend the advice of a counsellor or a coach. It is important that the facilitator respects the fact that the participant is responsible for him- or herself. The facilitator should avoid the trap of taking over responsibilities for which he or she is not trained. Furthermore there are country specific legal restrictions regarding counselling and coaching that have to be considered. In the next section

examples of experiential learning methods and techniques are provided, which could be used in a workshop.

6.4 Examples of Experiential Learning Methods and Techniques

A workshop in systemic, constructivist leadership is a group dynamic process that is essentially determined by the individual change processes of the facilitator and the participants. As the inner states of all involved people change constantly, from a systemic, constructivist perspective the outcome of such workshop cannot be predicted. Consequently it is not possible to design a template for the ideal structured workshop in advance. Rather the facilitator has to be aware of the current dynamics in the workshop.

Accordingly the facilitator has to develop and professionalise a 'tool kit' of methods and techniques, which can be used depending on the actual needs of the group. In the following various examples and inspirations for a workshop in systemic, constructivist leadership are presented.

6.4.1 Reflective Diary

Systemic, constructivist leadership requires awareness and self-reflection. A reflective diary is a suitable method for participants to document their transformation processes. All insights, critical incidents, ambiguities or doubts should be recorded. The participants as observers of themselves increase the awareness of the own change. The reflective diary should be a constant companion of the participants. This enables them to make an entry as soon as a relevant incident occurs. In general, the reflective diary should support the experiential learning of the participants. As personal change

processes vary from individual to individual, how the diaries are kept should be open to the participants. The diaries are not an academic exercise, but should portray the specific demands and requirements of each participant. They are confidential, because participants should also use them for private entries which are not meant to be seen by a third party. Instead of giving concrete instructions: how to manage a reflective diary, the facilitator could provide two or three examples. Furthermore the participants could share their personal experiences of writing the diary, thus inspiring one another.

6.4.2 Meditation: Observation of Inner State

Meditation is a method to develop awareness for one's inner world. It is a self-observation in silence that can be practised in the workshop independent of any religious or spiritual tradition. A seminar day could begin with a 15-minute sitting meditation. A special posture is not necessary. Often participants discover how difficult it is to observe themselves, and not to drift away in specific thoughts. If they are distracted and lose the state of self-observation, then the essential part of the meditation is to become aware of this distraction and to refocus again. Meditation as self-observation increases the awareness of the participants for their construction of reality. Judgements, emotions, or thinking loops become obvious. Thus meditation improves the encounter with other people in leadership situations, because the personal state of being becomes clearer.

6.4.3 Open Sharing of Participants

At the beginning of every day in the workshop, the participants are encouraged to openly share what is important for them with the group. These can be reflections from previous training, insights from the integration of new skills in their daily work, questions, or emotional states concerning the self-development process. If a person shares, the others listen and do not respond with advice or opinions. These daily sharings are an important source for the facilitator to evaluate where the group and the individuals are in the process of change. The participants have to decide for themselves the degree of openness concerning private issues of their change process. After the sharing, new insights should be written by the participants in their reflective diary.

6.4.4 Scanning the Body-Psyche-Social System

The Gestalt questions 'What do I think now?', 'What do I feel now?', and 'What am I doing now?' are a quick check on how the momentary state of the bio-psyche-social perception is. Thus the participant develops awareness of his or her specific subsystem in the moment. This exercise can also be done by using the reflective diary, entering the current state of being.

6.4.5 Active Listening: Encouragement and Awareness

Active listening is an important mental attitude for a systemic, constructivist practitioner, which helps him or her to understand the construction of reality of others. It can be trained in a group of three: a speaker, an active listener

and an observer. The speaker talks about a problem from his or her management practise. In the meantime the listener pays full attention to the utterances of the speaker. The task of the listener is to encourage the speaker to continue, and to be conscious of his or her inner reactions as a listener. Are there aspirations to give comments, to feel bored, or to drift away mentally? The observer follows the process of communication. Then speaker, listener, and observer provide each other with feedback on how they experienced the others. Afterwards the roles rotate – the speaker becomes listener, the listener becomes observer, and the observer becomes speaker – and a new round of the exercise begins.

