Advancing Relational Leadership Research

A Dialogue Among Perspectives

CHAPTER 1

EXPLORING THE COMPETING BASES FOR LEGITIMACY IN CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP STUDIES

Sonia M. Ospina and Mary Uhl-Bien[1]

*... [T]he philosophy underlying our scientific practice is a choice,
and should not simply be a default inherited without question from our teachers
and mentors. Understanding the implications of this choice ... is important
for any reflective and responsible scientific inquiry.*

—Bechara & Van de Ven, 2007, p. 36)

Entity and constructionist perspectives on leadership are separated by a profound divide in philosophical understandings—in the deep meanings—regarding what constitutes the nature of leadership and the research enterprise around it. This is because they have developed from contrasting philosophies of science, that is, contrasting answers to the ontological and epistemological questions that reflect the assumptions researchers bring to their work (as reviewed in this book's Introduction). In the face of this divide, it is even more remarkable that entity and constructionist scholars have recently come together around their interest in the idea of relational

leadership; *this is a clear sign that something bigger is afoot.* As we described in our introductory chapter, we believe this something bigger is relationality.

Given the importance of relationality and the different treatments of it in both perspectives on leadership, there is a critical need in the leadership field to clarify the approaches to thinking about the relational dimensions of leadership brought by each perspective. We need to unpack entity and constructionist assumptions to leadership and point to their respective contributions for advancing knowledge in the field. Such a philosophical investigation of the roots and implications of our research choices is not so much a matter of collective choice as it is an imperative: If we are to take collective responsibility for the leadership field, we need to engage scholars who are researching leadership across perspectives in dialogue. Without this engagement, scholars from each perspective will continue to "claim" ownership of the "true" meaning of relationality, and concerns about relational leadership will become yet another object in the competition for legitimate claims of knowledge in the field, perpetuating the paradigm wars of the past.

Capitalizing on the opportunity to advance new knowledge today starts by looking at the taken-for-granted, unanalyzed presuppositions scholars from each perspective bring to their research. In doing so, we can shed light on why the divide exists and why it is felt so strongly by members of each community. This understanding will help demonstrate to the field that each perspective has its own legitimate logic, and it offers useful insights about leadership as a social reality. Scholars, independent of their research posture, can then introduce refreshing ideas to enhance scholarship in their own perspective.

In this chapter, we name and explore some of the taken-for-granted presuppositions supporting each perspective. We structure the narrative into three sections. In the first section, we acknowledge and illustrate some visible manifestations of the divide between the entity and constructionist perspectives and highlight their contrasting views on relationality. We use the next two sections to inquire into the nature of these differences, unpacking the philosophical assumptions at their root. To do this, in the second section we examine their distinct sets of assumptions about *how we know reality* and the implications for relationality in leadership research. In the third part, we show how these assumptions manifest in distinct research *postures* and *agendas for leadership research,* thus coming back full circle to the experience of scholars as they go about developing a research practice to study relationality in leadership.

Two qualifications must be offered here. First, our analytical scheme is one among other existing frameworks. Organization and management scholars interested in the research implications of the philosophy of science have developed their own versions of existing divides in the field, which include diverse classifications and labels around core assumptions.[2] These variations reflect efforts to synthesize the complex philosophical streams that feed present intellectual discussions in the philosophy of social science. They also reflect that these scholars are largely self-educated in an area not sufficiently studied in doctoral programs (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006, pp. xxiii–xxiv). Moreover, our scheme does not represent a full framework in the philosophy of science. Instead, we highlight selected elements in as much as they tell us something important about how to study relationality. Footnotes expand information and acknowledge subtleties associated with claims in the narrative.

The second qualification explains an imbalance in the chapter. Postmodernism (and the constructionist version of leadership that is derived from it) is seldom taught to leadership scholars in training (at least not in the U.S.). Therefore, we examine it in more detail in contrast to the dominant, better-understood entity postpositivist perspective. We agree with Bechara & Van de Ven (2007) that scholars must choose and synthesize the philosophy of science that fits their scholarly practice to ensure that the assumptions they use are not merely inherited or brought in by default. This requires further reflection to make informed choices about paradigmatic stances that are less familiar, or even invisible, to the interested scholar.

We hope to make the discussion as reader friendly as possible for those who are new to it. The reader versed in the philosophy of science may want to quickly scan the sections to have a sense of the building blocks for the discussion that follows in the book chapters.

ENTITY AND CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVES OF LEADERSHIP

The divide between the entity and constructionist perspectives of leadership is not unique to the leadership field. In a recent *Academy of Management Review* article, Boisot and McKelvey (2010) pose a similar divide in the context of organization studies. Contrasting two worldviews, they argue that one is anchored in a modernist outlook, with deep roots in ideas of the Enlightenment, while the other rests on a postmodernist outlook, with deep roots in the anti-modernist period of the end of the twentieth century. Each produces a different orientation to scientific inquiry. The orientation to science originally called "positivism" (and its contemporary version, postpositivism) draws directly from modernist assumptions.[3] In contrast, the orientation to science called "interpretivism" builds from postmodern assumptions—that even challenge conventional definitions of science.[4] A postpositivist orientation to science represents the dominant tradition in disci-

plines like psychology (and therefore in fields like leadership and journals like *The Leadership Quarterly*).

Postpositivist and interpretivist orientations pull scholars' attention in different directions—reducing the possibility for agreements on what constitutes legitimate knowledge, and generating competing bases of legitimacy for the claims they produce. These two distinct approaches represent, in fact, competing paradigms, or to be a bit more cautious, competing *paradigmatic stances.* They mark the legitimacy of truth claims not only in the organization and leadership studies fields, but also in contemporary social science scholarship in general.

Tensions around the legitimacy of knowledge claims affect communication among entity and constructionist leadership scholars precisely because the paradigmatic stances behind their perspectives have not been acknowledged or are not sufficiently explicit. Yet, today the fundamentals of the leadership field (as in other fields of inquiry) rest on underlying assumptions that participants in each perspective simply presuppose: "Such assumptions appear so obvious that people do not know what they are assuming, because *no other way of putting things* has ever occurred to them" (Sedlacek, 2011, p. 8). Attentiveness to "*other ways of putting things*" and a degree of openness about what these may be can enhance communication among those who are part of the same field. Short of this awareness, "...individuals run a significant risk of talking past one another–listening without hearing and speaking without understanding" (Walker, 2006, p. 69). Leadership scholars must recognize not only what Walker calls "the metatheoretical perspective" of their interlocutors, but also their own perspective (p. 69).

Contrasts in Published Scholarly Research on Leadership

The marked differences between the work published in the two main leadership journals, *The Leadership Quarterly* (U.S.-based) and *Leadership* (European origin), illustrate the competing paradigmatic stances in the leadership literature. Both journals have published research from the entity and the constructionist perspectives (representing the postpositivist and interpretivist orientations to science respectively). Yet, a glance at two randomly picked issues from a similar time period exemplifies their contrasting approaches to scholarly research on leadership. Distinct language and themes, as well as choices reflecting methodological commitments to a particular approach to science, illustrate these differences in the articles for the selected June 2010 issue of *The Leadership Quarterly* and May 2010 issue of *Leadership.*[5]

Considering language and themes, a sample of the featured articles of the June 2010 *LQ* issue included *The impact of positivity and transparency on trust in leaders and their perceived effectiveness; Transformational leadership and children's aggression in team settings: A short-term longitudinal study;* and *A multilevel study of transformational leadership, justice perceptions, and organizational citizenship behaviors.* Articles in *Leadership* included *Leadership as work-embedded influence: A micro-discursive analysis of an everyday interaction in a bank; Shaping leadership for today: Mary Parker Follett's aesthetic;* and *Spirituality at work, and its implications for leadership and followership: A post-structuralist perspective.* The titles alone reflect quite distinct jargon and sensibilities.

The keywords accompanying the article abstracts are further illustrative. Those in the *LQ* issue referenced well-established management and leadership constructs (such as strategic fit, organizational citizenship behavior, leadership competencies, vision, followership, and trust). They tended to qualify a type of leadership (such as operant leadership, authentic leadership, and outstanding leadership) and embedded the research in formalized received knowledge from well-established leadership theories [e.g., social learning theory, transformational theory, leader-member exchange (LMX), and dynamic network theory]. While keywords in *Leadership* also included some traditional constructs (e.g., leader-follower interactions, identity, and influence), they were complemented by terms reflecting more postmodern views of relationships and relationality (e.g., circularity, paradox, portraiture, microdiscourse, and performances). This language widened the discursive community beyond just leadership studies, with specific leadership theories replaced by constructs evoking broader theoretical perspectives (i.e., post-structuralism) associated with the humanities, social theory, and critical management studies, among other fields.

These differences in language evoke distinct assumptions about the nature of leadership and what constitutes its legitimate study. Choices that reflect contrasting methodological commitments also brought to the surface different approaches to science in the articles. For example, despite some variation in methods, the *LQ* articles reflected a postpositivist approach to science with a preference for quantitative studies using structural equation modeling techniques as well as experimental and historiometric studies. (There was also one qualitative study.) In contrast, methodologies in the *Leadership* articles drew more heavily from interpretivist approaches to scholarship, including choices like ethnographic methods and analytical techniques drawn from the humanities (i.e., art history).

Likewise, all *LQ* articles reported empirical research based on large samples and hypothesis testing of well-established or emergent leadership theories. In contrast, the *Leadership* issue featured both conceptual and empirical pieces and gave them equal status. Most articles tended to be embedded in broader scholarly traditions to illuminate the data, for exam-

ple, a poststructuralist critique of leadership studies on spirituality at work. Finally, the *LQ* articles followed the script of deductive research reports, with the expected sequence of literature review, hypothesis formulation, methods, findings, and discussion. The *Leadership* articles were organized around unique structures and narratives, each with their own internal and distinctive logic.

This informal comparison suggests that scholars writing for these issues of *The Leadership Quarterly* and for *Leadership* tend to belong to different paradigmatic communities. The differences in each journal reflect distinct assumptions about what is theory, what is rigor, and what is legitimate scholarly research on leadership, as well as how to conceptualize and approach the notion of relationality.

Contrasts in Views of Relationality

We have characterized relationality as the understanding that individuals and collectives constitute *a field of relationships*, which in turn implies that each individual represents the intersection of multiple relationships (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Carroll, Levy & Richmond, 2008; Gergen, 2009). (For a deeper discussion, see the Introduction of this book.) However, in the same way that the underlying entity and constructionist assumptions produce distinct decisions about how to study leadership and how to report on the findings, they also produce distinct entity and constructionist views of relationality.

