

9 On the teaching of leadership intervention science in the action-theoretical background and design of a lecture on leadership¹

In diesem Kapitel ist ein Beispiel interventionswissenschaftlich inspirierter Didaktik dargelegt. Eine Sequenz aus einem Film wird als Ausgangspunkt für eine Reflexion verwendet. Bei der Reflexion werden Aspekte hierarchischer Ordnung und damit verbundene Rollen bzw. Positionen aufgezeigt und mit jeweils eigener Betroffenheit verknüpft.

9.1 Aims, target groups, and general didactical idea of the paper

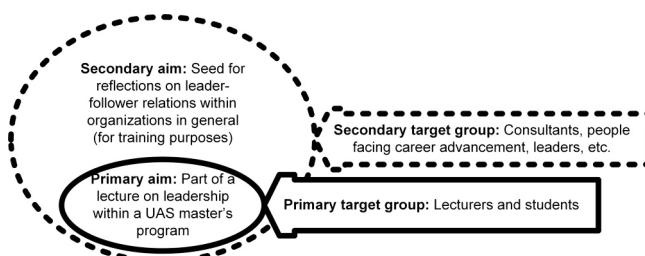
The primary purpose of this chapter is to provide lecturers with a coherent structure for teaching students about the ability to perform a leadership role. In addition, students themselves are invited to use this paper for orientation and preparation. The material discussed is taken from a lecture entitled Leadership and Motivation in the master's program in Strategic HR Management in Europe at a university of applied sciences (UAS) in Austria. The length of the program is four semesters, with a total of 120 ECTS.² The lecture "Leadership and Motivation" is held in the fourth semester. The students are part-time students, which means that they have a regular job during the day and attend the university in the evenings and on Saturdays. The primary target groups of this paper are lecturers and the above-mentioned part-time students. Although the practical approach is tailored to a specific purpose and audience, many different types of readers can benefit from its presentation of the complexities of leadership. In addition, this text provides a theoretical model and practical guidance for readers to reflect on leadership in general.

1 Dieses Kapitel wurde 2015 in der Zeitschrift Gruppendynamik und Organisationsberatung unter dem Titel »On teaching leadership (intervention science in action) theoretical background and design on a lecture of leadership« veröffentlicht (Schuster 2015).

2 ECTS European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. For detailed information, see <https://ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system> (accessed on July 27, 2022).

The general didactic idea comes from group dynamics and is based on the perspective that “[l]eader” is a word that implies a relationship, such as father/son or mother/daughter, as opposed to words like “man” or “girl”, which can stand more independently. Just as the word »son« has no meaning without the implication of a parental word like “father” or “mother”, so the word “leader” has no meaning without the implication of a word like “follower”. The relationships between followers and leaders are among the most significant of human relationships. In fact, most relationships can be viewed as variations on the theme of leader-follower (Rioch 1975, 159–160). In light of this, the secondary aim of this paper is to provide a catalyst for reflection on leader-follower relationships for training purposes within organizations in general. The secondary target group therefore includes consultants, people facing career advancement, leaders etc. Figure 55 illustrates these objectives and target groups.