6.4.6 Attentive Listening

Participant 1 talks about a topic. The task of participant 2 is to listen to the story of the other. After 10 minutes both participants change and participant 2 reports and participant 1 listens. After the second round is over, the facilitator asks participant 2 to repeat the story of participant 1 and vice versa. Then the participants give each other feedback on the accuracy of the retelling of the story. This promotes attentive listening and develops awareness for the danger of selected or projecting understanding.

6.4.7 Focusing Energy on a Desired Future: The Miracle Question

The miracle question is a systemic intervention used to support people in reconstructing their perception of reality (Mücke, 2011; Steinkellner, 2005; Tomaschek, 2006). It is an operation of the mind, and focuses energy on a mental state that has the power to find solutions to existing challenges. The

facilitator can demonstrate this technique to a group. Afterwards the participants are invited to practise this intervention themselves. They form groups of three: a leader who should learn this technique, a person who has an issue, and an observer who provides feedback. For instance, the leader asks the following variation of the miracle question: “Assume that you sleep very well tonight, and while you sleep your problem has been solved. What would be different tomorrow?” The person with the issue describes the desired situation in a brainstorming manner without self-censoring. The leader notes down all positive aspects. Then the leader asks the other person to relax while he or she reads the notes aloud. Usually a switch in the mind of the first person is triggered which has the potential to mobilize energy that can be used to tackle the current problem.

6.4.8 Empty Chair: Experiencing Multi-perspectivity

The ‘empty chair’ is a method borrowed from Gestalt therapy (Perls, 1973). It can be used to make multi-perspectivity experienceable to participants. For example, a participant who is a sales manager has a problem with one of her subordinates. A salesman has a low performance and is often ill. In this exercise the sales manager puts herself in the position of other people in the leadership system. She speaks from the perspective of the salesman, a colleague, the human resource manager, or a customer to an empty chair, which represents herself. Thus the sales manager develops awareness of the perspectives of others.

6.4.9 Equilibrium in a Group as Human System

This group exercise illustrates to participants how people can affect each other in human systems. The facilitator asks the participants to disperse in the seminar room. Then they are requested to create a human system, in which the distance between one another is one meter. The exercise has to be done in silence. After a while the participants experience how the modification of distance between two people has an effect on the complete human system. If one person changes the position, all other participants have to move until a new equilibrium is achieved.

6.4.10 Awareness in a Limit Situation

To train emotional alertness in a limit situation, the facilitator could apply an adapted method from humanistic therapy, the pressure cooker (Carrivick & Yuson-Sánchez, 2005). The facilitator divides the participants of the workshop into groups of six people. They sit on their chairs in a circle. Then the first participant of the subgroup stands up and positions him-or herself in the middle of the circle of chairs. Now the other participants are invited to give the person in the middle negative feedback about all the characteristics and behaviour, which they dislike. The person in the middle has to withstand the negative feedback for four minutes without any reactions such as aggressive responses or negation. During that time he or she has to develop awareness for the inner states in this unconformable limit situation. Then the next participant enters the middle and receives negative feedback. When all participants have completed the first round, the facilitator asks participants to repeat the exercise but this time giving with positive feedback. Thus the

participants are guided in a positive and energetic state. Firstly, this exercise trains emotional alertness for both comfortable and uncomfortable inner states. Secondly, active listening is practised, because the person in the middle is only receptive, but not responsive. Thirdly, in the second round the participants have the possibility to apply and test appreciations as systemic interventions. And finally the participants experience how their self-perception differs from the perception of others. Self-experiential methods using limit situations in a training context can be very powerful perturbations to change people.

6.4.11 Paying Complements

A good closing round of every workshop block is to pay complements to the group, participants, assistants, or oneself. On the one hand, genuine appreciation as a systemic intervention is trained. On the other hand, the workshop is completed in an energetic, positive, and resourceful way.

