

On becoming a transformative leader

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Introduction

This paper will argue on how managers can become transformative leaders by learning the capability to justify discourse from emotional and cognitive roots of thinking. Today much academic innovation on mental model and organizational change stems from the identity perspective, which implies the practice of reflection and self-reflection. This disciplinary perspective is a necessary premise to eradicate the mentality of perfectionism stuck to the leadership role. Indeed, it is a most favorable angle from which to explore personal boundaries for transformation. However, learning the transformative capability needs to go further down the multidimensional perspective of personal and social transformation. We claim that in order to secure organizational survival managers need to learn the mentality of challenging present strategic paradigms. Today competitive advantages become quickly obsolete; indeed tough competition makes patterns of non-linear thinking unavoidable. These patterns can be learned by embracing the mentality of creating change by means of both social interaction and attitudes of self-reference.

Education on leadership can help managers acquire this mentality by de-constructing the widespread perspective that life is shaped from external overwhelming forces. At the same time, it provides the opposite view of organizations relying on autonomy and self-responsibility to keep re-creating their uniqueness.

More specifically, education on transformative leadership may be based on special loops of action-reflection, where action is represented by the very social activity of learning, while retrospective reflection on this learning implies the practice of conceptualization on conceptualization. We refer to this kind of reflexivity as to *Meta-learning* to underline that education on transformative leadership is rooted in the processes of learning how to learn. *Meta-learning* is in fact a self-relating concept, which underlines the recursive process of learning from what is being done and doing from what is being learned.

By itself, the identity perspective does not assure that such a mentality shift will occur. Instead, this can result from a dedicated training on justification by *Meta-opposition*, a practice, which allows managers to interactively create knowledge by testing discourses from the two opposite epistemological views of positivism and constructivism through the practice of transformative sensemaking. Non-linear mental change will then arise from entering into a *Meta-paradox* and then critically and self-critically creating new paradigms that bring thinking beyond it.

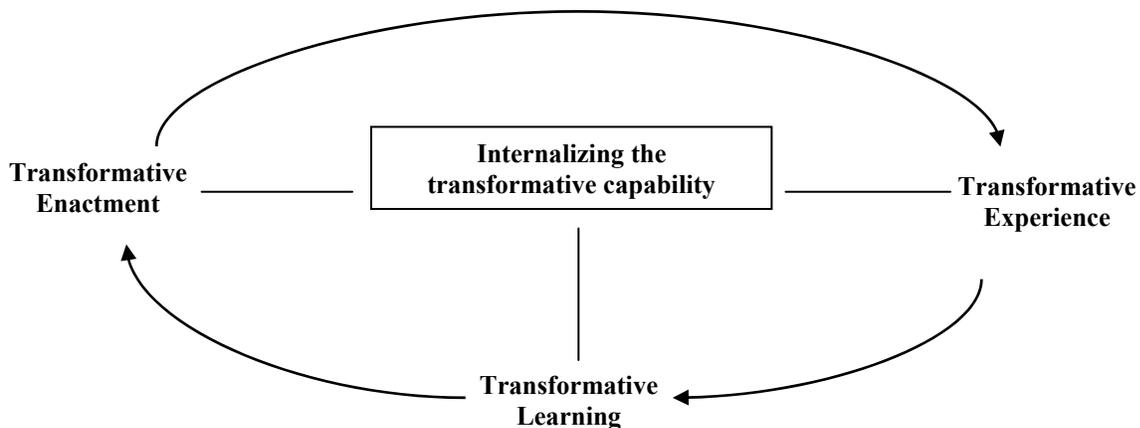
The transformative capability also encompasses the responsibility to help other managers inherit the transformative mentality, in a way that, once a group of managers have personally experienced transformation, a chain of transformative leaders educating potential transformative leaders can be built. In few cases this chain starts from a pure company initiative. One day it may be thoroughly embedded in the society educational system. Meanwhile, it can start as part of a dedicated training driven by professional experts.

1. The “Laboratory for Human Resources Development”

Since the 1998-1999 academic year we have successfully experienced education on transformative leadership within undergraduate courses on strategic management. As teachers and researchers of a business school we could also enjoy the opportunity to bring the rationale of transformative education within the Italian subsidiary of a global company. The project was named ‘Laboratory for Resource Development’ (LRD). The learning experiment was devoted to

the subsidiary top management and their closest subordinates. It was based on the *participatory action research* methodology (PAR), which from a *Meta-opposition* perspective implied that managers internalized the transformative capability from transformative leaders. Learning then resulted from recursive micro-loops of transformative enactment and transformative experience. At each loop *Meta-opposition* enhanced managers' learning by sorting out emotional and cognitive contradictions arising from paradox. Later, line-by-line analysis under the Constructivist Grounded Theory method fed substantive theorizing on how this multidisciplinary approach can make mental model transformation quick and effective.

Figure 1. Learning the transformative capability



At the very beginning transformative leadership was played only by researchers. At any moment learning allowed some managers to join the researchers' *enactment* task, which fulfilled the mission of both, de-constructing the positivist old mentality and providing an alternative way to knowledge-creation. De-contruction mainly related to managers' attitude of speculation. This process was painful because deep inside *Meta-opposition* challenges personal and professional values - those hampering creativity, as well as democratic and interactive learning. Moreover, building from 'mistakes', diversity, conflicts and *Meta-opposition* enacted mechanisms of transference and self-defense. These resistances were generally temporary as long as researchers and learners asymmetry remained too high in terms of both, knowledge and mentality. Problems also arose because explicit discourse on cognitive and emotional transformative issues does not produce understanding until successful experiences speak for themselves. Moreover, transformative enactment had to face the paradox of providing countenance, while pursuing the objective of freeing managers from the need for it.