Entity Views of Relationality

Most leadership theories—contingency theory, the transformational and neo-charismatic schools, LMX theory, cognitive and social identity theories, servant leadership, shared and distributed leadership, among others—can be located within the broader umbrella of postpositivism. They share a particular perspective of relational leadership that Hosking (1988, 2011) refers to as "entitative" (defined as "pure entity; abstracted from all circumstances"). Uhl-Bien (2006) in her 2006 relational leadership theory (RLT) article uses the term "entity" (defined as "something that exists independently, as a particular and discrete unit").[6]

The word *entity* reflects ontological assumptions that lead researchers to treat their objects of study—leaders and followers—as if they were independent of one another, regarding groups and organizations as a collection of individuals. The ontology associated with an entity view leads to a theorization of leaders, followers, and their surroundings as "separate units, the self and other, the person and culture, the individual and society" (Gergen, 2009, p. xx). Entity studies, drawing from a postpositivist epistemology, view

truth as emerging from a correspondence between a claim and empirically observed facts, demanding standards of replicability as a condition of quality (Boisot & McKelvey, 2010).

The epistemic stance behind postpositivist methods leads to conceptualizing a "relationship" as something that happens when distinct entities come into contact, meaning that relations are *derivative of the independent entities*. That is, relations follow from existing entities who approach one another (Gergen, 2009). The entity perspective is concerned with identifying attributes of individuals as they engage in interpersonal relationships, characterizing the quality and antecedents of relationships, the association between relationships and outcomes, and exploring issues such as the development of the relationship (Uhl-Bien, Maslyn & Ospina, 2011).

The growing concern of entity scholars for exploring the relational dimensions of leadership stems in part from having hit the limits of postpositivist methods in the context of a heightened demand to consider issues like relationality, time, context, levels of analysis, and practical value in leadership studies (Uhl-Bien, 2006). A big challenge for entity scholars is how to tackle a construct like relationality in ways that transcend the restrictions imposed by postpositivism's tendency to partition and simplify reality.

Constructionist Views of Relationality

In contrast to the more recent attention given by entity scholars to issues of relational leadership, constructionist scholars have long been concerned with relational leadership, as relationality is inherent to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this perspective (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006).

The constructionist perspective resonates with an interpretivist orientation to science with roots in postmodernism. It views leadership as a process of social construction produced through relationship (Fairhurst, 2007; Hosking, 2011). It is through social construction that certain understandings of leadership come about and eventually take on a life of their own, so that leadership appears "real." When enacted as if real, the consequences of thinking and doing leadership become "real." (Constructionists would say that these understandings of leadership become reified and are given ontological privilege) (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Grint, 2005). Relationality is intrinsic to the constructionist view of leadership because it sees the world as constructed in and through interaction (Hosking, 2011). It is in approaching one another that individuals can define themselves socially as separate entities: relationship comes first.

This constructionist notion of "relationship" stresses the interdependent nature of those in relation. Constructionism conveys an understanding of individuals and collectives as embedded in and constituting a field of relationships, making relationality endemic to the perspective. In Gergen's (2009) words, this implies a reversal of order to consider "the individual

units as *derivative of relational processes*" (p. xxi)—viewing "being" as a derivative of relating. This is exactly the opposite of an entity perspective, which views relations as derivative of individual units. In constructionist ontology, relationship comes first, and from there emerges our social world as a humanly constructed reality.

Constructionist scholars therefore enter their research on leadership in quite a different way from those doing entity research. While entity researchers privilege individual dimensions, constructionist researchers privilege the collective. The latter choose methods that are sensitive to the *apri ori* relational posture of this perspective. The emphasis here is on "the rich interconnections among people acting in contexts which allow leadership to be 'co-produced' in 'the space between'" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2011, p. 307, citing Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000).

A big dilemma for constructionist scholars is how to clarify and translate into practical terms the research and practice implications of the fact that *individuals are derivative of relational processes* rather than the opposite and more intuitive idea that individuals create relationships. This is particularly true because, in giving priority to process, constructionist leadership researchers may easily downplay the importance of the *embodied human beings* (quite enamored with their individuality) who participate in and drive such processes.

Leadership research is caught between these two distinct understandings of relationality and their respective views of what constitutes legitimate scientific research. As we suggest in the Introduction, premature paradigmatic closure in the field has privileged the entity perspective as "the legitimate" type of leadership scholarship. Despite the inroads of constructionism in the U.S. management field (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010) this version of research has yet to gain comparable standing with the entity perspective in leadership studies. For example, *LQ* continues to give preference to a postpositive approach to science, and there are indications that it is hardening this stance. The entrance of European-based journals like *Leadership* (in response to the need for an outlet for interpretivist voices in leadership scholarship) has broadened the potential space for exposure to different interpretivist perspectives, including constructionism. Yet, learning and sharing across perspectives is still rare in the leadership field as a whole.

Mix-ups and Misunderstandings in Leadership Scholarship

The insidious consequences of this divide are quite real for the field, as suggested in the Introduction, even if entity and constructionist scholars experience them differently. The dialogues in this book between scholars

representing each perspective reflect these tensions. In the broader field, they are palpable in differential access to journals for scholars in each tradition, and even in the invisibility of non-postpositivist perspectives in surveys of the field.[7] And yet, these tensions and their consequences are seldom explicitly discussed or acknowledged.

Neither are the reasons behind the differences in research practices—from framing the problems and questions to choosing specific research tools and writing reports—well understood or appreciated. The result is great potential for confusion, misunderstanding, and frustrations for scholars in the field. For example, consider the cognitive dissonance produced by differences in research reporting. Entity leadership researchers tend to start their research designs and reports at the level of theories and models, ignoring or taking for granted ontological and epistemological assumptions behind theoretical and methodological decisions. They are, on the other hand, quite meticulous about their methodological choices and (quantitative or qualitative) analyses. In contrast, constructionist scholars are very purposive about making transparent the philosophical assumptions informing their research. Yet, they tend to be less explicit, and often informal, about their methodological choices and analytical strategies.

This results in two very different types of documentation in entity and constructionist leadership research products which, in turn, represents a source of frustration for both entity and constructionist scholars. Scholars trained in the postpositivist tradition often do not know what to do with articles based on constructionist research. They may be uncomfortable with the language and approaches—often finding the narrative obscure and overly complex. More importantly, the lack of attention to methods by constructionist scholars often leads them to conclude the work is not "scientific," and therefore they do not recognize it as fully legitimate scholarship. Constructionist scholars are more familiar with the type of research published in *LQ*, but they often become impatient with what they see as too narrow a focus and a homogenous approach to research that seems to them too formulaic and reductionist. These dynamics also reflect the tension between dominant and non-dominant research perspectives described in the Introduction of this book. Recall Deetz's point (1996) that members of the dominant group tend to grow blind spots, while those in the less dominant group must learn the two systems (theirs and the dominant one) to survive.

The differences in the mode of inquiry that researchers take (as illustrated in the selected journal issues discussed above) can also generate confusion and block communication. Entity leadership scholars tend to favor the deductive phase of the cycle of theory construction. Theory is translated into a model, with established relationships between two or more constructs operationalized as variables. They thus begin with an existing theory of leadership, such as LMX or shared leadership, develop a model,

and test propositions regarding the model's accuracy to validate, refine, or reject the theory. Theoretical models are built cumulatively, incrementally, and in small strands. In contrast, constructionist leadership scholars tend to enter research in the inductive phase of the theory-building cycle, letting the data illuminate the question at hand,[8] and drawing loosely from the rich heritage of broad (macro) theories associated with postmodernism (e.g., critical theory, narrativism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, social theory, feminism, queer theory, poststructuralism, and so on). They may refer to mainstream leadership theories, not so much to refine them or build on them, but to deconstruct them or challenge their logic. *The result is two relatively parallel conversations, rather than an authentic dialogue between perspectives in the field.*

Furthermore, understandings of *what is theory* or *how it is used in research* differ significantly. Entity scholars prefer to work with "theories of the middle range" (Merton, 1968): empirical, testable propositions that are positioned between all-embracing, unified theories (from which they may be derived) and descriptive empirical work, with little theoretical orientation (empiricism). New adjectives qualifying leadership give rise to new leadership theories (e.g., contingency theory, transformational leadership theory, LMX theory, relational leadership theory, complexity theory, and so on). It is from these theories that entity scholars draw their identities in the field.

In contrast, constructionist scholars do not identify with these specific leadership theories. Instead, the theories they use may reflect the "grand" theories that the sociologist Merton (1968) positioned one level of abstraction above theories of the middle range, including postmodernism as such, with its deep influence in the social sciences as a challenge to modernist assumptions at the end of the twentieth century (Hollinger, 1994). Constructionist leadership studies are highly theoretical, but not in the way that entity scholars would conceive of theory. When the entity scholar reads a research article and does not find a "theory" translated into a model with testable propositions, the inclination is to discount it as a "story" or a narrative, rather than regard it as a legitimate "scientific" research product (with numbers and hard quantitative analyses).

The potential for mix-ups and misunderstanding becomes even greater when critical theory is added to the mix.[9] Critical management and leadership researchers develop knowledge to help improve the human condition—if possible, bringing to center stage oft-silenced voices and perspectives from the margins (Collinson, 2011; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Ospina & Sorenson, 2006). As Alvesson and Sveningsson make clear in Chapter 7 of this book, they view the meaning of "leadership" itself with suspicion or even skepticism.

Contrary to entity leadership scholars' choice to start with a firm definition of leadership, critical leadership scholars, rather than reaffirming existing understandings, *deconstruct* these understandings (and their associated assumptions) to uncover how leadership discourses and practices contribute to reproducing power and control in organizations and society (Collinson, 2011; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). To do so, they draw on an eclectic set of theoretical perspectives in which the line between the social sciences and the humanities is blurred, for example, "structuralism, labour process theory and critical realism . . . feminism, post-structuralism, deconstructionism, literary criticism, post-colonial theory, cultural studies, environmentalism and psychoanalysis," among others (Collison, 2011, p. 182). They apply a postmodern logic of *critical deconstruction* that is quite foreign to entity leadership scholars' modern idea of critical thinking.

It is not surprising therefore, that entity scholars find the body of constructionist and critical leadership research on leadership hard to navigate. There are no "labels" that would help them locate the perspective "theoretically," other than through the broad blanket of constructionism, or one of other multiple, associated, broad theoretical traditions. In and of themselves, these often add more confusion than insight, given the entity scholar's lack of familiarity with the perspective and its assumptions, as well as the many possible strands of social theory from which constructionists and critical scholars may draw.[10]

The dynamics of competition for legitimacy among their seemingly *incommensurable* paradigmatic stances also leads to a narrowing of the field. Yet, insights from both perspectives are needed to advance present understanding of relational leadership:

> An understanding of a complex problem or phenomenon being investigated can be enhanced by engaging the perspectives of diverse scholars. . . . Appreciating these diverse perspectives often requires communicating across different philosophical perspectives. It also requires maintaining the diverse intellectual differences that not only create an opportunity for arbitrage, but also for a productive interplay of perspectives, models and world views. (Bechara & Van de Ven, 2007, p. 37)

In the leadership field, productive interplay calls for better understanding of the modernist and postmodernist assumptions shaping the philosophies of science in the entity (postpositivist) and the constructionist (interpretivist) perspectives of leadership. We turn to the core of these distinctions in the next two sections, where we offer a simplified scheme that considers differences at three levels of the analytical ladder of abstraction. We first consider the broadest and most abstract philosophical divides suggested by Boisot and McKelvey (2010), modernism and postmodernism. At this level, the differences are about worldview. Going down one level, postpositivist and interpretivist modes of inquiry represent different approaches to science associated with the modernist and postmodernist worldviews

respectively; one level below are the entity and constructionist perspectives of leadership with their distinct research agendas, linked respectively to the postpositivist and interpretivist approaches to science.[11] In the next section, we make comparisons around the first two levels of this scheme—worldviews and approaches to science—leaving the third level, research agendas, to the final section of the chapter.