6.5 Challenges of Facilitating the Process

Most important is for a facilitator to compose a group, which supports the participating individuals to develop a systemic, constructivist self and attitude in leadership. The facilitator conducts interviews with applicants of the workshop and selects those who are suitable. Criteria for picking the people are that they have managerial responsibility in their job, self-reflections skills, advanced communication abilities, and are open to personal change processes, or previous experiences in self-development trainings. If the facilitator is unsure about the suitability of a participant, he or she can use

the first workshop as a trial. Alternatively, a 'taster workshop' could be offered. For example, in the limited time space of one day, a facilitator can present the training and offer participants learning experiences, which cannot be conveyed in a brochure or in an information talk. In addition, the facilitator learns more about interested participants and can provide recommendations for the next steps.

Furthermore the facilitator has to be prepared to guide participants in an exit strategy from the workshop. As personal change processes demand the full commitment of the participants, the decision to leave the programme for personal reasons has to be respected. Leaving the workshop at any time should be possible. In these cases, the facilitator has to make the exit as bearable as possible both for the group and the individual leaving.

The facilitator has to focus all efforts on the self-development process of leaders. Especially in emotionally challenging situations, he or she should not dissipate energy on side issues. Subjects of a private nature such as; difficulties with a spouse or previous traumatic experiences may be important for a specific participant, yet are not part of a leadership development programme. In these cases the facilitator has to clarify this. In addition the facilitator could recommend that the participant seek advice from an appropriate professional, for example a counsellor or coach (see above 6.3). As the dynamics of individual and group change processes cannot be planned, every workshop is different. Therefore the structure and the processes of training should be customized to the needs of the participants

in the specific workshop. Hence the guideline of the workshop is always provisional and should be adapted if necessary.

6.6 Post-Workshop Evaluation

At the end of the workshop both the facilitator and the participants have to give each other feedback.

The evaluation of the participants by the facilitator is challenging, because besides the intellectual understanding of theory and the acquisition of new skills, the process of self-development is significant. Personal change processes such as the evolution of a systemic, constructivist self or mental attitude cannot be quantified or differentiated with school grades. However, often a conflict arises when a sponsor such as an employer of a participant demands an assessment. To meet these formal requirements, the facilitator can decide between completed and not completed. Criteria of failure could be the insufficient application of learnt techniques such as systemic interventions, the resistance to contribute in the exercises, the undermining of the group process or unexcused absence.

The participants are asked to assess their experiences and change process in the workshop. Open questions such as: -

- Which personal goals have you achieved?
- What worked well for you in the workshop? And what not?
- What can be improved or added?

These questions are intended to provide the facilitator with an important source of feedback concerning the participants personal change process as well as the facilitator's performance. The questionnaire should not be too long and should focus on some important key points. If there is anything unclear or if there are urgent issues that have to be clarified, the facilitator needs to connect with the participant after the workshop.

6.7 Summary

This chapter provides an overview of how a systemic, constructivist self and personal mental attitude can be developed through training. An experiential learning process of the participants characterizes the field of change. In the selection process the following criteria should be considered: participants should come from different companies and industries; a relatively balanced gender ratio should be achieved; and the personal and professional qualifications of applicants taken into account. The facilitator customizes every workshop to the specific needs of the group. The workshop should be both a 'safe space' and a 'space of unknowing'. Examples of methods and techniques are given that support the experiential learning process. The challenges and responsibilities of a facilitator in designing the field of change are examined. Finally, the difficulties of evaluating personal change processes are illuminated upon. The next chapter discusses the limitations of the research project as a whole and the applied research methodology of heuristic inquiry.

7 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The literature review indicated that there is no consistent systemic approach. Rather systemic theorists and practitioners utilize knowledge from various sciences in an eclectic manner (Achouri, 2010; Königswieser et al., 2005; Mücke, 2011). The author of this thesis also chooses this approach. He studied literature in the systemic fields of therapy, counselling, coaching, and consulting. Then he transferred relevant insights to leadership. The focus was on topics that are directly related to this study. A detailed scientific exploration about specific fields such as cybernetics or biologic issues was not part of the project. The selection of the literature was mainly determined by experiences and knowhow of the author. Therefore the study is his subjective construction of a scientific reality. Other researchers with divergent preconditions may consider other key aspects more important.