Personal proneness to transformation determined learning results from the enactment-experience interaction. Managers' openness always resulted in entering into cognitive and emotional contradictions, as part of the transitional aspects of mental model de-contruction and re-contruction. In turn, contradictions further fed enactment for de-contruction and re-contruction.

Learning remained stuck for managers who firmly believed that the rationale for change was immediately clear and easy to pursue. In fact, this situation revealed that learning was not transformative. It rather took the form of using constructivist principles as positivist rules. In

some cases, it showed that managers were hampered by the impossibility to maintain personal *narcissistic equilibrium* in response to the demands for mental model transformation. Conscious closeness often resorted in a persisting attitude of personalizing *Meta-opposition*.

2. Theoretical roots for learning the transformative capability: from sensemaking to transformative sensemaking

Enactment - experience interactions were transformative under the practice of discourse justification. At the beginning this was ensured by researchers' transformative enactment. Later, managers were asked to become aware of the theoretical principles of justification. Within the LRD experiment they could reappraise personal and social practice of justification to face *Meta-paradox* by the theory of *Transdisciplinary Justification* (TJ). This theory advances the idea that non-linear thinking stems from managing the opposition between an element of *inclusion* (Event) and an element of *exclusion* (Not Event). It tells us that this paradoxical opposition is solved only through the social search for superior domains (*third ways*), where Event and Not-Event can exist and co-evolve without changing their features.

TJ emphasis on social communication for purposes of creativity and innovation helped managers' discourse move from 'Whats', to 'Whys' and 'Hows', as well as to '*Meta-Whats*', '*Meta-Whys*' and '*Meta-Hows*'. However, this justification philosophy does not make explicit how *third ways* can be created. As a consequence we were driven to graft into TJ the practice of both, orders of knowledge and sensemaking. This experience has resulted in a systemic multidisciplinary view of how transformative learning arises when sensemaking becomes transformative (figs. 1,2,3).

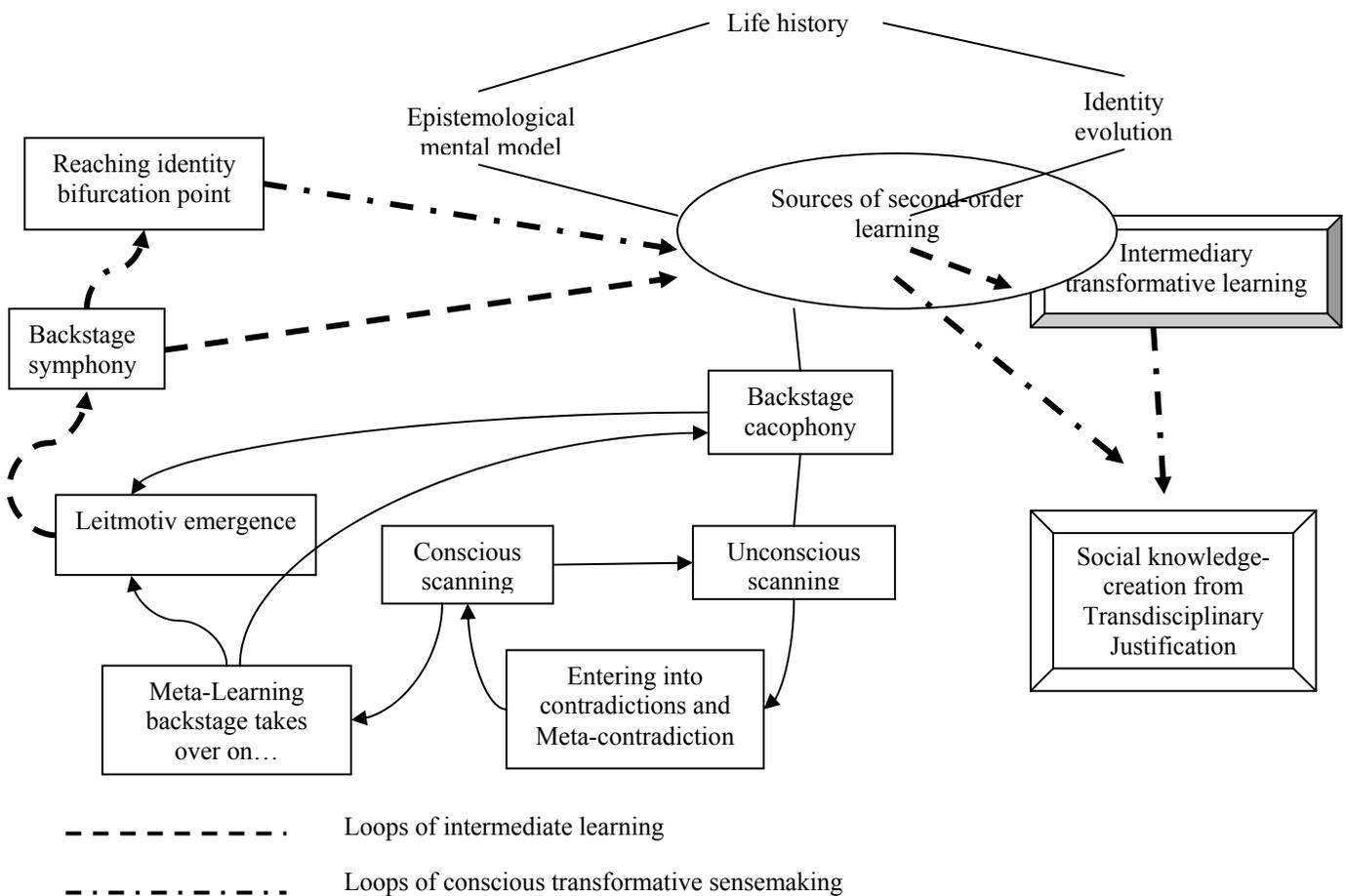
Understanding transformative sensemaking has been a major theoretical achievement of LRD (fig.2). Traditional theory of sensemaking is mainly rooted on the conscious processes of raw data choice, scanning, connecting and informing. These processes force to ground discourses on data as well as to become aware of the process by which any opinion is formed. Chopping discourse according to these rules has been quite effective in de-constructing managers' speculative attitudes. However, sensemaking does not precisely apply to mental model transformation, because neither is it linked to roots of learning, nor does it address the issue of knowledge-creation. Deep insights were gained by the practice of conceptualization from the orders of knowledge. This construct tells us that thinking refers to phenomena and discourse as a *third level* of knowledge; to conceptualization as a *first level* of knowledge; and finally, to *Meta-concepts* as a *second level* of knowledge. Profound depth then arises because these orders of learning provide a vertical path for justification as conceptualizations linking phenomena and discourse to *Meta-concepts*. This practice is the very rationale for challenging the premises of personal and social thinking from personal history, epistemological mental model and identity (fig.2). From the point of view of vertical sensemaking we found that the very practice of second-order learning within the enactment-experience interaction reveals those premises and their nature, either cognitive or emotional. We called them *backstage*. These usually remain implicit, though clearly visible in the discourse. Within self-reflection, instead, *backstage* can be recognized and discussed.