TRUTH AND HUMAN EFFORTS TO STUDY REALITY

The contrasts between modernist and postmodernist stances to research reflect broad historical changes in worldviews over time (Boisot & McKelvey, 2010; Hollinger, 1994). The key distinction between these two worldviews revolves around the idea of "truth" and a researcher's ability to attain it. A scholar taking a modernist stance believes that it is possible to capture truth (a unified truth) about our objects of study. This scholar also assumes the possibility of approximating truth with some certainty and with some independence from his or her own subjectivity. In contrast, a scholar taking a postmodernist stance assumes that there are multiple truths about our objects of study. This view of "truth" considers the various interpretations of those experiencing the reality studied, including that of the researcher as s/he enters their world. Postmodernist scholars do not expect to attain more than a glimpse of those multiple truths, while acknowledging their own subjectivity in doing so.

These distinctions point to different assumptions about the world ("reality"). Reflecting the assumptions and worldview of the Enlightenment, modernism offers a "realist" answer to the ontological question of *what is the nature of the world and of human beings?* They claim that reality is a concrete, objective "thing," independent of human cognition. Human beings are autonomous, relatively self-contained entities, with independent interests and desires, who respond and adapt to this external reality. This makes it possible to "see" the world as an objective reality that can be rationally manipulated and controlled to achieve social ends. These assumptions have led to a characterization of this worldview as "atomistic" and "objectivist."[12]

In contrast, to the same ontological question, postmodernists offer a *constructionist* view of the world as a *meaningful reality that is humanly constructed.* Rather than objective truth, there are "just humanly fashioned ways of seeing things whose processes we need to explore, and which we can only come to understand through a similar process of meaning making" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). While a world may exist outside of human subjectivity, *meaningful realities* exist only through the interpretation of human relations. Moreover, these realities become "dense feedback loops" generated by intentional constructions of events, and by complex interdependencies

among each other (Boisot & McKelvey, 2010, p. 420). Meaningful realities are inherently relational. Therefore, this worldview can be characterized as resting on a "connectivist" and "subjectivist" ontology (in contrast to the "atomist" and "objectivist" ontology of modernism). Objectivist and subjectivist assumptions about reality point to different assumptions about how we know and study reality (including questions about the role of the researcher).

Modernist Assumptions about How We Know Reality

To the epistemological question of *how can we develop knowledge about the world,* modernism offers the paradigmatic approaches to science of logical positivism and postpositivism. The metaphor of "a window" (Shank, 2002) illustrates the objectivist nature of the "modernist gaze" behind them, and its accompanying vision of research. The "window" can be thought of as a tool to look through, to try to get as "accurate" view as possible of what is on the other side. This is the case when using microscopes and telescopes in the natural sciences, or applying an index or a scale in a survey protocol in the behavioral sciences. Since the world behind the window is real, the goal is to "see" the world with as little distortion as possible, to capture it as best as possible. As Shank suggests, the researcher corrects for smudges in the window (bias) and tries to identify flaws in the window (error). Then s/he looks for causal relationships and trends to explain what has been observed and to predict future occurrences. This implies discovering patterns or relationships among phenomena, finding causal associations in their variation (variables), and controlling for endogenous variables and other spurious factors. Objective truth about reality can be discovered. Science offers the tools to get as close as possible to gaining truth with some degree of precision and certitude.

Variations Within the Modernist Worldview

Sharing an objectivist ontology, the approaches to science of logical positivism and postpositivism nevertheless differ in the degree to which they fully espouse pure objectivism and the consequent assumptions about the role of the researcher. Postpositivism (or neopositivism, as some prefer to call it) is a more sophisticated and more critical orientation to research, compared to logical positivism (Crotty, 1998).

Consistent with its objective ontology, logical positivism assumes that it is possible to *fully* capture a true picture of reality, that the only source of knowledge is observation, and that the researcher has *full independence* from the object of study. In contrast, postpositivism replaces "*fully*" capturing reality with "*imperfectly*," and "*full independence*" of the researcher with "*partial*

independence." In shifting from a "realist" to a "critical realist" ontology (Van de Ven, 2007; Walker, 2006), postpositivists acknowledge a limited understanding of the "real" world, and they reject the notion of a predetermined methodology to capture reality in ways that allow for the full judgment of the veracity of knowledge (Bechara & Van de Ven, 2007; Crotty, 1998).

Furthermore, some postpositivists are more "critical" than others depending on how far away they move from the original positivist realism, and the consequent implications for their understanding of the "window" metaphor. The most critical realist postpositivists assume that there is an objective world but a limited understanding of it, particularly of its emergent social processes; that the search for universal, error-free truths is merely a guiding aspiration; that all forms of inquiry are partial and value-laden rather than impartial and value-free; and finally, they see the benefit of developing models that simplify the complexity of reality, allowing for the possibility of considering multiple perspectives in the search for partial truth (Bechara & Van de Ven, 2007, p. 37).

In leadership studies, the assumptions of entity scholars vary according to where they fall within the purely realist position (of logical positivism) and the more relaxed realist position (of postpositivism). Most entity scholars who express concern with relationality tend to espouse the assumptions of critical realism. This makes it less surprising to see the convergence with constructionism around relational leadership, and this reinforces the potential for dialogue at the present time in the field. The more "critical" their realism, the easier it is for postpositivists to open up to authentic communication with constructionists, but this has yet to be realized. This possibility becomes even clearer when the assumptions of constructionist leadership scholars (and their primary postmodernist approach to scientific inquiry, interpretivism) are further unpacked.

Postmodernist Assumptions About How We Know Reality

In contrast to the metaphor of the "window" (that illustrates a positivist and postpositivist modern worldview), the metaphor of the "lantern" illustrates a way of knowing reality that reflects a postmodern worldview. The constructionist perspective of leadership falls within this paradigmatic stance. Postmodernism challenges the idea that it is at all possible to "capture reality." Instead, knowing is about understanding its meaning. A lantern helps to "shed light in dark corners" (Shank, 2002, p. 11); it illuminates patterns, relationships, gaps, discontinuities, and the underlying mechanisms that help one to *understand.* In a postmodernist worldview, inquiry is about the search for "meaning where no meaning has been clearly understood before" (p. 11). This is meaning that can be better accessed and understood in experience and through practice.[13]

In a postmodern constructionist worldview, the relationship between individuals and the world is one of reciprocal influence: The self and the world constitute one another. Human beings construct meaning, and through these constructions, they shape reality, which takes on a life of its own; then, as human beings *interpret* this reality, they are in turn shaped by it. This is why, to the question of *how can we develop knowledge about the world,* a constructionist postmodern orientation answers with an approach to research called interpretivism.[14]

Interpretivists assume that we can only access the world through that which people themselves interpret as "real," which, in turn, makes the consequences of their actions equally "real." However, one should note that this is not merely about the subjective perceptions of research subjects. Pachirat (2006) describes what it means to be an interpretivist researcher as follows: It is about "humans, making meaning out of the meaning-making of other humans" (p. 374). In this statement, the interpretivist researcher comes to understand that approaching the subjectivity of his/her subjects does not mean just reporting exclusively on their subjective perceptions. It also means that the researcher must consider their embeddedness in social and cultural contexts. This requires stepping back to make meaning of them with the use of broader social science theories and tools that, like a "lantern," help to illuminate a corner of the social world as experienced by those who inhabit it.

The answers to the ontological and epistemological questions that support the postmodernist metaphor of the "lantern" differ significantly from those that support the modernist metaphor of the "window," precisely because postmodernists challenge the modernist project. Given the gap between the entity and constructionist paradigmatic stances in leadership studies, entity scholars' strong reactions and discomfort with constructionist language might be associated with the relentless postmodernist challenge to modernist assumptions, and more specifically, to that of objectivist ontology.

Indeed, the postmodern notion that there are multiple truths represents a profound challenge to the modern aspiration to search for some degree of objective truth. This challenge may be experienced as an assault to basic beliefs underlying entity scholars' postpositivist assumptions, or to a misunderstanding of their critical realism for those postpositivists who have moved away from logical positivism's realist stance. Either reason may generate reactions like defensiveness, annoyance, or even resentment, which in turn become barriers to communication. Yet, part of the problem is that the challenge is taken as a blanket statement, when in fact, as within modernist stances to science, there are also important variations within postmodernist stances that open up opportunity for dialogue.

Variations Within the Postmodernist Worldview

If interpretivists commonly agree that realities are drawn from human meaning, they *vary in the degree to which they fully or partially embrace two postmodernist assumptions:* subjectivism (assumptions about the world), and researcher distance from the object of study (assumptions about the researcher's way of knowing).

Some postmodernist scholars embrace *a totally subjectivist ontology.* They view meaning making as a purely subjective act, essentially independent of the object. This purely subjectivist view of reality is called *constructivism* (Crotty, 1998). Other scholars view subject and object as distinguishable, *but as always united and constructed through interaction.* This *inter-subjective* view of the world is called *constructionism.* We are concerned with the second variant of postmodernism, which gives rise to the constructionist perspective of leadership.

This ontological distinction between constructivism and constructionism has important implications for the respective assumptions about ways of knowing–and their consequent approaches to research. Below, we clarify the nature of constructionism by contrasting it to its postmodern cousin, constructivism, and to the much better-understood modernist orientation of postpositivism (which underlies entity perspectives of leadership that emphasize relationality).