Heuristic inquiry “refers to a process of internal searching through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). It is a research methodology that is based on the subjective experiences of the researcher. Initially the author was confused and unsure whether this methodology is ‘scientific’. Indisputably it is not research in the traditional positivist sense, which transfers the approach of natural sciences to humanities. “The key idea of positivism is that the social world exists externally, and that its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition” (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p. 22). The purpose of a heuristic

inquiry is not to find out cause-effect relationships, but “to discover the nature and meaning of the phenomenon itself and to illuminate it from direct first-person accounts of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomenon in experience” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990, p. 38). As the author investigated psychological phenomena ‘systemic, constructivist self’ and ‘systemic, constructivist mental attitudes’, he concluded that from his point of view, a heuristic inquiry is a viable research methodology to explore the subjective reality of a leader from an inverted perspective (cf. Salk, 1983).

The heuristic researcher is at the same time producer and collector of data. He or she is not a distant, neutral observer, but also the co-creator of the investigated phenomena. Interventional side effects are not bias; they do not distort research outcomes, but are an important contribution to gain new insights into the subjective universe of human beings (cf. Ochs, 2012, p. 1). In so far heuristic research is an opportunity to transcend the positivist object-subject split between the researcher and researched object and a possibility to investigate human experiences as a whole.

Heuristic research is an “exploratory open-ended inquiry” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). The researcher has no time restriction and the research project is completed when no new insights are found. However, this approach is not consistent with the requirements of this study as the author worked within a time limit to complete the research. This academic time frame set by the university does not need to be congruent with the natural end of the heuristic

research process. Hence the author is forced to make a pragmatic time-cut in order to analyse and to evaluate the results. Therefore these are only preliminary. The initiated processes of heuristic quest may continue, but new insights are no longer part of this research project

Sela-Smith (2002, p. 71) identified four possible areas of confusion in a heuristic inquiry: (1) The studying of external situations rather than internal experiences; (2) The distraction from the internal processes by co-researchers; (3) The use of language with different perspectives and meanings; (4) Shift from experience and self-search to observation of experience of self and others. Next each of these areas will be explored.

(1) Study of External Situations rather than Internal Experiences

The term 'heuristic inquiry' can be misunderstood, because the meaning implies the psychological exploration of external situations of human beings, as well as self-search of their internal experiences. Therefore the labelling of 'heuristic inquiry' should be replaced by 'heuristic self-inquiry' (Sela-Smith, 2002). The author's intention was to avoid this trap of fuzziness, between external and internal experiencing, by focusing exclusively on the own inverted perspective in the research project. As the investigation of the internal world is only accessible for the researcher, the right preparation of self-inquiry is essential. Inspired by meditation as a method to develop self-awareness, the author participated in training in Gestalt psychology. An important element of the training was the focus on direct experiences of

human beings. The Gestalt questions (see above 3.6.2) were particularly effective techniques in exploring the own internal experiences.

(2) Distraction from Internal Processes by Co-Researchers

Moustakas (1990) proposes that in addition to the experiences of the primary researcher, the experiences of co-researchers should be explored. The advantage is that “a study will achieve richer, deeper, more profound, and more varied meanings when it includes depictions of the experience of others” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 47). Initially the author as primary researcher was persuaded by this approach and invited ten systemic experts to share their experiences in unstructured interviews. However, retrospectively these interviews did not contribute to the generation of new knowledge. Extracts of the co-researcher from the interview transcriptions were perceived as artificial and often redundant, thus weakening the statements of the primary researcher. Therefore the author made the decision to exclude these interviews from the study. Instead he chose to focus more intensely on his own internal processes and the depictions of his experiences in the reflective diary. Hence, a methodological break between heuristic self-inquiry and the external exploration of the experiences of the co-researchers was avoided.

Despite the formal exclusion of the interviews with systemic professionals in this research, they have had an impact on the primary researcher. The common sharing of experiences had a catalytic and inspirational function, and provided the primary researcher with deeper insights.