Through *backstage* PAR gives practical contents to unconscious sensemaking, which traditionally is only the object of speculation. Line-by-line analysis revealed that from the unconscious perspective we could think of transformative interaction as of a *backstage* cacophony giving birth to a *Meta-backstage*, which we named *Leitmotiv*, often contrasting the

Meta-learning backstage. The LRD story can in fact be told as the way in every session and meeting social *Meta-learning backstage* took over on the *backstage* cacophony and *Leitmotivs* by turning them into a *backstage* symphony (fig. 2).

Vertical sensemaking is only one part of transformative sensemaking. The other comes from the horizontal unconscious- conscious interaction (fig.2). In fact, the conscious process of transformative thinking from raw data choice, scanning, connecting and informing, with a clear view of roots of learning, is the way to become aware of resistances to change as well as of reasons for change to happen. Without this awareness a swing from non-linearity to linearity would occur, thus slowing transformative learning.

Figure 2. Loops of horizontal and vertical transformative sensemaking



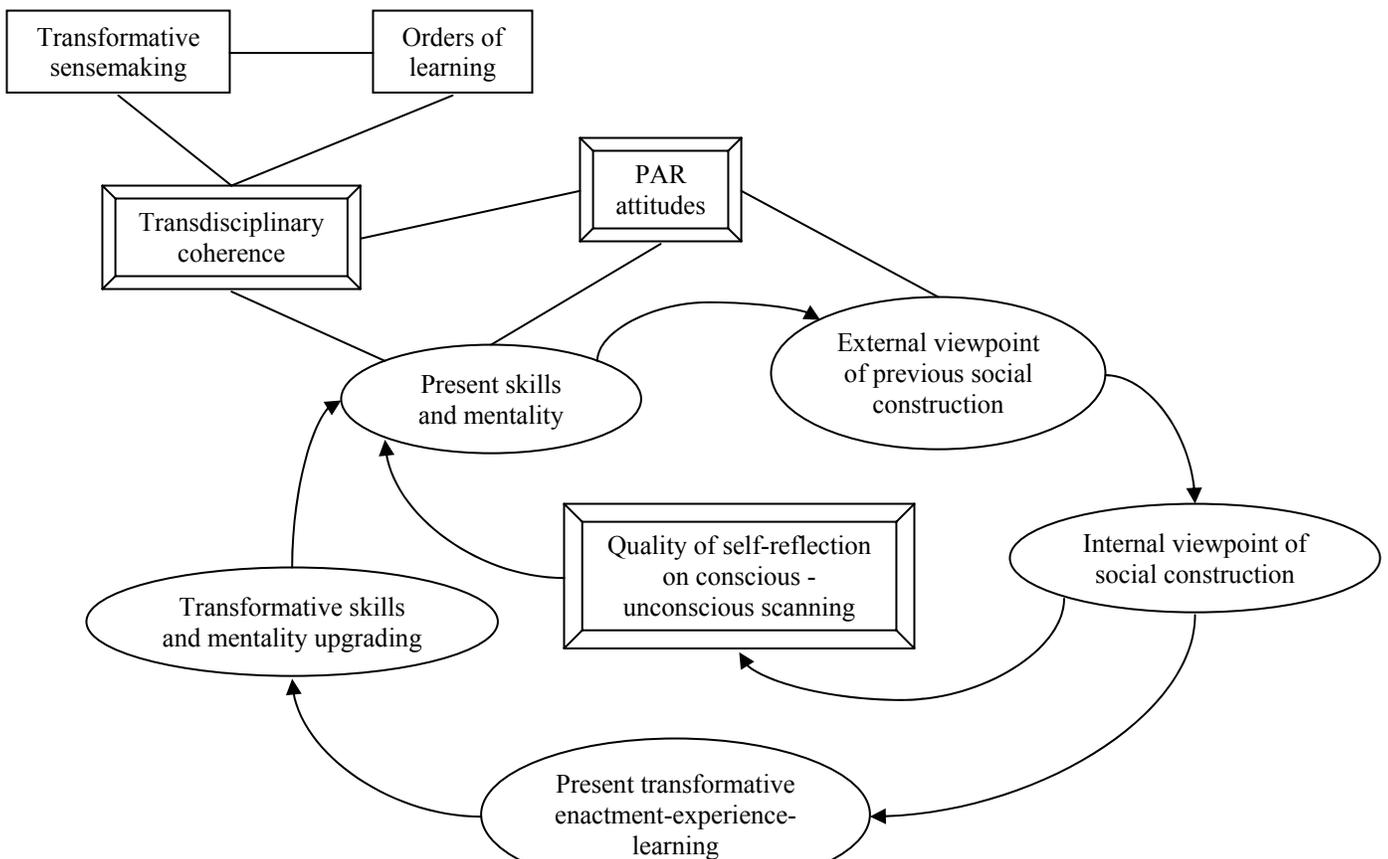
Along the entire educational experience asymmetry implied that at the beginning learners relied mainly on unconscious scanning by grasping *Meta-concepts* and mentality from how transformative sensemaking echoed personal history, identity and epistemological approach. Becoming conscious of how discourses emerged from recursive conscious-unconscious loops took place gradually. Managers were taken into intermediary transformative learning when the enactment-experience interaction brought towards a *backstage* symphony. They would finally take over on asymmetry when experiencing an identity bifurcation point, which made it clear that lack of transformative capability condemns to mediocrity (fig. 2). At this point managers