Constructionism: A Particular Version of Postmodernism

The labels of constructivism and constructionism are often used interchangeably, but they are not synonymous. Constructivism is the most subjectivist view of postmodernism, whereby all that counts as real is human subjectivity. The world is but projections of mental representations. In this subjectivist position, understanding the world is about understanding the *subjective interpretations of individuals* since what goes on in individuals' heads is viewed as the source of reality.[15]

In contrast to construc*tivism,* construc*tionism* is a distinct postmodernist stance that moves away from pure subjectivism. Constructionism views reality as the result of the interaction between the subjectivity of an individual and an external world (where other subjectivities also reside). However, this world only becomes a social reality (socially meaningful) when it is interpreted *in relation to other subjects.* In this ontology, the world may exist on its own, but it is, in fact, nothing more or less than an "inter-subjective reality," two subjectivities connected to "construct" a third, common—and social—reality, out of a reality that would otherwise have no meaning. At its core stands the notion of relationality: Reality is at the same time internal

(subjective) and external (objective). Subjects who are engaged with one another encounter and interpret the object of attention and become co-producers of a shared, inter-subjective social world. This view is quite different from constructivism.[16]

The distinction between constructivism and constructionism suggests that three (not two) approaches to knowing have direct implications for how *relational* leadership is studied: modernist postpositivism,[17] postmodernist constructivism, and postmodernist constructionism. The constructivist subjectivist view offers a mirror image of postpositivism's objectivist view: In constructivism, reality is created through a subjective act of humans (subjectivism), while for postpositivism, objects are real and independent from subjectivity (objectivism). Despite this radical difference, they share a common feature: In both cases, it is the individual who approaches (postpositivism) or creates (constructivism) the world. Hence, constructivist and entity perspectives of leadership both emphasize individual agency as the point of entry to their study. While postpositivist entity scholars might be more inclined to attend to behaviors and relationships in addition to cognition, constructivist scholars might attend to perceptions, and mental models, as well as cognitive and affective states when studying leadership.[18]

The assumptions of both postpositivism and constructivism contrast with those of constructionism, which fits somewhere in between the two positions that prioritize agency (entity and constructivist views of leadership). Like constructivists, constructionists see meaning as the path to reality. Yet, contrary to constructivists' idealist assumption, constructionists assume the existence of a world. Human beings *construct meaning when they approach the object of study and interact with it.* This also contrasts with the objectivist assumption of postpositivism, that there is a world with *inherent meaning in its objects, independent of someone coming upon them* (Crotty, 1998). For constructionism, objects are irrelevant independent of the subject approaching them. An approaching subject makes them meaningful, thus making them real in social terms.

In sum, in contrast to constructivism, for constructionism, meaning *does not reside in the subject.* In contrast to postpositivism, meaning *does not reside in the object either.* Meaning is neither "subjective" nor "objective," it is relational: In constructionism, objectivity and subjectivity are brought together indissolubly (Crotty, 1998, p. 44). While separate, subjective reality and objective reality are inherently connected. Hence while constructivists and postpositivist scholars emphasize the individual (behavioral and cognitive) dimensions of reality, the inter-subjective, connectivist stance of constructionists leads them to emphasize the collective dimensions of reality, attending to properties and dynamics that involve *all members of a group as distinct from its individuals.* Given their postmodern, inter-subjective stance, constructionists do not see an objective reality as the locus from which to

gain "objective truth." The world and truth are constructed (not discovered). And, this world is accessed through the interpretation of meaning (not through distanced observation).[19]

It follows that, rather than giving primacy to agency, constructionist perspectives of leadership attend more deliberately to its collective dimensions, and thus operate at a level of observation and analysis that is different from the individual level. From this entry point, constructionists see something collectively labeled as *leadership* emerging from the process of co-construction of meaning associated with a particular inter-subjective reality around a group's organizing and coordinating tasks. Constructionists explore the processes and the context that serve *as the raw material* for the emergence and sustenance of this something called "leadership." Constructionists privilege process and context over agency as the entry point to study leadership. They emphasize culture rather than "the unique experience of each of us" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58).

Constructivism's affinity with entity approaches to leadership lies in their similar focus on individuals as the primary source of leadership. They both differ from constructionist's focus on the collective sources of leadership. This further clarifies Kennedy, Carroll, Francoeur, and Jackson's intriguing story of leadership development in Chapter 6, where they compare the lived experience of two facilitators, viewing one account as "constructivist/entity" and the other as a "social constructionist account."

Constructionism, Critical Theory and Leadership Studies

According to constructionism, *reality is constructed when individual subjectivities meet in an inter-subjective (collective) world, and objects attain meaning*. This is a pedagogical way of describing a complex social dynamic in which many subjectivities interact to generate shared social meaning over time. The shared agreements become the basis of a potentially stable social order, one that is simultaneously tenuous and firm, flexible and resilient, changeable and enduring.

Fragile, shared meanings eventually morph into stable and long-lasting social institutions that become "real" and are treated as if they had emerged naturally—independent from human relations. Social reality is recreated over time through language and other symbolic discourses and socially accepted enactments. At some point, it appears to be natural, "independent" of its social origins. Through this process of *reification* (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), members of a society start believing that certain shared assumptions can be explained through the natural laws of the world and are therefore immutable. They then believe that these are external from the original shared agreements that gave them meaning at a given (historical) time in a given (local) context.

Some constructionist scholars add the lens of critical theory (Bohman, 2002) to this scenario.[20] For them, the relationship between the world, its actors, and the observer is also characterized by power asymmetries. Reification serves an ideological purpose for those in the dominant positions, as it makes people "forget" that recurrent agreements sustaining structures of oppression have a social, and not a natural origin, and are thus changeable. The "naturalizing" discourses that reproduce existing relations (e.g., socially constructed institutions such as slavery were presented as natural realities for a long time) serve to maintain social order as it is. Critical theorists contend, however, that social order is also tenuous because these discourses can be contested and re-constructed.

Even though not all critical theorists are constructionists, management and leadership scholars who use a critical theory lens tend to espouse a postmodern constructionist epistemic stance. Critical management and critical leadership scholars aim to uncover taken-for-granted ways in which power influences organizational outcomes. They unveil hidden mechanisms of oppression associated with management and leadership processes.

Critical management studies (CMS) draw from the critical theory tradition to explain and critique processes in organizational life and work institutions. Critical management scholars explore micro and macro processes and their interconnections. They explore how unequal power relations influence social outcomes to the advantage of some and the detriment of others (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Alvesson & Willmott, 1996; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Lotia & Hardy, 2008). Discourses and practices that sustain power structures and the political dynamics of systems of production and work become of paramount interest (Cunliffe, 2009). Also of concern is the unequal impact of these dynamics on various stakeholders, such as owners, shareholders, managers, and employees or workers. Leadership is one such process of organizational life that receives the same scrutiny.

Collinson (2011) points to an emergent group of critical scholars in the leadership field. He identifies them as doing studies that "share a concern to critique the power relations and identity constructions through which leadership dynamics are often reproduced, frequently rationalized, sometimes resisted and occasionally transformed" (p. 181). Key themes explored in this approach to leadership research tend to be linked to the dialectics that characterize leadership dynamics, such as control/resistance, dissent/consent, and men/women (Collinson, 2011).

To sum up, in this second section of the chapter, we clarified and contrasted the ontological and epistemological assumptions of entity and constructionist perspectives of leadership, which are respectively informed by the modernist approaches to inquiry (logical positivism and postpositivism) and the postmodernist approaches (constructionism and constructivism). We also showed the intellectual linkages between constructionism, critical

management and critical leadership scholarship. Finally, we ascertained that scholars in these traditions tend to share a commitment to an interpretivist approach to inquiry, which contrasts with the commitment of entity scholars to the postpositivist approach discussed earlier. Moving one level down on the analytical ladder, we now turn to explore in the final section of this chapter how these approaches manifest differently in the way scholars do research and report their research outcomes.

METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES IN LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

Postpositivism and interpretivism offer two conflicting bases of legitimacy for the knowledge claims made about "this thing" we have agreed (or disagreed) to call "leadership." And yet, only by recognizing the legitimacy of both approaches will the conversation move in the right direction—that is, to a place where good empirical research on either perspective (i.e., research performed in a way consistent with the paradigm's definitions of quality and rigor) is viewed with equal value in the field. Having unpacked the philosophical assumptions of each, it is now time to unpack the implications for methodological choices in leadership research.

Modes of Knowing

Assumptions behind the answers to *how something can be known* manifest in research purpose and practice. Focusing on the leadership "relationship" as something between two or more relatively autonomous entities (leaders and followers), postpositivists tend to be interested in linking relational constructs, operationalized through variables, into a chain of *causal relationships* translated into linear models that explain and predict the behavior of either the leader or follower or something associated with the quality of the leadership relationship. (See, for example, Shamir, 2007, Figure 4; see also Brower, Schoorman & Tan, 2000; Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly, 1992; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). In contrast, considering *relationship* as an emergent, constructed phenomenon, interpretivist scholars tend to be interested in accessing the meaning ("discovering" is too modernist of a term) of leadership relationships in context. They want to reveal *explanatory mechanisms* that clarify how patterns and relationships associated with leadership emerge in practice, thus giving primacy to communicative and organizing processes over individual behavior (Drath, McCauley, Palus, Van Velsor, O'Connor & McGuire, 2008; Fairhurst, 2007; Grint, 2005; Hosking, 1988, 2007; Ospina & Foldy, 2010).

Causal *relationships* are about the systematic correlation of variables, one of which (everything else being equal) follows logically from the other. Explanatory *mechanisms* are about why and how phenomena are related (Lin, 1998), which involves identifying reciprocal influences and unraveling the mechanism into even finer gradations of interconnection. Patton (2002) illustrates the difference by depicting the most simple postpositivist explanation as being of the type "*x* caused *y* which in turn caused *z*," in contrast to the most simple interpretivist explanation as being of the type "*x* and *y* came together to create *z*" (or, for a critical scholar, it might be "*x* and *y* came together to cover, reproduce, or create *z*").[21]

At the level of methodology, it could be argued that this difference is a matter of deciding between working with numbers or words—that is, using quantitative or qualitative data. Yet, the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy is too simplistic, as it hides Hatch and Yanow's (2008) point that methodology is *the application of our ontological and epistemological presuppositions in our choices for research procedures and tools*. Despite their preference for one over the other, neither postpositivists nor interpretivists reject the possible benefits of using words or numbers; they will use them as needed, *but they will use them in ways that are consistent with their postpositivist or interpretivist approach to inquiry* (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

Rather, the difference between privileging causal relationships or explanatory mechanisms relates directly to differences between *modes of cognition* associated with each paradigmatic stance. Bruner (1986) describes two fundamental forms of human reasoning—the "abstract" and the "narrative" modes of knowing—that depict "distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality" (p. 11). The abstract mode privileges reason, precision, and explanation. The narrative mode privileges experience, metaphor, and interpretation.[22]

The abstract mode of knowing reflects the objectivist and realist assumptions of modernist approaches to inquiry: logical positivism and postpositivism. The narrative mode reflects the connectivist and inter-subjective assumptions of postmodernist constructionist approaches to inquiry typical of interpretivism. Bruner argues that, while "irreducible to one another," their complementarity conveys the "rich diversity of thought" that human beings can use to explore their experience (1986, pp. 11–13). The application of either mode, nevertheless, yields different stances or attitudes towards a researcher's research agenda, that is, different research postures.