Similarly to the interviews with systemic experts, a web-based survey with stakeholders of the author's company such as employees, customers, and suppliers did not add any value to the study. The intention of the survey was not validation in the scientific sense, but the provision of additional information from the research field in regards to his own leadership qualities. However, the results did not generate any new information relevant to the study, but distracted from the exploration of the inner processes of the researcher. Therefore the stakeholder survey was excluded, too.

(3) Use of Language with Different Perspectives and Meanings

According to Sela-Smith, there are three stances of language in heuristic inquiry. The first stance 'feeling' is the introspective, meditative, and reflective search into the nature and meaning of a question or issue (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11). It is the core of heuristic inquiry and describes from the first-person perspective 'I' experiences from the internal world of the researcher. However, Sela-Smith suggests that in addition there are two further distant stances of language. While the second stance 'reporting' is the description of a feeling in an objective way, the third stance 'observing' generalizes the feeling in a scientific language. Sela-Smith criticises Moustakas, claiming he 'betrays' heuristic inquiry as a method of intensive self-search with access to tacit knowledge by the presentation of a formal research design and methodology. "When he shifts to the second and third languages ..., he removes the bridge [between feeling and tacit knowledge] , and experience is simply one more "thing" for the positivist scientist wearing a "qualitative researcher's mask" to observe" (Sela-Smith, 2002, pp. 79-80).

Similarly to Sela-Smith's three stances, the author was confronted with three different aspects of his personality and thus use of language in the research process. He differentiates between the 'practitioner', who immerses himself in the experience; the 'researcher' who reflects and conceptualizes these; and the 'author' who documents the research project in a written thesis. The 'practitioner' corresponds to the first stance 'feeling' (direct experience with access to tacit knowledge in self-inquiry), the 'researcher' to the second stance 'reporting' (collection of data in reflective diary), and the 'author' to the third stance 'observing' (writing the thesis). The study indicates that on the one hand the use of the different perspectives practitioner, researcher, and author provides a deeper and richer picture of human experiences, on the other hand it is the prerequisite for a scientific research project to be more than the autobiographical depiction of feelings or experiences. It is thus essential that the researcher develops an awareness of the importance of the various perspectives, and differentiates clearly between them.

(4) Shift from Experience and Self-Search to Observation of Experience of Self and Others

Heuristic inquiry involves a methodological double-focus. Sela-Smith points out that "Moustakas shifts from *experience* used as a verb that is connected to the internal self-search to *experience* as a noun that is connected to observation and thoughts related to the observation of an event or an experience" (Sela-Smith, 2002, pp. 71-72). Consequently there is the self-experiential part and the observing part of the researcher. This double-focus is not a distraction from the primary experiences under investigation, but the

necessary requirement for change processes. Sela-Smith (2002, p. 82) suggests self-transformation as the dominant part of a heuristic research project. The author incorporates self-transformation in his study by integrating the six stages of heuristic inquiry in Kolb's experiential learning cycle (see above 3.4). The stages 'concrete experience' and 'reflective observation' facilitate experiential learning processes and thus change and self-transformation of the heuristic researcher.

The author has the impression that his rich and manifold personal experiences gained in this research project cannot be captured and presented completely in a printed work. On the one hand personal experiences can never be transferred one-to-one into language. The verbal expression of experiences is always a selection process by the person who describes it. Thus parts of the experiences become lost in the communication. On the other hand there are also experiences which cannot be formulated in words. For example 'existential doubt' is a perception of reality at a specific moment by a specific person. It can be a thought or a body feeling. Whatever it is, a written study cannot convey this experience to others. As a thesis usually does not offer a feedback loop between author and reader, the author is careful to formulate his results as clearly as possible. Therefore the author provides three examples to demonstrate systemic, constructivist leadership in action. Furthermore the author employs metaphors such as 'inner witness', 'slave of the own emotions', 'hanging mobile', 'hamster wheel', or 'jumper from a cliff' to illustrate and visualize his ideas in the study.