Fig. 55: Aims and target groups



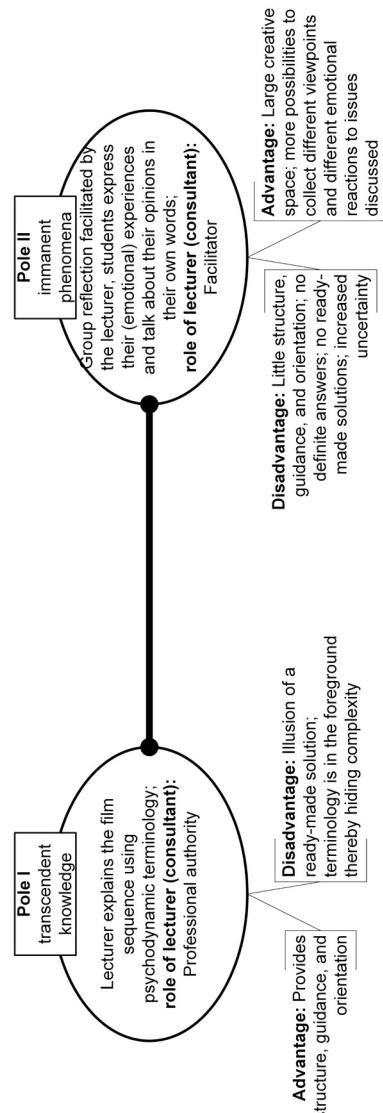
Source: Schuster 2015, 215

The didactic approach presented in this chapter contains two opposite extremes (Figure 56), namely *transcendent knowledge* and *immanent phenomena* (Figure 59). Pole I (transcendent knowledge) contains the structured and clearly defined interpretation of a certain film sequence that is shown to students and that uses psychodynamic concepts. Special vocabulary and terminology discovered and developed in the past are transmitted by the lecturer (cf. Rioch 1975, 164). Therefore, *professional authority* is the role of the lecturer according to Pole I. This role is appropriate for providing orientation and guidance to students, but it also has a dark side. When students unconsciously follow the lecturer as a person “rather than his ideas and his philosophy, [they] need not understand the ideas and the philosophy, even though [they] mouth them. [Their] followership consists of a kind of hypnosis, of giving over [their] will to the [lecturer] and losing thereby that terrible burden which [they] carry so reluctantly: responsibility for [their] own acts” (Rioch 1975, 164).

It may also be a relief to students to see the concept presented as a final, determinative explanation, creating an illusion of the possibility of ready-made solutions. Terminology, especially if it is well developed, can distract from the overwhelming complexity of reality. To balance the dark side of professional authority, the lecturer must gradually shift into another role: that of facilitator of group reflection. Pole II (immanent phenomena) is finally reached when students can contribute stories and reflect on their own expe-

riences of leadership and/or followership, facilitated by the lecturer. In order for this shift in roles to be successful, the lecturer must have previous experience in group dynamics. In our experience, leaving the role of a professional authority increases the likelihood of stirring up frustration in groups. One aspect of the shift from professional authority to facilitator is that the lecturer must avoid definitive answers and instead provide a space for student responses.

Fig. 56: Opposite extremes of the didactic approach



Source: Schuster 2015, 215

The lecturer must also modify the concept as presented in advance, telling the students that there are other concepts that may also fit. This increases uncertainty in the group. People who are used to being taught ready-made solutions are especially likely to complain that the change is not due to the overwhelming complexity of reality, but rather to the lecturer's incompetence. Nonetheless, the learning opportunities are significant if the facilitation of the group works. A wide space for creativity is opened. Students have the opportunity to gather different points of view and different emotional reactions to the issues discussed. The experience is primarily about students recognizing their own behavior and the reaction of the rest of the group to it – in other words, the here-and-now experience of a large-scale feedback process. Although there is no guarantee that the group will reach this state of the process, the approach discussed below can at least provide the possibility for it. The advantage of a group's here-and-now experience lies in the deep impact of learning by consciously including and connecting the emotional as well as the rational aspects. The basic ideas for this kind of learning have been developed extensively in the Austrian tradition of group dynamics, especially in the settings of T-Groups and O-Labs (cf. Kasenbacher 2013, 120–121; Lesjak 2013, 84–87; Krainz 2008, 27–28).

The challenge for lecturers (consultants) using the didactic approach is to navigate within the field of tension created by the two extreme poles, and thus to

- assume and fulfill the role of a professional authority (transmitting transcendent knowledge);
- shift from this role to that of a group facilitator (facilitating group reflection on leadership); and
- initiate a process by shifting the focus of the group from passive reception of transcendent knowledge to active participation in a mutual feedback process on imminent phenomena.

9.2 A psychodynamic view of leadership

I used the following considerations, based on psychodynamic concepts, to frame the design of a lecture on leadership.

For reasons of space, the view presented here is limited to the issue of fears and anxieties, and how they can be contained. From a psychodynamic point of view, one of the goals of leadership³ can be seen as providing a way to contain such fears and anxieties of the individual or group led by the leader. By containing these fears and anxieties, the leader enables the led to focus their energy on the task at hand.

»**Anxiety** is a feeling of nervousness or worry« (Cobuild 1999, 64). Consciousness can be seen as a reason to know about the fact of individual vulnerability and the uncertainty

³ Leadership, as opposed to management, “implies looking to the future, pursuing an ideal or goal. Furthermore, leadership, by definition, implies followership, while management does so by a much lesser degree” (Obholzer 1994a, 43).