Research Postures

In a classical article, Everet and Louis (1981) contrast the practices of two postures that a researcher may take—"inquiry from the outside" and "inquiry from the inside." These research postures can be associated respectively with the metaphors of the window and the lantern, the abstract

and narrative modes of knowing, and with postpositivism and interpretivism. These stances, Everet and Louis argue, differ in the degree of immersion of the researcher in terms of experiential engagement, existential commitment to the subject, and physical involvement in the setting. Stemming from different modes of knowing, they produce different but equally valuable types of knowledge.

As a researcher doing inquiry from the outside (evocative of the window and of an abstract mode of knowing) one distances oneself from the subject of study and takes a detached, value-free stance, often also removing oneself from the setting. In contrast, in inquiry from the inside (evocative of the lantern and of a narrative mode of knowing), the researcher assumes that s/he can know by being immersed in the stream of events and activities, thus participating in the phenomenon studied. Hence, inquiry from the outside places the researcher as an external observer, who observes through instrumentation (window), while in inquiry from the inside, the best instrument is the researcher as actor, illuminating meaning through varying degrees of participation (lantern).

Researchers doing inquiry from the outside validate knowledge exclusively by methodological procedure and rational logic (abstract mode of knowing). In contrast, those doing inquiry from the inside assume that knowledge is validated experientially, meaning that the interpretations of the studied reality must make sense to the actors who experience it (narrative mode of knowing). (We will return to this topic in our discussion of standards of quality in interpretive research.) Consistently, in inquiry from the outside, the aim is to isolate the phenomenon and, as much as possible, reduce the level of complexity in the analysis. In contrast, inquiry from the inside aims to learn by getting a holistic picture of historically unique situations, where idiosyncrasies are important to find meaning. The goal is to disentangle elements of that complexity, rather than to ignore it, reduce it, or to hold it constant.

In terms of actual research approaches and tools, researchers doing inquiry from the outside tend to favor quantitative methods and a deductive mode of inquiry, drawing from experimental and semi-experimental methods, econometrics, survey methods, quantitative and mixed case studies, traditional ethnographies, and so on. Only when research engages in hypothesis testing is it viewed as "theory driven."

Researchers doing inquiry from the inside tend to favor qualitative research and an inductive mode of inquiry, drawing from methods that give preeminence to language and representation, such as narrative inquiry, qualitative case studies, some postmodern forms of ethnography, phenomenological studies, hermeneutics, historical analysis, participatory action research, and in the most postmodernist versions, other forms of representation like poetry, visual arts, and theater. Theory is also conceptualized

differently: "for some, it is best developed inductively; for others, it is better seen as a 'resource' than as an apparatus of causal laws" (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. xviii).[23]

The research practices of leadership scholars differ according to their epistemic stance (and preference for a particular mode of knowing), and the particular methodological choices associated with it. So, for example, if a researcher accepts (explicitly or implicitly) that reality exists independent of human subjectivity, s/he will naturally accept the idea that knowing the reality of leadership requires objective instruments and a distanced approach when capturing it objectively ("inquiry from the outside" type tools associated with the window and abstract knowing). It would be somewhat contradictory to then choose as the primary approach a postmodernist interpretivist method such as an auto-ethnography—i.e., an autobiographical research genre connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It would make more sense, instead, to construct instruments such as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Antonakis, Avolio & Sivasubramaniam, 2003). Likewise, if the researcher views leadership as co-constructed, data from the latter instrument would not be helpful to access, interpret, and understand the experience from which leadership constructions emerge. Instead, interpretivist methods such as narrative inquiry (Ospina & Dodge, 2005), which aim to "find meaning in the stories people use, tell, and even live" (p. 144), would offer more appropriate ways to investigate the nature of leadership.

Some degree of consistency between a research project's epistemic stance, theoretical framework, and methodological choices helps to ensure quality of the research, *independent of perspective*.[24] Acknowledging this can also help to reduce misunderstandings and judgments about the rigor of perspectives and research choices when these are different from those of the person doing the assessment. This is particularly needed because postpositivist methods have dominated leadership studies, and, given the blind spots that accompany this dominance (Deetz, 1996), their standards of rigor have become (mistakenly) the only point of reference by which to judge research quality. Below we discuss the interpretivist standards of rigor that support legitimate research choices within the logic of this mode of inquiry.

Rigor in Interpretivist Research

Interpretivists challenge the automatic translation of research methods and tools from the natural to the social and human sciences. They instead devise methodologies and techniques to ensure a degree of good fit between method and the ontological and epistemological commitments of their postmodernist stance. They derive from these the theories and methods needed to better understand the human world in all its complexity.

Interpretivists aspire to ensure rigor in their research, but it is, nevertheless, quite different from that of postpositivists (Yanow, 2006; Dodge, Ospina & Foldy, 2005).[25] Consistent with their challenge to modernist assumptions, interpretivists rethink standards like validity, reliability, and objectivity to consider instead criteria that are more appropriate to their postmodernist assumptions. Examples of the many possible standards they consider include credibility, dependability, comfirmability, and transferability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Dodge et al., 2005; Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

In their aspirations to rigor, interpretivists start from the observation that what appears as a stable social world is, in actuality, unstable, fluid, multidimensional, and conflicting in all its messiness. Key notions of postmodernism, like "complex interdependencies" and "dense feedback loops" suggest that inter-subjectivity itself is embedded and complex. Working with these assumptions, interpretivists take quite seriously the postmodernist notion of multiple truths, and the consequent idea of "multivocality." Accessing meaningful reality therefore requires entertaining multiple voices and alternative representations—while considering each equally relevant. This means exploring how multiple perspectives contribute to producing understandings of a social phenomenon. Part of the task is to trace how this meaning emerges in action, through both communication and interaction, and how it is manifested in recurring practices over time.

For this reason, researchers must grasp two interrelated components of an "interpretive research gestalt" (Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 92). First, they must be attuned to the subtleties associated with the nature of meaning making—the ambiguities of human experience, the rich tacit knowledge of actors, the artifacts through which people make sense of their world (like rituals and stories), the blind spots in actors' consciousness, their taken-for-granted assumptions, and so on. Second, researchers must be sensitive to the various narrative forms that relevant data may take, from word, to imagery and sound, to space and objects, to numbers. They must collect sufficiently varied manifestations of the experiences constituting an emergent reality to ensure they are accessing multiple truths. Ensuring this gestalt yields a holistic, multi-faceted, processual understanding of human experience.

This rationale explains why the interpretive concept of inter-subjectivism replaces the postpositivist concept of methodological individualism in the theorizing and practice of interpretive research (Yanow, 2006, p. 14–15). In this view, knowledge is about mapping contexts and associated patterns of symbolic discourse (and their worldly manifestations), rather than about capturing variance to explain and predict phenomena in an objective world. The researcher aims to uncover constructed realities revealing the meaning of experience, rather than accessing reality itself. These assumptions make the postpositivist aspiration for even partial objectivity in scientific research not only impossible, but *inappropriate.*

Rigor is still demonstrated through the application of method—ensuring quality in reference to the type of criteria listed above (e.g., credibility, dependability, comfirmability, and the transferability of findings). But this is not enough. The researcher must also ensure "rigor of interpretation" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This means demanding from one another a systematic defense of their reasoning in regard to the process of interpretation. To guarantee both meanings of rigor, interpretivist researchers draw on practices and techniques from the interpretive research gestalt that ensures "the faithful rendering of some truth (notice the lower case t) from the perspective of socially situated actors" (Dodge et al., 2005, p. 290).

This description suggests a research posture that goes well beyond the simple act of making consistent methodological choices. The posture rests in a particular set of commitments to an epistemic community whose members agree on the meaning of what it is to do scholarly rigorous empirical research. Theoretical and methodological choices are closely connected to these commitments.

Because the difference between variance and process models has been often used to draw attention to differences in research posture, we turn to it briefly, highlighting the complexities associated with using this comparison to distinguish postpositivist and interpretivist approaches to research.

Research Models and Postures

At the level of theory, the contrast between variance and process sheds light on the distinct inquiry strategies associated with postpositivism and interpretivism. Variance theories express relationships among variations in social factors to answer "what causes what," identifying antecedents and outcomes of the studied phenomenon. Process theories express relationships among events (and actors) to answer "how did they develop and change over time" (Van de Ven, 2007).[26] Variance theories aim to make causal predictions from occurrences, while process theories aim to examine temporal sequences of unfolding events (p. 22).

Standards of rigor in exploring process and variance theories also reflect different ways to approach an object of study. Good answers to variance questions require evidence of co-variation, temporal precedence, and non-spurious associations between independent and dependent variables. Good answers to process questions require identifying "generative mechanisms" underlying the unfolding of events, and the circumstances under which these are present (Van de Ven, 2007, citing Tsoukas, 1989).

At this level of abstraction, the association to distinctive worldviews and philosophical roots works: The postmodern interpretivist researchers' assumptions offer an indication that their approach will be process oriented, and modern assumptions of postpositivists suggest that they will develop or draw from a variance theory. But at some point, the analogy between vari-

ance and process theories and postpositivist and interpretivist approaches to inquiry begins to break down.

For example, a postpositivist researcher may consider process theories, asking why something develops as it does to deepen or complement a "what" explanation. The researcher may even decide to work with a process theory alone, given the nature of the question. Yet, the opposite does not hold: It is unlikely that an interpretivist researcher would ask a "what" question alone. It is even more unlikely that s/he would consider a variance theory because interpretivist research is always process oriented. Moreover, the interpretivist might also be reluctant to organize the research around a process theory, particularly if s/he takes seriously other postmodern assumptions such as the non-linear, discontinuous nature of events, that is, the postmodernist challenge to the linear nature of change and progress (Hollinger, 1994).

The analogy "variance is to postpositivism what process is to interpretivism" is therefore limited. It breaks down even more when the researcher translates process and variance *theories* into process and variance *models* at the level of research design. The idea of a "model" itself may be problematic for interpretivist scholars. In replacing realist with "critical realist" assumptions, postpositivists propose models as ways to connect abstract theory and concrete data in the world (Van de Ven, 2007). Moving away from logical positivism, postpositivists understand that (as partial representations or maps of a theory) models are fallible and incorporate the researcher's perspective. Yet, the construct of "model" nevertheless retains a modernist flavor: Models are precisely instruments used to simplify a theory of the phenomenon so that it can be "tested" or "refined"—so that the critical realist aspiration to gain at least some partial truth can be attained.

Designed to temper the modernist expectation of an ultimate truth and to reflect only selective representations of the world, models nevertheless are generated to approach an entity that is conceived as separate from other entities and from the researcher (i.e., a separate "object"). Models are tools that aim to reduce complexity, lessen error, and minimize bias. Whether they are variance or process, models belong to the repertoire of a researcher committed to the metaphor of the "window," and to an abstract mode of knowing.

This approach to research reflects objectivist assumptions that are problematic from the postmodernist worldview underlying interpretivism. A postmodernist distrusts any encompassing attempt to "capture" even a *piece* of reality, which is what a model—variance or process—is intended to help the researcher do. Consequently, the more postmodernist an interpretivist researcher's assumptions are, the more reluctant s/he will be to use models, no matter how much they evoke the process dimensions of a phenomenon.