The unique focus on the experiences and reflections of the researcher and his or her subjectivity poses a challenge to the generalizability of the findings. The presented theory of systemic, constructivist leadership has to be regarded with suspicion. The investigated 'systemic, constructivist self' is the 'self of the researcher'. The twelve mental attitudes of systemic, constructivist leadership and the nine personal reflections depict subjective insights of the researcher. However, the desire to generalise is not consistent with the methodology heuristic inquiry. Its value lies in the context specific richness of how subjective experiences affect leadership and the transformation of the self of the leader.

When presenting and discussing the results of the study, the author found out that there are two groups of people. One is fascinated by the systemic, constructivist theory and practise, and one is alienated. A scientific discourse about systemic, constructivist leadership requires the acceptance of basic assumptions such as autopoiesis, multi-perspectivity, self-reflexivity, or intersubjectivity. Some people may find these epistemological assumptions difficult to agree with. Therefore the author has learnt to clarify these before discussing. If a common ground cannot be found, the author respects the different perspectives of the world, and asks that his perspective should also be respected.

The exploration is a narrow depiction limited to the inverted perspective and subjective world of one leader. The impact of systemic, constructivist leadership on other people in the leadership system such as; employees,

colleagues, customers or suppliers is not investigated. Despite encouraging results of this exploratory study, future research should include the effects on all stakeholders of the organization.

This study presents a systemic, constructivist approach that is characterized by being anti-dogmatic. Systemic not-knowing, all-partiality, or multi-perspectivity are all attributes that indicate a non-manipulative ideal, appreciating the various perspectives of other people. Human beings are seen as experts for their own problems, hetero-imposed solutions and advice are not required. Instead support in finding their own answers would be beneficial. The possibilities for misusing the systemic, constructivist approach for manipulative purposes needs to be explored in future studies.

The author advocates a radical, constructivist theory of leadership. However, given its intention to change leadership practice, this study also adopts a more applied perspective. Both approaches seem to be incommensurable, because recommendations or 'recipes' for practitioners are in some ways 'realist' or even 'transactional'. However, similarly as studies of transformational leadership recognise that the context in which leaders work requires at times a transactional approach, this study recognises that circumstances may also require a transactional rather than a constructivist approach. Therefore further research is needed into how radical, constructivist theory of leadership and leadership practise can be reconciled.

The author has discovered in his management practise that the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader proliferates within the organization; the quality of personal encounters and communication changes. An exciting topic for future research projects could be the exploration of key factors that would be advantageous for dispersion of systemic, constructivist ideas in business organisations.

The study shows the relevance of humanistic psychology in leadership. Positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), systemic approaches (Mücke, 2011; Steinkellner, 2005; von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007) , Client-centred therapy (Rogers, 1967), Self-actualization (Maslow, 1973), Gestalt therapy (Perls, 1973), or Hypno-systemic therapy and counselling (Schmidt, 2011) all contribute to an alternative view of leadership. The author argues that humanistic, psychological know-how can be applied in leadership contexts in which people encounter each other to achieve common goals in a business organisation. Therefore the impact and practicability of humanistic psychology in leadership should be further explored.

Finally, the author found the bio-psyche-social model helpful to integrate the systemic, constructivist approach in leadership practice. However, the use of these three subsystems is only one possibility. For example, the author suggests adding an additional spiritual subsystem, which could be integrated into a holistic approach to leadership. This could satisfy the often existing yearnings of human beings for transcendence or universal eternity.

8 Conclusions

The author explored the mental attitude of a systemic, constructivist leader within a business organization over a time-period of five years. The integration of the research methodology heuristic inquiry in Kolb's experiential learning cycle (see above 3.4) enabled him to experience, on the one hand, deep personal insights into leadership, and on the other hand, a transformation of the own self. In addition to being the writer of this scientific study, the author was also the producer, collector, and analyst of data. This partial fuzziness of overlapping perspectives inspired him to extra-ordinary - but sometimes strangely perceived insights - in his research topic. Instead of imposing restrictions and thought limitations, the author remained open to challenging epistemological approaches such as; systems theory; or Gestalt psychology. As practitioner researcher he delved further into his research project. The combination of abstract leadership theory and concrete leadership action made the exploration an exciting and life-changing experience.

Systemic, constructivist leadership is much more than an isolated leader/follower(s) relationship. Being a leader means being part of a human system that steers and organises (autopoiesis) itself. The leader as observer of the system defines the relevant elements. These elements can be, for instance, stakeholders in specific leadership situations or inner subsystems of the leader outlined in the bio-psychic-social model. Any intervention by a leader in the dynamics of the human system means that all elements are directly or indirectly involved so that; the outcomes of the intervention cannot

be predicted; the leader him- or herself is affected by his or her own impulses. Hence leaders do not control human systems, but contribute to the autopoiesis. Furthermore, the study indicates that the development of a constructivist attitude is of great value to the leader. The leader is not the objective observer of an outside world, but the constructor of the own subjective reality. Assumptions such as objectivity and truth are substituted by intersubjectivity and viability. Moreover, the author presents operational attitudes which transfer systemic, constructivist insights into leadership practise, identifies psychological growth factors of a leader, and introduces two meta attitudes 'awareness' and 'focusing of attention' - concentrating on inner processes within the leader.

The literature review indicated that there are numerous definitions and classifications of leadership styles. However, these academic statements are often static and do not take into account the dynamics of human systems. For example, leadership can be coercive; or authoritative; or facilitative; or democratic; or pacesetting; or coaching (Goleman, 2001). This study suggests an inner or inverted perspective to leadership. Hence systemic, constructivist leadership is nothing concrete or fixed; it cannot be captured in a definition, but is a continuous process of change within individuals to support the autopoiesis of the system. Systemic, constructivist perturbations are presented in this study (see above 5.3). These are catalysts transforming the self of a leader, but not descriptions of systemic, constructivist leadership itself. Consequently, a theory of systemic, constructivist leadership can never

depict the dynamics of human systems, but is limited to the formulation of perturbations, which initiate and perpetuate change processes.

The author recommends that training in systemic, constructivist leadership should be designed as an experiential learning process. Concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation to generate new experiences (cf. Kolb, 1976) are repetitive cycles to elevate people in leadership positions to a higher professional level. A leadership development programme does not match participants to ready-made templates of the ideal leader, but supports individual change processes of participants. As human beings are diverse, training needs to be customized to specific requirements and circumstances. Side effects of self-development and self-actualization are often uncomfortable emotions such as fear, anger, rage, or sadness. These symptoms of change are indications that transformation is happening, and not shortcomings, which need to be suppressed. As individual change processes cannot be limited to the professional field of leadership, the effects on all other aspects of life of the participants must remain under constant review.

This study proposes that humanistic psychology and psychotherapy can contribute to the development of a systemic, constructivist self and mental attitude in leadership. Gestalt therapy (Perls, 1973); client-centred therapy (Rogers, 1967); positive psychology (Seligman, 2002); systemic therapy (von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007); or hypno-systemic therapy and counselling (Schmidt, 2011) have inspired the author to focus on the inner or inverted

perspective of a leader. The transfer and application of these concepts into leadership can be controversially discussed. Both psychology and psychotherapy are generally associated with psychic deficits. However, the author argues that the above-mentioned concepts also offer opportunities to support 'healthy people' in improving their lives. From this perspective they provide practically approved methods to design a self-development and self-actualisation process of human beings in leadership.

Systemic theory is an eclectic approach utilizing knowledge from various scientific fields (Achouri, 2010; Königswieser et al., 2005; Mücke, 2011). The selection depends on a specific researcher's objectives, knowledge, interests, or research environment. In this study, the author also refers to spiritual concepts such as mindfulness, awareness and the practise of meditation. As the author is interested in Eastern spirituality, especially in the form of ZEN, he has found these techniques and methods beneficial in exploring the subjective dimension of systemic, constructivist leadership.

The author has experienced systemic, constructivist leadership as an art of becoming closer to reaching the leader's full potential. Metaphorically, the journey is the reward. There are no norms, standards or objectives to achieve except that of being on the path. Maslow (1973) signifies such transformation as the self-actualisation of a person. The author wonders whether this last chapter of his study is the end. Definitely it is the end of an academic research project about systemic, constructivist leadership. Nevertheless, many questions remain open. Ergo the journey will persist.

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