would be able to consciously explore the conscious-unconscious evolution within a self-reflection activity.

3. Learning from sensemaking on sensemaking

Sensemaking on sensemaking was the practice of retrospectively making sense of what, why and how learning had occurred in previous enacting-experiencing-learning loops. For this purpose we filmed any processes going on during meetings and made textual documents out of them. We used those documents for both, education and substantive theorization. More often sensemaking on sensemaking immediately followed presentation and discussion. Line-by-line analysis allowed us to realize that practicing sensemaking on sensemaking means to take an external view to explore the internal processes and contents of past experience (fig.3). In order to enhance transformative learning the external view has to be based on mastering PAR recursive, participatory, social and emancipatory PAR attitudes. These attitude bring managers to learn

Figure 3. Learning from sensemaking on sensemaking



PAR attitudes and constructivist mentality, rather than discipline contents. In fact, PAR recursivity assures that reflection on past learning is deliberate, critical and self-critical. It also helps realize how learning results from of a deep understanding of what the enactment-experience interaction contributed to change. In our case change processes were peculiar because

objects of our learning were the emotional dimensions of the self, as well as cognitive *Meta-knowledge*.

The PAR participatory attitude tells how present knowledge and identity shape knowledge-creation. It was of a paramount importance to help managers filling the distance from researchers in terms of mentality. It occurred on the basis of self-criticality, by which one can take the responsibility of personal learning.

Sensemaking on sensemaking also enhanced the social attribute of PAR in that reflection on past experience drove managers to recognize the relevance for researchers' to enact *Meta-paradox* rather than opposing it.

The PAR emancipatory attitude refers to the ability to recover and release from constraints embedded in the outside world, as well as in educational constraints and within the self.

Sensemaking on sensemaking enhanced this perspective by underlining how the processes of deconstruction occurred and how it had changed personal "pictures of the world". Learning this attitude indeed occurred, but it was still partial because managers were still bound by company culture of harmony hiding only political *backstage*.

Taking the internal viewpoint with either some or all of these attitudes implies that managers reconsider contents and processes of past experience, thus enhancing conscious understanding of how social and personal transformative sensemaking occurred.

At the beginning, managers tended to dwell upon the 'Whats' of their learning. However, sensemaking on sensemaking forced them to focus on the very processes of learning. This means that learning is enforced when the external and the internal viewpoint co-evolve.

In the end, sensemaking on sensemaking moved managers into the practice of self-reflection from all PAR attitudes.

Sensemaking on sensemaking has also been a quite powerful root to learn how to face the risk of self-defense and regression arising from *narcissistic disequilibrium*. In fact, it has shown to managers a way to become aware of how emotion influences action and thinking. Additionally, it has helped them to build self-confidence and motivation by exploring personal progresses in learning the transformative capability.

4. Manager's experience of *Meta-learning* from unconscious scanning

Transformation started smoothly, because managers at first were not asked for commitment in homework. This attempt was managed around two main questions: "Let's tell stories of a company's innovation and discuss about what makes people innovate" and "What did you learn from company's innovations that can be applied to any strategic innovation?" Discussion revealed how strongly manager's mentality was based on concrete 'Whats' and linear-thinking. No one could accept to get into the story of human interaction. Managers' search for abstract truth was stoic. No results could be obtained from attempts to de-construct speculation.

Enactment to move towards 'Hows' tended to be removed. At most managers transformed 'Hows' into 'Whats'. *Meta--opposition* was mainly perceived as a personalized threat. It rarely moved learning towards cognitive contradictions. For some the pain for challenging personal way of thinking was unbearable.

Above all, by moving discussion to sensemaking on sensemaking, the second question - "What did you learn from company's innovations that can be applied to any strategic innovation?" - let it emerge that our approach to learning asked for a revolution in managers' way of thinking and interacting. This made the *Leitmotiv* 'Do we want to really engage in this project?' emerge from

linear conscious thinking above the cacophony of personal *backstage* (fig.2). Answers were provided from different viewpoints. Researchers relied on PAR and the justification perspective. The Personnel Director instead referred to the company situation: “*The idea of this course is for building the capacity to make social knowledge-creation happen in our organization... If we had just called upon our personnel telling - People, get together and make creative decisions! - nothing would have happened.... This course stands just to create a community of people who will be able to auto-organize for this purpose ... We will be able to understand the leadership model we want to apply....*”.

Meta-learning take-over was partial. It could not change a *backstage* cacophony into a *backstage* symphony since researchers-managers’ asymmetry was yet the highest possible.

For the following meeting managers were asked to make written assignments, presentations and discussions on the concept of strategy and strategic management drawing from readings bringing either implicitly or explicitly the opposite view of positivism and constructivism. Enactment then took the rationale of de-constructing managers’ marketing perspective. This process went very far up to the point of challenging the well-known concept of competitive advantage. The idea was to give managers the opportunity to learn how knowledge-creation is linked to the capability of challenge the obvious.

Because of the deep professional implications of this de-constructive attempt, interaction was very painful for managers. Besides, researchers were disappointed for commonsense interventions disentangled from the task of comparing two opposite viewpoints, as well as from the very understanding of the difference between routine and strategy. Resistances to change resorted to a strong hold on speculation. Some managers also engaged in manipulative and self-delusional thinking. This situation revealed the difficulties to undertake vertical learning, as well as to become aware of the need for this kind of learning. Strong company’ conflicts drugged learning by a leader party devoted to strongly oppose the LRD initiative.

We felt overwhelmed by the need to face at the same time countenance, political *backstage* and epistemological mental model transformation. We also were not yet aware of the power to focus on PAR attributes to let hidden *backstage* emerge from self-reflection. Finally we were yet blind about the concept of a *Leitmotiv*, which then was that of resisting any move out of the marketing identity. Still *Meta-opposition* took care of the backstage “Is product strategy equal to strategy?” and “Is learning strategy worth of changing my marketing identity?”

As usual *Meta-learning* arose when some managers joined the role of enactors of change from raw data scanning and connecting, as well as from challenging positivist thinking. The strategic view of management was then widely accepted and it became clear how success is linked to the capability of facing competition by knowledge-creation.

Because radical mental model opposition, however, deep inside, the transformative interaction made managers become very frustrated. The feeling for identity threats coming from *Meta-opposition* persisted. It was taken care of only in the following interaction, when managers experienced the ability to use concept and *Meta-concepts* of strategy to discuss management implications of an impending corporate strategic turn. This experience worked as a catalyst for healing emotions. The previous *leitmotiv* - “Is learning strategy worth of changing my marketing identity?” - then seemed to evolve in those “Let’s make order out of identity chaos” and “ We can see now our skills to conceptualize from a new point of view”. In fact, the quality of self-reflection in this session was the best of the entire project. It showed that managers could approach the concept of strategy from all three orders of learning. Their conceptualizations were

rooted in the awareness of paradox, the bifurcation encompassed in the trade-off concept, self-reflection and the constructivist mentality. Cognitive contradictions occurred frequently and were taken care of by a social transformative enactment. Some managers were able to take over the enactment task by climbing up to the roots of unconscious scanning. However, researchers missed the opportunity to make managers aware of both, the relevance of unconscious scanning and the positive nature of their learning experience. As a consequence, first we left managers with the perception of having learned more powerful rules for thinking. Second, we did not use success as a way to manage motivation.

The effort to move toward awareness on vertical and horizontal dimensions of transformative learning was tried during the subsequent sensemaking on sensemaking activity by the help of textual records of the previous session. At that time, without the present conscious focus on what went on, our main objective was to let managers discover that discourse building was mined from speculation. We hoped that by line-by-line analysis managers would realize how cognitive understanding was hampered by resisting researchers' enactment on conscious sensemaking. In fact, sensemaking on sensemaking was perceived as the revelation of mistakes, which back fed feelings of identity threats.

Despite those limits *Meta-learning* moved on recursively from the external to the internal view of conscious sensemaking. For the first time managers' focus moved from 'Whats' and '*Meta-Whats*' to learning processes. Additionally, because sensemaking on sensemaking related to a personal experience, they were able to make self-critical reflections. Despite all, learning became high because, the internal viewpoint allowed managers to reinforce their awareness on '*Meta-Whats*'. On the other side, the external viewpoint forced managers to discuss why they found it difficult to move from 'Whats' to vertical and horizontal processes of learning. From this session onwards grounding discourse on data became a stable aim of managers' learning.

5. The power of learning from learning theories

The process of internalizing the transformative capability reduces researchers-managers asymmetry when managers are provided with transformative constructs. Then they can start building multidisciplinary capabilities that help gaining awareness of how vertical and horizontal learning shape the very personal cognitive and emotional roots of strategic thinking (fig.2). Even this phase has been painful because the *Meta-level* approach to TJ and transformative sensemaking is very far from managers' way of thinking. Unfortunately, managers at home had focused their attention only on one construct in order to make a proper presentation. Therefore, they missed the opportunity to link sensemaking to justification, which would help them understanding how sensemaking can be applied to transformation (fig. 2).

A presentation on Weick sensemaking was given in a theatrical form, which faced these difficulties by reducing complexity, as there was no place for doubts, but only for apparent perfection. While the performance related to sensemaking, managers released questions on "What was the role of strategy". Focus was still on the 'Whats' of leadership, rather than on the 'Hows' of sensemaking. Later presenters revealed that this mismatch was due to the process of linking those questions to Weick arguments (orchestral' behavior), rather than to the presentation itself. However, they found this approach natural, while it showed Weick theory understanding as a system of unquestionable rules. The presentation also consisted in applying sensemaking rules to an operational marketing activity, rather than to a strategic issue. Managers missed

completely the vertical dimensions of thinking, despite a lot of discussion that had previously occurred on strategy and *Meta-strategy*. Presenters did not justify why the scene was performed the way it was. Theoretical arguments were marginal; therefore comparison from the two epistemological perspectives was missed. Finally, the presentation could not adjust Weick concepts on personal sensemaking for the social processes performed in the scenes of the presentation.

All these shortcomings announced that, once again, the process of transformation would be tough. Researchers' choice to face learning under these circumstances was to force managers in the process of sensemaking on sensemaking (fig.3). In other words, managers were continuously asked to take the external perspective of reviewing the presentation. This forced them to move out of the 'Whats' of leadership into the 'Hows' of the sensemaking process by engaging in the recursive attitude of self-criticality. By re-starting self-reflection on the presentation managers became also aware of the need for justification: *Researcher: "Today we were able to make explicit the sensemaking process behind the scene"; Manager: "But, we have done it before to producing the scene"; Researcher: "It is not sufficient. We must explicitly communicate what happens behind the scene"; Manager: "Yes, ...we passed an entire afternoon creating the scene. Then, when simplified and represented, it is not meaningful for the others. Actually, you should have been with us when the scene was prepared"; ... "Maybe it can be better to start directly from the reading, because the scene is misleading"; Researcher: "You might even record the experience of your preparation"; Manager: "This makes more sense, because you could help us more by entering the specifics of the preparation"*.

This is a discourse interaction that shows how a lot of learning took place by becoming aware of the implications of challenging ways of thinking and ways of doing. However, de-construction prevailed on the need for countenance, leaving room for *narcissistic disequilibrium* and consequently for self-defense. A self-reflection on the high learning degree achieved would serve this purpose, but it was not done.

The presentation on TJ immediately followed that on sensemaking. Two managers proposed opposite epistemological views with the help of famous passages from Greek and English literature. While the presentation unfolded, it clearly appeared that presenters had missed the pivotal relative meaning of justification under different epistemologies. Since in the reading justification was treated as synonymous for coherence presenters took an absolute value for it. The distinction made had been ignored. Besides, since presenters did not attempt a minimal link with the theory of sensemaking their opposition persisted, as they had no practical ways to face it. A change occurred when someone showed the need to understand the very meaning of justification from the raw data represented by the TJ theory. Then, a turning point arose when researchers asked managers to try to take the role of a constructivist author to rethink a passage that presenters had given as example of positivism. The sentence was "First tell yourself how you want to be, then act coherently". This simple demand allowed managers to move away from a personalized *Meta-opposition*. From then onwards construction about justification went on smoothly. However, managers first attempt to consciously dealing with justification only faced the need for basic theory understanding, rather than for that proposed in figure 2. On the all, this first attempt to build learning from learning theories was hampered by the simple difficulty to understand the theory. In other words, raw data scanning was very low and managers could not conceive that they needed help for basic understanding. It was also evident that this blindness did not come from superficiality, but from the very roots of mental model. In other words, managers

still blended positivism and constructivism. Since they could not get rid of the speculative attitude, they remained trapped into *Meta-opposition* and *Meta-paradox*. Anyway justification theory of Event-Not-Event paradox tells that in changing the mental model one has always to face the reality of feeling stuck because of ignorance and emotion. This process can only be eased from deeply understanding the system of processes underlying transformative change (figs. 1, 2, 3). Because of this situation managers' *Meta-learning* remained unconscious, mainly forced from researchers' conscious *Meta-opposition*.

Meanwhile, the need for countenance became acute because learning difficulties and resistances were cumulating from the morning sensemaking on sensemaking without any focused management

6. Avenues of systemic learning opened by the need to face problems of *narcissistic disequilibrium*

From an evolutionary perspective now we understand that some weeks later in the subsequent meeting we were forced to take care of left aside identity problems. Managers, in fact, immediately brought into the discussion a pre-planned "Win-loose" *Leitmotiv*, which radicalized *Meta-opposition*. However, the power of *Meta-opposition* contributed for the first time to managers' deep learning. First of all, from this session onwards managers undressed the mask of good learners, which turned meetings into a real life and more democratic experiences. Additionally, in that meeting, radical managers-researchers' opposition turned into a best opportunity for deep learning, since it provided enactment with many opportunities for transformative sensemaking from renewed contradictions. As a consequence, for the first time managers started gaining a conscious systemic, multidisciplinary view on transformation. Healing managers' frustration was possible because educational plans for the day precisely focused on learning how to build discourses from second-order learning. This meant that managers were provided with dedicated training on reflection and self-reflection from the identity perspective (fig.2). Sensemaking on sensemaking for the first time took a central role in managing identity frustration. While in the previous session it was completely avoided, now it occurred both, at the end of each session, and, apart from any presentation, to discuss the very rationale and usefulness of the course. As a result, managers' significantly upgraded their understanding of TJ, transformative sensemaking and orders of learning by assuming the internal viewpoint (fig. 3). They also unconsciously practiced PAR attitudes up to the point of turning the *backstage* cacophony, driven by the 'Win-Loose' *Leitmotiv*, into a *backstage* symphony (fig.2 e 3).

During the first session of the meeting, managers were asked to compare two Gospel episodes opposing, one, Jesus and the Samaritan at the well, and the other, Jesus and the Pharisees (Saint John, 4,1-26, 39-42; 8, 31-47). We hoped that Jesus' successes in the first episode would provide the opportunity to challenge personal concepts of leadership, while His 'failures' in the second episode would address the issue of how self-responsibility and '*persistent narcissistic obstacles*' define the boundaries of transformative education.

Manipulative interventions backed by poor sensemaking, often turning into nonsense, showed how manipulation in the end hurts manipulators when leaders master social constructivist thinking. Even manipulator's attempt to take advantage of researchers' emotion evolved into a best opportunity to show how constructivism can effectively take care of emotion by way of making explicit processes of vertical and horizontal sensemaking.

Micro-processes' analysis revealed that enactment from justification finally broke manipulators' coalition. Social learning isolated the left manipulator, who also entered into the trap of trying to mine non-linear mentality from within. Drawing on transformative sensemaking was sufficient to face the situation, which in turn enhanced manipulator isolation, as well as social learning. This experience showed that conscious enactment from the constructivist perspective usually takes over on *backstage* driven from positivist thinking. It also demonstrated that, on the contrary, speculation and linear thinking lacks effective weapons to question constructivist thinking.

Deep learning in the first session enormously enhanced managers' openness. They welcomed the self-reflexive question "Why does discourse building remain stuck when left to managers' responsibility?" Learning then was very much rooted on the identity perspective. It brought back to the Gospel episodes, which brought managers to recognize how those episodes spoke of identity encounters. In turn, emphasis on identity opened managers' minds to explore personal identity from PAR self-criticality. ... *"In my view, ... we are extremely rooted in a given cognitive mental model, which hampers our thinking..."; ... "I feel in myself a great heritage from past ... because of my education, I think that I am always asked for 'beautiful' answers. Never was I taught to say no, or to enter deeply in things... I felt right when I learned rules... Now the big change is that you are asked to challenge what you are talking about, to try to go deeper, to change level..."; "I believe that their [researchers] discourse analysis was built on processes rather than on contents"; "It is true. I step more on contents..." ... "By the way, this is a mistake we currently make... Everyday every our interaction is made of 'I am right, you are wrong' perception against perception, without any climbing of a higher dimension, without asking ourselves where this or that sense comes from, from what data... It is the approach that matters"*.

A bifurcation point occurred when managers understood how much the capability to be at the same time spectators and actors would empower their personal thinking and doing. From then onwards this renewed interest on PAR recursivity helped them to wear the justification mentality.

Sensemaking on sensemaking went on solicited by the same managers' initiative to discuss how the LRD experiment was going. It made clear that morning activities had not yet overcome the emotional status of people who wanted to count in any circumstances. The left manipulator did not admit the usefulness of learning the transformative capability, neither on this occasion, nor throughout the whole experience, despite the personal learning had often been quite deep. It appeared as if the idea that learning can result from a de-construction process was unbearable, or as if personal aspiration for power could not be sustained before needs for learning through 'mistakes'. Those managers were also linking criticism on researchers' performance to the fact that some managers had quit the LRD experiment. No attention was given to learning self-responsibility or to the political *backstage* of those withdrawals until the Personnel Directors revealed them.

Actually, those managers were expressing a deep need for emancipation from pain and frustration. Expressing their frustration further increased the positive attitudes towards learning. Together, managers and researchers driven by the *Meta-learning backstage* took care of transference, self-delusion and arbitrary choice of linear causalities. With only one exception, the

entire group of managers was brought from closeness to self-criticality and therefrom to identity and cognitive mental model change.

Later that day one presentation was given by the manager who has started manipulation and then withdrawn from it. This session made it clear how far both, focus on orders of learning and sensemaking on sensemaking had brought managers' learning.

The presentation related to the creative dynamics of self-organized shadow systems. It appeared formally impressive, despite, it were strongly influenced by presenter' linear mental model and his '*persistent narcissistic obstacle*'. Neither *Meta-opposition* undermined this presentation, nor enactment took place to ask why self-organized shadow systems were transformed into organizational formal structures at the disposal of the hierarchy. Researchers immediately turned away from presentation to the authors' mental model comparison, thus objectifying *Meta-opposition*. Learning results were astonishing. In a short while, reference to both, authors *Meta-perspective* and the presentation contents drove everyone to independently ask questions in order to understand transdisciplinary justification. The presenter could now contribute to the discussion from a non-linear viewpoint. Explicit reference to the presentation led him very quickly into the meaning of transformative leadership. With his help the difference between hierarchical and transformative leadership became clear to everyone.

The level of maturity reached by managers in learning by *Meta-opposition* made it possible that learning became somehow conscious, though no one discussed how *backstage* evolved to allow such learning. This meant that managers could not perform the participatory PAR attribute, which unfortunately maintained the swing from non- linear to linear thinking. Above all, it could not help managers in moving forward towards identity de-construction, which is the final step of transformative sensemaking towards stabilizing the mentality for transdisciplinary justification (fig.2).

7. Learning the PAR participatory attitude from the capability to explore identity roots to discussion building

The last meeting revolved around the reading of the two gospel passages related to Saint Peter's betrayal and repentance (Mathew 26, 30-35; 60-75), and to his final appointment as shepherd of Jesus Christ' Church (Saint John 21, 15-23). The idea was to move from the transformative leadership of God to that of a man.

Discussion on these passages was preceded by conceptualization on conceptualization, which started with the question "What do you think we can learn from this comparison?"

Conceptualization on conceptualization helped managers to take care of further doubts on learning theories moving very decisively into a systemic learning of transformative sensemaking and transdisciplinary justification (fig. 2). The question "What do you think we can learn from this comparison?" brought managers to consciously practice the participatory PAR attitude, as a reflection on how personal knowledge shapes knowledge-creation. Managers undertook this self-reflection freely drawing on their personal experience of transformative learning. As a consequence, they soon ran into the objective-subjective interpretation of raw data choice and scanning, thus moving into unconscious transformative sensemaking. In fact, they realized that data are not objective bricks of the sensemaking construction. They, instead, reflect personal choices driven from personal history, identity and mental model (fig.2). Managers also ran back into the relativistic issue that explains how conceptualizations become raw data for further conceptualizations while discourse building moves on.

From this discussion a manager expressed his uneasiness with the ambiguity introduced by relativity: *“I do not like the idea that reading one piece with a different objective in mind produces different meanings”*. Transformative enactment underlined that: *“ The problem has rather an opposite nature. Interpretation from facts, disregarding the Meta-perspective is false. There is only one way to legitimize discourse, by justifying from a deep understanding of identity and cognitive awareness.* Other managers, besides the Director of Personnel, could easily link this argument to facts of company’s life

Subsequent gospel analysis was meant to realize that Saint Peter’s repentance resulted from recognizing how his promise of faith stemmed from an unchallenged identity. Sticking with that promise implied instead a painful identity de-construction. All groups missed this point, as they were not familiar with the idea that human leaders can become transformative just because of the experience of identity evolution from facing ‘mistakes’. Every group centered on Saint John’s passage to try to understand why a weak person was rewarded or if that reward was instead a punishment.

Participatory and emancipatory interventions started emerging as group accounts of Gospel were over and the discussion became free. A manager started recognizing that evolution and complexity are coherent with the view of becoming transformative leaders. Then more managers were able to approach the paradox behind Saint Peter’s tears from the second order thinking. However, discrepancies in linking all learning orders from a well-understood second-order level of knowledge showed how difficult it was for managers to give a positive meaning to Saint Peter’s weakness.

A turning point arose when we could focus on this paradox. Then we could arrive at Jesus’ *backstage* of teaching transformative leadership through learning from mistakes.

In this discussion managers made all their best to use the first theoretical review. This time, justification understanding came from their personal interest to learning rather than from researchers learning enactment. From the internal viewpoint they finally arrived to a more systemic learning.

Substantive research on this meeting showed that managers had matured the attitude to build social discourse from a deliberate and critical perspective. The paradox between interest for recursive learning and frustration for poor results had finally become the engine that brought them to consciously underline the nature of their problems. From this perspective they could advance the idea that the armory of principles gained in the LRD experiment was not yet sufficient to let the wanted democratization emerge. Managers’ intervention on that matter was grounded on deep arguments and finally not personalized. It took the form of external conscious sensemaking of past conscious-unconscious co-evolution.

In the late afternoon we turned back to personalized opposition. We now know that this happened because, while focus on identity had enormously increased, deconstruction on positivist thinking remained insufficient because of the difficulty to enter into the identity bifurcation point (fig. 2). For this purpose it would be necessary a stronger commitment on self-criticality. In fact, previous learning successes were related to deliberate and critical commitment. This means that always analysis on identity related to somebody else, Jesus, Saint Peter, the company, the researchers, rarely themselves. Hence, the objective to permanently resolve the researchers-managers asymmetry required further training. It also required that researchers built a deeper understanding of the system of micro-processes involved in a

transformative mental model process. This is why we turned to this task before any further training.

Conclusions

This article gives the detailed story of researchers-managers' community of learning. On the managers' side, mental models de-construction and re-construction has occurred by first building social discourses on strategic management and then retrospectively making sense of the learning processes involved. On the researchers' side, a substantive theory of becoming a transformative leader has emerged, both, while experiencing transformative leadership and from a further evolutive discourse analysis under the rules of the Grounded Constructivist method applied to the PAR methodology.

It has specifically shown that transformative leaders assume the responsibility to raise subordinates capability to knowledge-creation by giving a high relevance to the skill of linking practice to theory, thus lessening leaders-learners asymmetry. Instead, traditional perspectives on leadership often gives a positive value to knowledge asymmetry, implying that subordinates cannot contribute to leaders' learning.

In the LRD experience this last view could well be advanced because of the difficulty to convey researchers' knowledge on epistemology, research methodology and method, as well as contents of disciplines such strategic management, organization and psychology. To any leader this learning task might appear insurmountable. However, we want to stress our strong commitment to the idea that a *Meta-learning* approach to mental model transformation is possible. The LRD experiment has shown that transformative leadership is not a problem of transferring the contents of numerous disciplines, but rather one of helping others experience mental model transformation. We found that this is possible within the *enacting-experience* dynamic of discourse building followed by a retroactive *sensemaking on sensemaking*. However, those activities resorted to mental model transformation only because while practicing them managers were also learning how to create knowledge from epistemological opposition.

Substantive theory showed that lack of self-criticality undermines the possibility to vertical and horizontal sensemaking. The LRD learning experience made it clear that a withdrawal from self-criticality arises from poor identity management. This circumstance suggests that identity and epistemological thinking must be considered systematically in order to reach the identity bifurcation point from the solely power of constructivist thinking.