Even though a *process model* draws from the more relaxed objectivist assumptions of critical realism, it still echoes the language and spirit of modernism. It is therefore likely that the researcher's view of "process" will reflect this worldview and its primary research stance. A postpositivist application of a process model will most likely yield an outcome-driven explanation based on probabilistic relationships between dependent and independent variables associated with a view of change based on actions and activities (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 148).

Pushing the envelope even further, a critical realist postpositivist may shift from an outcome-driven to an event-driven explanation that aims to identify the emergent mechanisms that illuminate a temporal sequence (Van de Ven, 2007). Acknowledging greater complexity and interdependencies, the research stance of this scholar may lead him or her to incorporate the newest multilevel quantitative techniques (such as social network analysis, longitudinal designs, hierarchical linear modeling, and linear growth modeling). S/he may even decide to investigate and develop a narrative account of the mechanisms that help explain the temporal sequence.

However, the posture and product will flow from a modernist commitment to critical realism (with its objectivist ontological assumptions and its commitments to the window). The account would most likely be based on the researcher's view from outside these events, independent from the subjective experience of the event participants (despite including interviews with them). It would reflect the basic aspiration to "capture" reality as faithfully as possible from the other side of the "window," no matter how imperfectly or partially. The account would thus reflect a degree of certainty about the relatively "objective" knowledge mirroring some aspect of reality, with the truth claims guaranteed through adherence to method.

The "narrative" account of this postpositivist researcher would reflect an *abstract* mode of knowing typical of a modernist worldview, which would contrast significantly with the *narrative* mode of cognition typical of a postmodern worldview and its interpretivist approach to inquiry. The latter would assume a constructionist understanding of process and change. It would see process as contextualized and oft-discontinuous events with participating social actors embedded in webs of relationships. These would be characterized by multiple feedback loops that highlight the non-linear and complex nature of change. Interpretivist scholars would not want to simplify this complexity but would rather try to capitalize on it, reflecting this in their study design and producing quite a different research product compared to the process study of the postpositivist scholar.

The interpretivist researcher would "enter" his/her object of study through the subjective experience of the event participants, taking a posture from inside these events. The product would take the form of a rich and detailed narrative account, with a unique format and style depending

on the researchers' degree of commitment to postmodernist assumptions. It could be a relatively linear, systematic account of the identified mechanisms with evidence presented in the voice of participants. Or, it could be a more creative multivocal narrative deconstructing particular beliefs and practices (and their origins) as well as uncovering their relationship to a particular regime of power (e.g., a postmodernist, Foucauldian account of a phenomenon) (Hollinger, 1994, p. 173).

No matter what format or style, the researcher would also report on his or her position *vis a vis* the subjects of study, thus acknowledging the influence of his or her own interpretations and voice in the research process and construction of meaning.[27] The narrative way of knowing would attune the interpretivist researcher to aspects of experience that emerge from unique contexts and in specific timings, and yet tell us something important about the human condition in general. The narrative account would reflect the uncertainties, blind spots, and discontinuities associated with human experience. In applying a narrative way of knowing, explanation would become interpretation, and interpretation of meaning would yield understanding.

Revisiting the Continuum

In the Introduction of this volume, we offered a "map of the terrain" (see Figure I.1) that located the book's contributors within a continuum of scholarship between a modernist "entity" perspective of relational leadership (that included logical positivism and postpositivism) and a postmodernist interpretivist perspective (that included constructionism and constructivism). Figure 1.1 in this chapter summarizes our analytical scheme, sheds light on the nature of the continuum, and further clarifies the meaning of the location of contributors in that spectrum as depicted in Figure I.1 of the Introduction to the book. For example, the left-to-right progression of ontological assumptions from objectivism to subjectivism explains why constructivism is placed to the right of constructionism, not next to postpositivism, despite the fact that it shares with entity perspectives a privileging of individual agency.

The shaded boxes in Figure 1.1 represent the competing epistemic stances underlying the perspectives in the leadership field. One level below are researchers depicted as a series of thin rectangles along the continuum. In this book, none of the contributors are located at the two extremes, or poles, of the spectrum. None of the contributors embraces the pure modernist objectivist position of logical positivism in the left pole (with its "realist," objectivist position) or the pure postmodernist subjectivist position of constructivism (with its idealist subjectivist position) in the right pole. Contributors fall somewhere between these extremes, embracing varied degrees of commitment to modernist and postmodernist worldviews and their epistemic stances, with the associated modes of knowing and research pos-
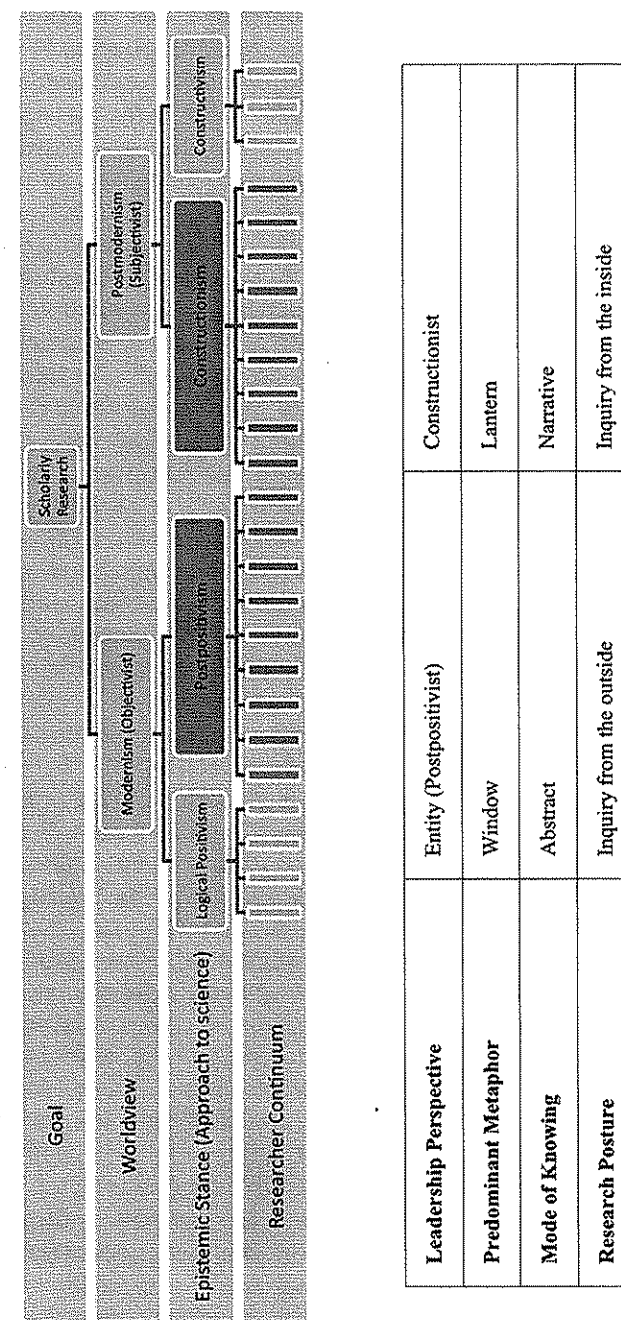

Leadership Perspective	Entity (Postpositivist)	Constructionist
Predominant Metaphor	Window	Lantern
Mode of Knowing	Abstract	Narrative
Research Posture	Inquiry from the outside	Inquiry from the inside

Figure 1.1 Summary of analytical scheme and key comparisons.

tures. Toward the left are various postpositivist contributors who espouse the "critical realist" position, and toward the right are various constructionist contributors who espouse the "inter-subjective" position of constructionism. A few contributors offer "hybrid" approaches connecting the two perspectives in the middle of the continuum. The closer to the right or left poles, the more likely it is that contributors find the perspectives incommensurable, even if they see room for conversation.

This chapter has also highlighted variations within each perspective other than those identified in the Introduction. For example, on the entity side, scholars vary in the extent to which they use or advocate using qualitative methods and process models to go beyond variance approaches. On the constructionist side, they vary in their commitment to critical theory and whether they commit to a full postmodernist project, or have a moderate postmodern stance. These internal differences reinforce the idea of a continuum of contributors characterized by a more or a less relaxed set of ontological and epistemological assumptions, rather than completely separate perspectives with fixed boundaries. Differences across the perspectives, however, do not disappear: The farther away from the middle of the continuum, the stronger and more distinct the assumptions are about the nature of reality and how we know, and thus how we can study leadership empirically.

Reflecting the broader trend in the field, the postpositivist and constructionist contributors find themselves converging, through different paths and for different reasons, in their interest in the relational dimensions of leadership. Even though they have agreed to join the conversation, and they may use the same words (e.g., "relations," "reciprocal influences," "process," "science," "theory," "rigor," and so forth), their words may carry different meanings depending on their epistemic stance and the consequent research posture. The farther apart from each other, and in relation to the poles of the continuum, the more different are the languages they speak. Likewise, the stronger the adherence to core modernist or postmodernist assumptions, the harder it will be for them to understand each other, unless they explicitly engage in conversation to share each others' implicit assumptions.

CONCLUSION

The comparisons presented in this chapter offer pointers to the question of *how can leadership be researched* from the two perspectives of postpositivism (with its modernist assumptions) and constructionist interpretivism (with its postmodernist assumptions). The metaphor of the window, the abstract mode of knowing, and a preference for "inquiry from the outside"

evoke the assumptions of a postpositive version of research that has represented, for many years, the dominant way of doing empirical research both in the natural and the social sciences. A critical realist version of this perspective has informed mainstream leadership research in the U.S., yielding research products that have tended to dominate the management and leadership journals.

The metaphor of the lantern, the narrative mode of knowing, and a preference for "inquiry from the inside" evoke the assumptions of a constructionist version of social science—interpretivism—which has a strong following in Europe and Australia, and in some disciplines in the U.S. (such as sociology, anthropology, some branches of political science and history, and some fields in management) (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). Constructionist leadership scholarship has flourished outside of the U.S. for quite a while; recently it has gained currency in this country, though it has still not achieved full legitimacy yet. The competition over the legitimacy for the knowledge claims that scholars in these perspectives produce is quite real, as are the tensions it raises. These tensions impact the experience of leadership scholars and affect the nature of communication across perspectives, as well as the ability to advance broader understandings in the field.

Variations *within* each perspective, nevertheless, offer opportunities for scholars to engage *across* perspectives, particularly as their postures move away from the pure objectivism or the pure subjectivism of the poles in the continuum. For example, there may be some resonance between a critical realist entity researcher and a moderate postmodernist constructionist scholar. This postpositivist's report on findings from a process model of relational leadership may not feel so far apart from the constructionist's report on the identified mechanisms underlying leadership enactments in a given context. Of course, resonance would be stronger between those two scholars than between an entity researcher using a variance model and a constructionist doing a post-structuralist analysis of a similar phenomenon.

Be that as it may, there are interesting opportunities for capitalizing on the relational leadership convergence. The space for conversation can be broadened as scholars acknowledge the reasons behind both resonant insights and incommensurable differences. For example, with respect to assumptions about the nature of the world, entity and constructionist scholars can acknowledge that both start with the notion of a reality. But the entity scholar sees it as separate from the knower, while the constructionist sees it as interdependent. With respect to assumptions about the nature of knowing, both acknowledge that the knower (researcher) *is not completely independent* of the object of study. But the entity scholar sees the lack of independence as a problem, while the constructionist sees it as an opportunity. The entity scholar strives for independence through methods that help to get as close as possible to reality, while the constructionist uses the

lack of independence as the raw material from which to understand the meaning of constructed experience (what makes reality "meaningful" and thus "real").

Acknowledging that some assumptions relax as scholars move away from the extremes of the continuum opens up more space for fruitful conversation because it makes communication easier. For example, given a subjectivist epistemology (i.e., the knower's interplay with the subjective perspective of those experiencing the reality under study), a constructionist leadership scholar may be more receptive to the posture of a postpositivist entity scholar whose critical realism allows for a less objectivist and more subjectivist epistemology (i.e., the knower's perspective influences one's knowledge of reality despite any efforts to gain some distance). Likewise, drawing on objectivist ontology (reality is independent of our cognition), the entity scholar may be more open to conversation once s/he learns that the constructionist's inter-subjectivist ontology acknowledges the existence of reality (even though it only has meaning in relation).

In conclusion, entity and constructionist leadership scholars share an aspiration to advance theoretically robust and methodologically rigorous research agendas on the relational dimensions of leadership. This aspiration, however, can only be realized if scholars from both perspectives acknowledge the profound gap that exists around what it means and what it takes to produce such advancements. Indeed, while entity and constructionist scholars may converge around their interest in *relationality*, there is still much confusion, misunderstanding, and disagreement around the assumptions that help grasp its meaning for leadership from the two different but equally valuable perspectives.

Our intention has been to explore the tensions inherent in the field around the competing paradigmatic stances and the legitimacy of their knowledge claims, so that readers can explore what these mean for leadership theory, research, and practice as they engage the book chapters. We hope the ideas generated in this candid discussion will become a source of energy to identify what each perspective can bring to generate knowledge that advances the field.

We now invite readers to hear what the book's contributors have to say in the sections that follow.

REFERENCES

Abbott, A. (1988). Transcending general linear reality. *Sociological theory, 6*, 169–186.
Abell, P. (1987). *The syntax of social life: The theory and method of comparative narratives.* Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (1996). *Making sense of management: A critical introduction.* London, England: Sage.

Alvesson, M., & Sveningsson, S. (2003). Managers doing leadership: The extraordinization of the mundane. *Human Relations, 56*, 1435–1459.
Alvesson, M., & Karreman, D. (2011). *Qualitative research and theory development: Mystery as method.* London, England: Sage.
Antonakis, J., Avolio, B.J., & Sivasubramaniam, N. (2003). Context and leadership: An examination of the nine-factor full-range leadership theory using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. *The Leadership Quarterly, 14*, 261–295.
Bechara, J.P., & Van de Ven, A.H. (2007). Philosophy of science underlying engaged scholarship. In A.H. Van de Ven (Ed.), *Engaged scholarship: A guide for organizational and social research* (pp. 36–70). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
Berger, P.L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* New York, NY: Doubleday and Company.
Boisot, M., & McKelvey, B. (2010). Integrating modernist and postmodernist perspectives on organizations: A complexity science bridge. *Academy of Management Review, 35*(3), 415–433.
Bohman, J. (2002). Critical theory. In N. Smelser & P. Baltes (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences* (pp. 2986–2990). London, England: Elsevier Science.
Brower, H. H., Schoorman, F. D., & Tan, H. H. (2000). A model of relational leadership: The integration of trust and leader–member exchange. *The Leadership Quarterly, 11*(2), 227–250.
Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis.* London, England: Keinemann Education Books.
Bradbury, H., & Lichtenstein, B. (2000). Relationality in organizational research: Exploring the "space between." *Organization Science, 11*(5), 551–564.
Bruner, J.S. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Carroll, B., Levy, L., & Richmond, D. (2008). Leadership as practice: Challenging the competency paradigm. *Leadership, 4*, 363–379.
Collinson, D. (2011). Critical leadership studies. In A. Bryman, D. Collinson, K. Grint, B. Jackson, & M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of leadership* (pp. 181–194). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
Cunliffe, A. L. (2009). *A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about management.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
Dachler, H. P. (1988). Constraints on the emergence of new vistas in leadership and management research: An epistemological overview. In J. G. Hunt, B. R. Baliga, H. P. Dachler, & C. A. Schriesheim (Eds.), *Emerging leadership vistas* (pp. 261–285). Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath.
Deetz, S. (1996). Describing differences in approaches to organization science: Rethinking Burrell and Morgan and their legacy. *Organization Science, 7*(2), 191–207.
Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1–28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dodge, J., Ospina, S. M., & Foldy, E. G. (2005). Integrating rigor and relevance in public administration scholarship: The contribution of narrative inquiry. *Public Administration Review, 65*(3), 286–302.

Drath, W., McCauley, C., Palus, J., Van Velsor, E., O'Connor, P., & McGuire, J. (2008). Direction, alignment, commitment: Toward a more integrative ontology of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 19*(6), 635–53.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A.P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative and reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 733–768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Everet, R., & Louis, M. R. (1981). Alternative perspectives in organizational sciences: "Inquiry from the inside" and "inquiry from the outside." *Academy of Management Review, 6*(3), 385–395.

Fairhurst, G. (2007). *Discursive leadership: In conversation with leadership psychology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fairhurst, G., & Grant, D. (2010). The social construction of leadership: A sailing guide. *Management Communication Quarterly, 24*(2), 171–210.

Gaskell, G., & Bauer, M. (2000). "Towards public accountability: Beyond sampling, reliability and validity." In M. Bauer, & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound: A practical handbook* (pp. 336–350). London, England: Sage.

Gergen, K. (2009). *Relational being: Beyond self and community.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Glynn, M. A., & Raffaelli, R. (2010). Uncovering mechanisms of theory development in an academic field: Lessons from leadership research. *The Academy of Management Annals, 4*(1), 359–401.

Grint, K. (2005). Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of leadership. *Human Relations, 58*(11), 1467–1494.

Harrington, A. (2000). Alfred Schutz and the objectifying attitude. *Sociology, 34,* 724–740.

Herr, K., & Anderson, G. (2005). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hollinger, R. (1994). *Postmodernism and the social sciences: A thematic approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hosking, D. (1988). Organizing, leadership and skillful process. *Journal of Management Studies, 25,* 147–166.

Hosking, D. M. (2007). Not leaders, not followers: A post-modern discourse of leadership processes. In B. Shamir, R. Pillai, M. Bligh, & M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.), *Follower-centered perspectives on leadership: A tribute to the memory of James R. Meindl* (pp. 243–263). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Hosking, D.M. (2011). Moving relationality: meditations on a relational approach to leadership. In A. Bryman, D. Collinson, K. Grint, B. Jackson, & M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of leadership* (pp. 455–467). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kuhn, T. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1st ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G. (1992). What is metaphor? In K.J. Holyoak, & J.A. Barnden (Eds.), *Advances in connectionist and neural computational theory* (Vol. 2: *Analogical Connections*). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Laudan, L. (1990). *Science and relativism: Some key controversies in the philosophy of science.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Leonardi, P. M., & Barley, S.R. (2010). What's under construction here? Social action, materiality and power in constructivist studies of technology and organizing. *The Academy of Management Annals, 4*(1), 1–51.

Lin, A.C. (1998). Bridging positivist and interpretivist approaches to qualitative methods. *Policy Studies Journal, 26*(1), 162–180.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp.163–188). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lotia, N., & Hardy, C. (2008). Critical perspectives on collaboration. In S. Cropper, M. Ebers, C. Huxham, & P. Smith Ring (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations* (pp. 366–385). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure* (Enlarged ed.). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Morgan, G., & Smircich, L. (1980). The case for qualitative research. *Academy of Management Review, 5*(4), 491–500.

Mohr, L. (1982). *Explaining organizational behavior.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Naples, N. A. (2003). *Feminism and method: Ethonography, discourse analysis and activist research.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Ospina, S., & Dodge, J. (2005). It's about time: Catching method up to meaning—The usefulness of narrative inquiry in public administration research. *Public Administration Review, 65*(2), 143–58.

Ospina, S., & Sorensen, G. (2006). A constructionist lens on leadership: Charting new territory. In G. Goethals, & G. Sorenson (Eds.), *In quest of a general theory of leadership* (pp. 188–204). Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar.

Ospina, S., Dodge, J., Foldy, E.g., & Hofmann-Pinilla, A. (2008). Taking the action turn: Lessons from bringing participation to qualitative research. In P. Reason, & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of action research participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed.) (pp. 421–434). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Ospina, S., & Foldy, E. (2010). Building bridges from the margins: The work of leadership in social change organizations. *The Leadership Quarterly, 21*(2), 292–307.

Pachirat, T. (2006). We call it a grain of sand: The interpretive orientation and a human social science. In D. Yanow, & P. Schwartz-Shea (Eds.), *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn* (pp. 373–379). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Riccucci, N. M. (2010). *Public administration: Traditions of inquiry and philosophies of knowledge.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Romani, L., Primecz, H., & Topcu, K. (2011). Paradigm interplay for theory development: A methodological example with the Kulturstandard Method. *Organizational Research Methods, 14*(3), 432–455.

Shamir, B. (2007). From passive recipients to active co-producers: Followers' roles in the leadership process. In B. Shamir, R. Pillai, M. Bligh, & M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.), *Follower-centered perspectives on leadership: A tribute to J. R. Meindl* (pp. ix-xxxix). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Shank, G. (2002). *Qualitative research: A personal skills approach.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Schwandt, T. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp.189–213). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schwartz-Shea, P. (2006). Judging quality: Evaluative criteria and epistemic communities. In D. Yanow, & P. Schwartz-Shea (Eds.), *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn* (pp. 89–113). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Sedlacek, T. (2011). *Economics of good and evil.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Tsoukas, H. (1989). The validity of idiographic research explanations. *Academy of Management Review, 14,* 551–561.

Tsui, A. S., Egan, T. D., & O'Reilly, C. A. (1992). Being relationally different: Relational demography and organizational attachment. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 37,* 549–579.

Uhl-Bien, M., Maslyn, J., & Ospina, S.M. (2011). The nature of relational leadership: A multi-theoretical lens on leadership relationships and processes. In D. Day, & J. Antonakis (Eds.), *The Nature of Leadership* (2nd ed.) (pp. 289–330). London, England: Sage.

Uhl-Bien, M. (2006). Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*(6), 654–676.

Walker, D., Zimmerman, D. P., Cooper, J. E. (2002). *The constructivist leader* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College.

Walker, M. (2006). The theory and meta-theory of leadership: The important but contested nature of theory. In G. R. Goethals, & G. L. J. Sorenson (Eds.), *The quest for a general theory of leadership* (pp. 46–74). Chesterton, England: Edward Elgar Publications.

Wayne, S. J., & Ferris, G. R. (1990). Influence tactics, affect, and exchange quality in supervisor-subordinate interactions: A laboratory experiment and field study. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 75,* 487–499.

Yanow, D. (2006). Thinking interpretively: Philosophical presuppositions and the human sciences. In D. Yanow, & P. Schwartz-Shea (Eds.), *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn* (pp. 5–26). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Yanow, D., & Schwartz-Shea, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn.* Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

NOTES

1. The authors thank Richard Williams for reading and offering thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.
2. See Burrell & Morgan (1979) for a classic analytical scheme from organization theory, Deetz (1996) for a critique and counterproposal, and Bechara and Van de Ven (2007) for a more recent discussion in the management field. For discussions in reference to leadership, see Walker (2006) and Dachler (1988). Two relevant articles summarizing key philosophical distinctions in reference to qualitative research are Morgan and Smircich (1980) and Lincoln and Guba (2000). Riccucci (2010) offers a classification for public administration
3. Some scholars prefer the term *neopositivism* to postpositivism (see for example Alvesson and Sveningsson in Chapter 7). Postpositivism has also been used before to convey a movement *away* from positivism and *toward* postmodernism (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We follow Crotty's (1998) nomenclature to describe *postpositivism* as the contemporary (much more sophisticated and less rigid) version of logical positivism, which espouses a philosophy of science that some scholars have called "*critical realism*" (Laudan, 1990; Van de Ven, 2007) while still maintaining its modernist roots.
4. Boisot and McKelvey do not use the term *interpretivism*. But as modernism and postmodernism represent equivalent categories, the equivalent to *postpositivism* (an approach to science reflecting modernist assumptions) is *interpretivism* (an approach to science reflecting postmodern sensitivities) (Crotty, 1998; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). In our discussion, we have used the term *interpretivism* where Boisot and McKelvey may have used *postmodernism*, as we see appropriate.
5. *The Leadership Quarterly,* June 2010, Volume 21, Issue 3; *Leadership,* May 2010, Volume 6, Issue 2.
6. Both definitions were retrieved from the online Free Dictionary by Farlex (http://www.thefreedictionary.com), October 2011.
7. See, for example, the absence of journals favoring interpretivist research in the sampling frame of Glynn & Raffaelli's 2010 literature review.
8. Some scholars prefer to talk about *abduction* rather than *induction*, that is, a type of inference that results from engaging with the world and encountering an anomaly or inconsistency with the previous understanding or theory of the world (see Alvesson and Karreman, 2011, for a full discussion). Bechara & Van de Ven (2007) describe it as follows: "Abduction entails creative insight that resolves the anomaly if it were true. A conjecture developed through abductive inference represents a new plausible alternative to the status quo explanation of a given phenomenon in question" (p. 65).
9. Critical theory originated in the German Frankfurt School of philosophy's distinction between a traditional and a critical theory by the extent to which it sought to contribute to liberating human beings from any circumstance that obstructed their full development (Bohman, 2002). Today, there are many "broad, diverse and heterogeneous perspectives" on critical theory (Collinson, 2011, p. 181), but a common aim runs throughout: to produce scholarly

knowledge supporting thinking and actions that increase human freedom, and reduce oppression, manipulation and other forms of injustice (Bohman, 2002; Crotty, 1998).

10. The nomenclature in this book further illustrates the confusions. In our call to contributors, we proposed contrasting an "entity" and a "construction-ist" perspective, thus acknowledging the presence of *relational leadership* approaches in both types of scholarship. Making labels more evocative of their ontologies would require calling them something like the "realist" and the "constructionist" perspectives, or evoking their epistemic stances, the post-positivist and interpretivist perspectives. Because the entity-constructionist distinction appears in most chapters, we have continued to use it (in the Introduction, in this chapter, and in the Conclusion) to differentiate the two paradigmatic stances that characterize the field. Furthermore, the reader should be aware that following Uhl-Bien's 2006 original distinction, some contributors use "entity" versus "relational" instead of "entity" versus "constructionist." We hope to at least clarify the reasons underlying these confusions—thus bringing further clarity to the discussion.

11. Of course, there are also many more important distinctions within these two "blocks" which are quite relevant to appreciating the choices researchers make. The extent of this complexity surfaces by studying other classifications. For example, Bechara and Van de Ven (2007) and Walker (2006) discuss four philosophical approaches to science rather than two: positivism, critical realism, and relativism. In reference to our scheme, despite subtle differences, the assumptions of the first two are more consistent with modernism and postpositivism, and those in the second two with postmodernism and interpretivism. These are indeed important differences worth exploring.

12. Deetz (1996) argues that the objective-subjective distinction proposed here and in other schemes such as Burrell and Morgan's (1979) is "misleading" because it "reproduces a neopositivist philosophy of science and obscures the nature of other research programs" (p. 194). We agree that this and other distinctions should be viewed as "a way of focusing attention rather than as a means of classification" (p. 191). At the same time, as will become clear, we find the distinction helpful to elucidate why entity and constructionist leadership scholars have had such a hard time understanding one another.

13. Walker (2006) refers to Lakoff's distinction (1992) between an objectivist view that conceives of thought as "the mechanical manipulation of abstract symbols," (p 64) and an "experientialist" view that links our experience to "thought structures," thus arguing that "thought is *embodied*" (p. 65). This dimension merits reflection for readers interested in further exploring the philosophy of science.

14. There are multiple taxonomies of the interpretivist tradition. We follow Ya-now and Schwartz-Shea's (2006) view of interpretivism as an epistemic stance encompassing a spectrum of methods ranging from descriptive to critical. Often, these interpretivist methods are mixed together in empirical research, as in the case of Ospina, Foldy, El Hadidy, Dodge, Hofmann-Pinilla, and Su's chapter in this volume. Other scholars use the term "interpretivism" differently. For example, Schwandt (2000) presents interpretivism as one of three epistemic stances for qualitative inquiry, along with hermeneutics and social constructionism. Some classifications ignore the construct of interpretivism altogether. For example, Lincoln and Guba (2000) classify non-positivist postmodernist qualitative paradigms into critical theory, constructivism (including constructionist assumptions), and participatory action research; and Boisot & McKelvey (2010) use "postmodernism" to refer to both the world-view and its manifestations in research.

15. This subjectivist position can be viewed as an "idealist" position [in contrast to the "realist" and "critical realist" (objectivist) positions of positivism and postpositivism in the modernist stance, and to the "experientialist" position of constructionism in the postmodernist stance.] (See also footnote 11.)

16. Leonardi and Barley (2010) offer a classification of five ways in which "constructivists" (their language) have contributed to advance knowledge of the social construction of technology. By failing to distinguish constructivism from constructionism they obscure important differences between the two poles of their continuum. A similar problem occurs in discussions in other fields, including leadership (e.g., see this treatment in the various classifications reported by Walker, 2006).

17. Entity scholars who fully espouse the philosophical assumptions of logical positivism are less likely to be concerned with the relational dimensions of leadership. Hence, while logical positivism represents a variation of the modernist worldview, in this discussion we consider only entity leadership scholars who espouse a postpositivist, critical realist ontology.

18. Constructivism has been systematically applied in the study of leadership in other disciplines such as education (e.g., Walker, Zimmerman & Cooper, 2002), although it is worth noting that in this field, like in others, the problem of confusing constructivism and constructionism may also be widespread.

19. There is, nevertheless, a debate among postmodern interpretivist scholars around how to address the researcher's subjectivity and his/ her distance to the "subjects" of research (e.g., Harrington, 2000). The more extreme the postmodernist stance of the researcher, the more s/he will challenge the possibility or desirability of any distance, and the more moderate the postmodern stance, the more s/he will emphasize a social science aspiration to differentiate the perspectives of the researcher and the researched. The moderate postmodern position moves closer to the modernist epistemological assumptions of postpositivism's critical realism, while maintaining a subjectivist position at the ontological level.

20. See footnote 7 in this chapter for an introduction and brief characterization of critical theory. Note that, despite the use of the same term ("critical"), "critical theory" refers to something completely different from the notion of "critical realism" discussed in reference to postpositivism's challenge of some of the assumptions of logical positivism.

21. Researchers who ascribe fully to a postmodernist project do not believe in "causality," "science," or "theory" as discussed here and below. Most constructionist leadership researchers nevertheless take a more moderate postmodernist position which aspires to produce scholarly knowledge and which takes into consideration such notions.

22. Bruner (1986) refers to the "abstract mode" as the "logico-scientific" mode of knowing, suggesting a separation between science and the humanities that is too literal. (He associates the narrative mode with "poetry, storytelling and art"). We use the distinction between the two modes as metaphor and prefer "abstract" to the "logico-scientific" label because the latter evokes a modernist, "universal" view of science associated with positivism that is too narrow. The metaphors of the window and the lantern, and abstract and narrative ways of knowing respectively are helpful to better understand the postpositivist/interpretivist distinction between *two approaches to science* and scholarly empirical research.

23. Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2006) further describe this view as follows:

    For interpretive researchers, concepts are embedded within a literature, becoming part of the historical background that forms the context for scholarly thinking; to attempt to specify them once and for all, as universal constructs, violates interpretive presuppositions about the historical locatedness of scholars and actors. (p. xvii)

24. This is what Gaskell and Bauer (2000) call "indication of method," drawing on the analogy of medical concern with "indication of treatment": A certain medicine is well indicated for a certain condition but not for another, for which other medicines are better indicated. Some choices at the level of research methods and procedures are better indicated for particular perspectives, theories and problems and not for others (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000, p. 337). In Chapter 9 Ospina and colleagues describe their efforts to design their constructionist research around this consistency. Likewise, in Chapter 15 of this volume Fairhurst suggests checking the extent to which researchers match the ontological units (based on understandings of leadership) with the observational units and the analytical units in their study.

25. There are also variations within interpretivism. More or less adherence to a full postmodernist project influences an interpretivist's view of rigor, so that the more postmodernist the researcher, the farther away his/her practice will be from the conventional (positivist) standards of scientific rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

26. Full discussions of variance versus process theories in organization and management studies include Abbott (1988), Abell (1987), Mohr (1982), and Tsoukas (1989).

27. For a discussion of the notions of "positionality" and "reflexivity" in various traditions of interpretive research, see Herr and Anderson (2005); Naples (2003); Ospina, Dodge, Foldy, and Hofmann-Pinilla (2008); and Shea-Schwartz (2006).

PART I

THEORIZING THE PRACTICE OF RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP