



Organisational Rhetoric and Leadership in Agile: A Wittgensteinian Inquiry

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Organisational Rhetoric and Leadership in Agile: A Wittgensteinian Inquiry

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Abstract

The focal point of this research has been the unpicking of reported experience versus rhetoric around a neo-bureaucratic approach to project management, referred to as “Agile”. This monolithic entity consists of many distinct methodologies, with an overlapping conceptual core. An understanding of Agile discourse is established through the data analysed as an object of comparison. The research findings speak to the space of legitimated expression and action, the depth grammar, of Agile organisation. The research was undertaken from a perspective of leadership agnosticism, in that the term was sceptically treated and included only in an emic capacity.

The research is a coding-based analysis which runs across three strands of linguistic “metafunction”, as defined by Michael Halliday’s “Systemic Functional Grammar”. A total of 35 Agile experience reports were analysed through this process. The codes derived in this first pass were aggregated into groupings based on the perceived relation of events captured, termed manifestations. These manifestations were then themselves aggregated into a smaller set of categories. In practice, this meant a reduction from 138 codes, grouping similar exemplars, to 16 manifestations and then 6 categories. These categories establish the core concepts around which the depth grammar is presented through the first discussion chapter.

This research has two primary contributions to Agile and another relating to leadership. In leadership studies, this research stands as an early empirical demonstration of the value in leadership agnosticism. Relating to Agile, a much-needed description of the focal points of organisational talk in Agile practice is provided. Furthermore, it is argued that concepts of leadership had a significant role

to play in disguising the continued operation of power in Agile contexts. This thesis, then, represents a contribution to Agile literature by providing a fuller exploration of the empirical challenges facing Agile’s idealised “Santa’s workshop” or “Hollywood/Disneyland” template.

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On this note of new understandings I am also thankful for the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, and I suppose by necessity the earlier; I cannot say how this thesis would look had *Philosophical Investigations* been left as unpublished, untranslated notes. Finally, I am thankful to those organisational scholars who have pursued an agenda against leadership, who create the space for others to push against this tired rhetoric in business.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution which Strathclyde has made to my career and to the completion of this thesis. Each of my three main engagements with this institution have been formative in different ways, largely because of the fantastic people who work and have worked there. The funding which has enabled the completion of the work ensured that I could focus my full attention on the research. Another organisation which has played an important role is the Agile Alliance, who brought together and made accessible the experience reports which comprise the main form of data used in the analysis.

I feel that the various mentors I have had through my time in the world of work have also been highly influential in my understanding of organisational issues and for this I owe them acknowledgement here. In my personal life, I would like to thank my friends and family for their tolerance, their genuine interest and their support. My parents, and my partner especially, have always been there for me, encouraging me to be my best self, creating ripples of further positivity.

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Glossary of Agile Terminology

A very brief glossary of Agile terms and their purpose when employed is offered here to provide the reader with a reference point in the following discussion of organisational practices:

Agile Methodologies – The group of project management methods which are collectively referred to as “Agile” in industry and which are associated with the Agile manifesto. Examples here include Scrum, Extreme Programming (XP), Kanban and Crystal, though this list is not exhaustive (Abrahamsson, Conboy and Wang, 2009; Beck *et al.*, 2001; Williams, 2010).

Coach – A figure, often but not always a consultant, brought in to facilitate Agile adoption by providing support to teams working on transitioning to the method. The nature of this work varies widely, but is broadly understandable as providing teaching around key principles and acting to disseminate this teaching to the organisation at large (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 37; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2011, p. 74; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7).

Extreme Programming – Also called XP, see Agile methodologies, Scrum.

Manifesto – Refers to the Agile manifesto discussed in the preceding sub-section; a document which codified the growing number of Agile methodologies and presented a united articulation of practice (Beck *et al.*, 2001).

Product Owner – Another term which originates in Scrum, but which sees use more broadly. A managerial figure responsible for primary input into the project planning process by acting as the voice of the customer, working with the team to prioritise tasks and establish the higher-level goals which will guide the teams efforts in their

sprints. Analogous to, and is still sometimes called, project manager (Medinilla, 2012, p. 129; van Waardenburg and van Vliet, 2013, p. 2162).

Scrum – One of the most widely-adopted Agile methodologies, along with XP, this approach provides a distinct set of roles, terminologies and guidelines which have been adopted into other incarnations of Agile also (Appelo, 2011, pp. 213-214; Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, pp. 88-89).

Scrum Master – A mid-level management role which originates in the Scrum methodology (Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017; Sutherland, 2014). This figure is intended to act as a focal point for self-organising teams, providing them with a clear route to removing organisational barriers and driving improvements in line with the method. In this way, a scrum master can also be a coach for a small number of teams. Often these figures have no direct authority over team members and instead are influential in the determination of Agile processes (Appelo, 2011, pp. 207-208; van Waardenburg and van Vliet, 2013, pp. 2162-2163).

Sprint – A period of time during which an Agile team conducts focused work. Known in Scrum as a sprint, and as “delivery cycles”, “iterations” or some similar term in other methods (Appelo, 2011, p. 23; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 97).

Waterfall – Traditional project management methods, as embodied by the Gantt chart. Named for the way that tasks proceed in a linear fashion, with each key stage “cascading” into the next, in contrast with the cyclical, simultaneous approach associated with Agile (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, pp. 96-98; Sutherland, 2014).

A Note on References to Wittgenstein

Referential conventions for pointing to the work of Wittgenstein were adopted in line with the work of Marie McGinn (2013, pp. XIV-XV). The following elements are key to understanding this convention:

PI – Abbreviation for Philosophical Investigations, the first part of *Philosophical Investigations* revised fourth edition, edited by P.M.S. Hacker and J. Schulte, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and J. Schulte (Wittgenstein, 2009)

PPF – *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment*, the second part of *PI*, published in the same text

The text of *PI* and *PPF* are split into a long series of numbered remarks. The symbol “§”, followed by a number is used to denote the specific remark which is being referenced. A page number is also provided.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The study of leadership has become a major industry and avenue of academic impact (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 33-34; Parker, 2018, pp. 208-209; Tourish and Barge, 2010). The issue is that this concept seems to stand more as an ambiguous omni-phenomena, capable of referring to an incredibly wide range of arrangements if not reified in a particular form by the researcher (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, pp. 374-375; Kelly, 2008, pp. 773-774). This capacity for broad employment means that leadership acts as a colonizing force within organising discourse, crowding out variable terminology in favour of variously flavoured “leaderships” (Alvesson, 2019; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 2-6; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211).

Agile, a project management methodology which will be further explored through sub-section 1.1.1, represents this tendency perfectly in the simultaneous assertion of leadership-based and self-organising discourses to articulate organising practices (Abernathy, 2009; Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017). It is argued through this research that the reliance on notions of leadership results in the discursively concealed continuation of conventional power dynamics in the firm. This continuation is facilitated through leadership notions acting to reassert the importance of executive actors in the management process, even as it ostensibly de-emphasises them. However, the challenge facing the sceptical researcher is not just finding an appropriate context, but also such an approach.

This thesis describes a novel research project, aimed at understanding and describing the organizational practices of Agile teams openly through a specific commitment to a position of leadership agnosticism (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 379;

Alvesson, 2019, p. 11; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 133-134) and a Wittgensteinian investigative rationale (Wittgenstein, 2009). The agnostic position was adopted to ensure that it was contextually employed participant concepts of leadership, and not researcher generated etic notions, which were surfaced through study (Costantino, 2008, p. 119). The agnostic approach was facilitated using discursive methods, specifically systemic functional grammar (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Matthiessen and Halliday, 1997), realised practically through an eclectic coding-based analysis which spoke to elements of process, identification and broad content (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 30-33; Saldaña, 2021, pp. 96-109, 177-186).

The research is essentially realised through three acts of overlapping review. The first section, comprised of the introduction to leadership and systematic review, stands as a traditional review by providing overview of the topic and mainstream treatments in the specific contexts. The second review problematises the concept of leadership, which was shown to be relevant in the preceding review, strongly and then provides the reader (and author) with an indication of how to proceed in the light of this problematisation to still perform meaningful research. The third review, which is a review of empirical material i.e. the analysis of experience reports, then brings these two contrasting elements together. It achieves this through a sceptical, yet flexible, analysis of participants engagements with the task of organisation, specifically around the actions which are viewed as, or related to, leadership.

The analysis itself uses techniques of coding and aggregation to inform the generation of interpretive theoretical concepts, referred to as “objects of comparison”, which are intended to shed new light on the processes and ideas involved in the enactment of organization. In practice, this translates to the generation of 138 codes or “exemplars”

from the accounts analysed, aggregated into 16 groupings called manifestations which were again reduced to 6 core categories. The 6 categories finally established were: “Agile Requires Organisational Change”; “Push Towards Employee Ownership”; “Agile Regulates Leadership Practice”; “The Dark Art of Control”; “Tension in the Role of Coach”; and “Enforcing Politicised Orthodoxy”. These categories are taken, in the discussion chapters, to be indicative of the key discursive focal points in Agile organisational work and were used to generate a depth grammar of organising talk in Agile.

The implication of these findings and discussions is that issues about the role of leadership in the maintenance of power structures are highlighted. The process of Wittgensteinian investigation enabled the researcher to arrive at the conclusions which inform the core argument and contribution of this thesis; leadership, especially specific notions such as “servant leadership”, play a significant role in explaining the continuing impact and importance of managerial actors. The concept thus provides a significant avenue for the retention of executive power in ostensibly “self-organising” contexts.

The original intention for this research project as proposed was to undertake ethnographic research with Agile practitioners, responding to a perceived appetite for greater insight into the complexities of the Agile experience, so to speak (Barroca *et al.*, 2015; Gregory *et al.*, 2016). There were two firms partnered in the research proposal who were interested in pursuing this research. Unfortunately, one of the firms in question collapsed and was no longer able to participate, while the primary contact in the second project partner moved to a different firm and no suitable alternative or handover process could be instituted. As such, both the method and the data source

were thrown into question near the start of the second year of the project. The end result was that no further embodied empirical access could be secured in time and, thus, the method and the data source required adjustment on the basis of what was feasible and available, respectively. The loss here was substantial, in that the perceived benefits of the Wittgensteinian approach rested, in part, on the fluid integration of materiality and physicality into the analysis of depth grammar.

However, the interpretive process itself was still implementable with the new dataset of experience reports, albeit the data would be exclusively textual and produced from participants' reflections.

Empirical data in the third review, as a result, instead comes in the form of experience reports; these retrospective accounts of practitioners' engagements with Agile in context form a broad collection of participant diaries (Wirfs-Brock, 2013). These reports "usually tell positive stories of problems solved", and so have some limitations as a source of complete information (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 93). Thus, though filtered, they are passed through the community of practice itself for editing. This is taken to mean that the reports are still reflective of organization as it is understood by these Agile practitioners, in that the documents exist in part to "provide guidelines".

Gregory *et al.* note that, while "industrial experience reports have limitations" and may primarily stand as "snapshots of successful practice", academic contributions are often limited in their "relevance to practice" and so these can still fill an important gap (2016, p. 93).

The following chapter will introduce the various key concepts to be employed throughout this thesis. Section 1.1 serves to explore the research focus and the rationale for the selection of this focal area. Sub-section 1.1.1 introduces the research

context and associated data, that is to say the experience report. Sub section 1.1.2 gives the reader some important historical context on the emergence of leadership theory. The next section introduces the key philosophical notions which guide the conduct and design of the research method. Section 1.3 covers the development of research questions for the project, while section 1.4 concludes the chapter by providing a thesis overview. In this final section, each chapter will be briefly summarised.

1.1 Research Focus and Rationale

The foundational interest which drives this thesis is the notion of leadership agnosticism and the further development of an empirical basis for this area of research. The details of leadership agnosticism will be unpacked further through the leadership literature review. However, for now it is worth providing some summary. Leadership agnosticism is an emerging body of research which looks to critically interrogate and challenge the centrality of all “leadership discourse” in the modern expression of organizational practices (Alvesson, 2019, p. 11; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 132-133; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211). This move is seen as going beyond existing critical positions on leadership, in that it precludes the formation of some “leadership-as” alternative which retains the centrality of the concept (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 4-5; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 9). One contribution of this thesis is to provide coherence to this emerging body of literature. To this effect, broad commitments of leadership agnosticism are described which articulate a perceived core, some “family resemblance”, in these critical publications. These movements are shown here, first, to provide a clear articulation of leadership agnosticism:

1. Leadership in itself is an empty signifier which is used in a wide variety of often mutually exclusive ways

2. Leadership, as a concept, is problematic as it crowds out more specific or less controversial terms
3. Most leadership research is complicit in perpetuating these issues by continuing to valorise or otherwise over-emphasise the notion

The initial aim, then, for the leadership agnostic is to treat leadership as this empty signifier, giving it no special emphasis which is not placed by the participants themselves. The fruit of this treatment is significant assurance that the discursive emphasis on leadership which is addressed is emic, that is to say reflective of the participants concepts, rather than etic, or based on the researchers own concepts (Fetterman, 2008, p. 249). Furthermore, the leadership agnostic looks to challenge the existing leadership discourse by highlighting its substitutes and shortfalls; the overall goal is this unsettling of leadership discourse towards some alternative, rather than simply offering critique of what usage there is (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 379; Alvesson, 2019, p. 11; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211).

Considering the aforementioned focus on linguistic matters, a systematic understanding of language was needed to rationalize the research process. It was here, by way of Simon Kelly's research, that Wittgenstein's work around "language games" was found to be deeply informative (Kelly, 2008; Wittgenstein, 2009). This approach to language conceptualizes communication as a "language game", undertaken successfully between those who share the relevant "forms of life" necessary to provide the required rules (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 49, PI §97). This understanding of language was sensitized, in practice, through the co-application of Halliday's systemic functional grammar (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). This rigorous, contemporary approach to discourse analysis encourages minute attention

to detail with respects to the functional elements of semantics. In other words, this theory provides a diverse toolbox to describe and unpack language use as it relates to meaning, in very specific terminology.

Wittgenstein contributes more than the linguistic framing of this project; his work is deeply intertwined with the epistemology of the research also. The nature of this connection will be expanded significantly in the following section and in the methodology chapter. However, it is important to offer some description of this impact here, for clarity. The key concept to understand here is the notion of “objects of comparison” and their application in a process of interpretive inquiry (2009, p. 56, PI §130-132). The model for this process is Wittgenstein’s own investigations of language; just as *Philosophical Investigations* is partially concerned with the description of “language games” and such as useful understandings which aid in describing language, this thesis focuses on the descriptive power of certain organizational concepts. Thus, the focus is not the search for a verifiable and generalisable fact, but rather the composition of a useful “object of comparison” which will help to describe organization in Agile. This gives credence to the statement that the thesis is grounded in an interpretivist epistemology.

Framing this research in Wittgensteinian terms, there are two primary “problems” which are the focus of the project, though they share a great degree of family resemblance. The first problem is that of agnosticism; whether is it possible to describe organizational practices without reference to the notion of leadership and without encouraging the use of such terms (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 10-11; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 37-39; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211). The second is one arising from Agile itself; a lack of clarity around the actual and intended organizational practices of

Agile teams (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, pp. 92-96; Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, pp. 426-427; Moe, Dingsøy and Kvangardsnes, 2009, pp. 8-9). These issues share a degree of family resemblance in that they both centre on the contextual, linguistic aspects of organizational practices. Indeed, as will be discussed in the following section, it was observed that various notions of leadership contribute to this confusion.

1.1.1 Context – Agile

Agile is a holistically divergent approach towards the management and delivery of projects which stands in contrast to the traditional model, best visualized through the Gantt chart and commonly referred to as “waterfall planning” (Hoda *et al.*, 2017, p. 792; Sutherland, 2014, pp. 3-5; Williams, 2010). The term holistic is key here, as Agile relates to much more than simply the planning method used to break up work into deliverable packets; as identified by Dybå and Dingsøy there are significant departures from traditional methods in a range of areas, including communication and organizational structure (2008, p. 836). In addition, Agile is often discussed variously as a set of tools or practices, a mindset, a method or a philosophy (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016; Dingsøy *et al.*, 2012; Willeke and Marsee, 2016).

Part of the reason for the aforementioned heterogeneity is the simple fact that “Agile” is not one monolithic entity, but rather a label for a collection of different “methods” which have been emerging since the mid-1990’s (Williams, 2010, p. 3). These distinct methods, such as Scrum, extreme programming (called XP in most literature), lean software development and others, were all effectively “banded” together through the publication of “The Agile Manifesto” in 2001 (Beck *et al.*, 2001; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008, p. 835). The manifesto was written when a group of software developers, self-

identified “organisational anarchists” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 7), gathered at an impromptu conference in February of 2001 to discuss emerging alternative “light-weight” methodologies which were becoming more prevalent in the industry (Abrahamsson, Conboy and Wang, 2009; Beck *et al.*, 2001; Williams, 2010).

This meeting has gone on to attain almost biblical significance for a group of practitioners who are broadly united by their interest in what was, at the time, called the “agile methodology movement”. The reach of this agile movement has been fairly widespread (Dingsøy *et al.*, 2012, p. 1213); in businesses with developers it is not uncommon to see non-operational areas such as marketing or HR departments take part in Agile transformations also. There are even governments engaging with the concept hoping to overhaul their operational departments in IT and beyond (Howey, 2016; Legault, 2016; Tune, 2017). Despite these ambiguities, Dingsøy *et al.* offer, through their overview of agile research, several formal definitions of Agile (Dingsøy *et al.*, 2012, p. 1214). These have been included in a table on the next page (Table 1).

One might think of Agile through the specific “manifestation” employed, the aforementioned methods such as Scrum, extreme programming (XP) et cetera. However, the idea of Agile is perhaps best understood, at least in general terms, through the content of the manifesto; the relationship with the principles and values outlined there is thought, by some, to be more revealing than the choice of specific methodology. The fact is these approaches are “polymorphous, multidimensional, and highly exposed to diverse interpretation and application”; methodologies are “rarely, if ever applied in textbook formats” (Conboy, 2009; Gale, 2012, in Drury-Grogan *et al.*, 2017, p. 249). These values and principles have been summarised in the form of two tables (Appendices A and B), but are essentially a set of four guiding axioms of

priority, the values, and twelve statements on practice, the principles (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 35).

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Definition of Agile</i>
<i>Henderson-Sellers and Serour (2005)</i>	agility involves both the ability to adapt to different changes and to refine and fine-tune development processes as needed
<i>Lee and Xia (2010)</i>	the software team’s capability to efficiently and effectively respond to and incorporate user requirement changes during the project life cycle
<i>Conboy (2009, p. 340)</i>	the continued readiness “to rapidly or inherently create change, proactively or reactively embrace change, and learn from change while contributing to perceived customer value (economy, quality, and simplicity), through its collective components and relationships with its environment.”

Table 1 -Formal definitions of Agile (Dingsøy et al., 2012, p. 1214)

Many of the principles relate specifically to practices around software, for example value 2 is “Working software over comprehensive documentation” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 29) and so are not so relevant to the focal points of this study, though they may have interesting organisational implications to be unpacked elsewhere, at a later date.

However, there are several principles and values which have potentially interesting organizational implications in the present study: Value 1, “Individuals and interactions over processes and tools”, which is meant to suggest an organisation that places “skilled individuals” and a relational, distributed and organic approach at the focal centre of the business (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 29); principle 5, “Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done”, which is explained by the authors’ as a call for managers to “trust their staff to make the decisions... [that] they’re paid to know about” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp. 30-31); principle 11, “The best architectures, requirements and designs emerge from self-organizing teams”, through which the “anarchists” behind the

manifesto encourage readers to cultivate and seek emergent properties arising from “self-organising teams in which the interactions are high and the process rules are few” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 33); and in a similar vein principal 12, “At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly”, which drives the authors to remark that “Trust in people, believing that individual capability and group interaction are key to success extends to trusting teams to monitor and improve their own development processes” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 33). Thus, one can see through this selection of principles and values alone, without even addressing the rhetoric which is threaded throughout the manifesto as a whole, that there is much said about organisation, about the distribution of responsibilities, autonomous teams and the role of exceptional individuals.

Agile was selected as the context for the research due to this perceptible heterogeneity within specific bounds, the notable, yet practically questionable, emphasis placed on shared leadership in the literature and the radical shifts called for at the organisational level (Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016, p. 639; Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, p. 427; Moe, Dingsøy and Dybå, 2009, pp. 25-26). The source of data chosen to facilitate this investigation of organization, as it was contextually resolved in Agile, is a collection of empirical accounts known as “experience reports”. These practitioner-authored reflections are solicited as part of an initiative undertaken by the Agile Alliance (Wirfs-Brock, 2013).

This source of data was chosen as it offered insight into a wide range of Agile contexts, ensuring the sketches produced were those of a well-travelled tourist. In other words, these reports were seen as a rich opportunity to gain empirical insight

into a range of Agile firms, while the research remained within the scope of a constrained project, as all theses necessarily are. It is argued that these accounts represent empirical data of an order relatable to participant diaries, or online ethnography. The key difference here is that the accounts are second hand to the scholar. However, the provenance and publication context of the accounts is understood by way of the ample documentation available through the Agile Alliance (Wirfs-Brock, 2013). In exact details, there were thirty-five reports analysed in the completion of this research. Though there were some overlaps in authorship, each account was written by a distinct team. The chosen reports were selected on the basis of the abstracts; the full database of reports made available by the Agile Alliance was checked, with all “organisational” reports analysed. Those reports not selected focused on more technical aspects of Agile methodologies, for example coding practices or user-experience insights.

Given this approach, the range of contexts involved in the research is extremely broad. These reports come to the researcher by way of large, recognisable firms like British Telecom and Vistaprint, as well as effectively anonymous smaller firms. There are reports authored by government contractors, consultants, educators and television executives. Care has been taken to introduce these accounts properly through the findings; writings are attributed to their author, who is placed in their respective context to provide insight into how and where the text was produced. This helps in the push to ensure that this diversity of contexts is not lost in the making of general comment. The aim of this study is not to show that all Agile organization is the same, or that it all follows the specified pattern. Rather, the aim is to illustrate some observed resemblances and common struggles which can act as the starting point for a more contextually sensitive discussion.

The type of discussion outlined previously is important because, despite the generally reflective disposition of Agile practitioners, the literature continues to express these organisational issues in simplistic, often leadership-related, terms which do not reflect the empirical accounts (Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016, p. 636; Hoda and Murugesan, 2016a, p. 248; Jovanović *et al.*, 2017, p. 178). The context of this research, then, is not just the empirical realm of the experience report. Rather, the work is also directed towards Agile scholarship. The purpose here is to unsettle the language of Agile research and direct scholars away by example from potentially empty “ready-made phrases”, such as “shared leadership” (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 14-15).

1.1.1.a Agile Manufacturing and Other “Agilities”

Agile project management as an area derives from the Agile manifesto and the lightweight software development methodologies which preceded this document. The history of these lightweight methodologies is one of reference to manufacturing improvement, but also of problem solving in the context of software development specifically (Beck *et al.*, 2001; Hohl *et al.*, 2018; Zaitsev, Gal and Tan, 2018). Concurrent to this strand of Agile has been the emergence of a similarly named but entirely distinct notion of agile manufacturing, enterprise agility or business agility (Booth, 1996; Jin-Hai, Anderson and Harrison, 2003; Tseng and Lin, 2011). These latter areas are not part of Agile project management theory and are not treated as related, apart from the fact that both draw on existing discourses of continuous improvement as a foundation (Conboy and Fitzgerald, 2004; Conboy, 2009, p. 331; Kettunen, 2009). In fact, agile enterprise or agile manufacturing predates the Agile manifesto, but the notion of enterprise agility does not form a point of reference for this document or the bodies of work drawing on it (Beck *et al.*, 2001; Hohl *et al.*, 2018).

Of course, there are similarities in the methods and the concerns they address. Certainly, both Agile manufacturing and Agile project management have a focus on the notion of adaptability or flexibility in the pursuit of customer value (Kettunen, 2009; Sanchez and Nagi, 2001; Yusuf, Sarhadi and Gunasekaran, 1999). Nevertheless, these areas of contribution are siloed and in neither relation nor substantial conversation with one another (Conboy, 2009, pp. 329-331). There is literature which connects the two, but this stands almost as the exception which proves the rule; the fusion is considered notable by scholars and is framed in the context of “What can Agile software learn from Agile software manufacturing”, suggesting these conversations are not normally ongoing (Conboy and Fitzgerald, 2004; Kettunen, 2009).

Agile manufacturing has little to do with the values, principles and practices described through the Agile manifesto and the subject specific literature published by practitioners. That being said, there is the scope for further research to investigate the compatible lessons and parallels that may exist between these two relatable but separate domains of contribution (Conboy and Fitzgerald, 2004; Conboy, 2009). Such a review of agile manufacturing is outside the scope of this project though and it will suffice to say that the two bodies of work are not currently well connected (Conboy and Fitzgerald, 2004; Conboy, 2009, pp. 330-331; Kettunen, 2009). One notable finding from the systematic review related to this is that scholars of Agile project management will specifically use the term “manufacturing” as an exclusion criterion when engaged in systematic reviews (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008; Zaitsev, Gal and Tan, 2018).

Confusing this discussion further is the fact that Agile from the software domain is now being translated into some manufacturing environments, giving rise to a second conception of Agile manufacturing which understands itself to be derivative of the Agile manifesto strand (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017). However, this is a later development and is not representative of the earlier, pre-existing strand of agile manufacturing (Booth, 1996; Sanchez and Nagi, 2001; Yusuf, Sarhadi and Gunasekaran, 1999). Regardless of this mixing, one can still clearly differentiate the strand of agile enterprise from that of Agile software through aspects such as the tools and values emphasised; Agile software recurses back to the manifesto and the values set out in this document, the language used reflects this and the tools referenced are uniquely associated with this form of Agile. For example, there is no notion of sprints described by scholars of agile enterprise literature, while sprints are a central practice of Agile software projects (Gunasekaran *et al.*, 2019; Kettunen, 2009; Yusuf, Sarhadi and Gunasekaran, 1999).

1.1.2 Context – Leadership

The following section looks to discuss the history of leadership research, with a specific focus on the emergence of the frames of leadership discussed later on in the systematic review chapter as being of relevance. To outline here, those frames are charismatic and transformational leadership, servant leadership and various distributed leaderships. There will also be a situating discussion which focuses on the concept in general, adopting a historical perspective informed mainly by the work on Keith Grint.

Indeed, starting with this historical view, one can see that some scholars trace the notion of leadership back very far indeed; Grint talks about “leadership” playing a crucial role in the “quest for survival and domination” all the way back to “Sargon of

Akkad” and the other contemporaneous cradles of agricultural humanity (Grint, 2011, p. 4). In this way, Grint then identifies the roots of leadership “study” in the works of Sun Tzu, Plato and Indian political philosophy, and moves forwards there to modern leadership works through the likes of Machiavelli’s *“The Prince”* (2011, pp. 4-8).

Thomas Carlyle is widely regarded, and recognised in Grint’s account, as the first contributor in this field of “modern” leadership studies (Bolden *et al.*, 2011, p. 141; Fairhurst, 2007, p. vii; Grint, 2011, p. 8). His work on the “great man” theory, originally published in 1840, took a similarly historical perspective and, through a lens which placed great emphasis on the words and deeds of notable individuals, devised a theory around these looming presences (Carlyle, 1993).

Grint suggests that this valorising tendency drifted off with the move towards a more systems and process-oriented way of thinking, precipitating a move towards the kind of bureaucratic management approach described by Weber in his research (Waters and Waters, 2015). The search to further rationalise these large, often inefficient structures was realised through contributions like Taylor’s Scientific management research, which Grint identifies in the process of leadership theory development by way of the “knowledge leadership” provided by these scientific managers (Grint, 2011, pp. 8-9). In the midst of this shift towards rationality, one can also find the groundwork of more participative/collectivist models being laid through the likes of Mary Parker Follett, in her response to scientific management and her work on power-with (Bolden *et al.*, 2011, pp. 29-30; Melé and Rosanas, 2003).

The subsequent development of leadership theory from this point of contemporarily relevant origin, that is to say from the work of Carlyle, has been substantial, with a vast back-catalogue of perspectives developing all through the 20th and 21st century

(Bolden *et al.*, 2011). This development has been charted out on the timeline provided, which shows the emergence of key theories. The most relevant theories for this study have been made bold for visibility, but many other areas are included also. Following this timeline there will be a brief account of each relevant theory's development.

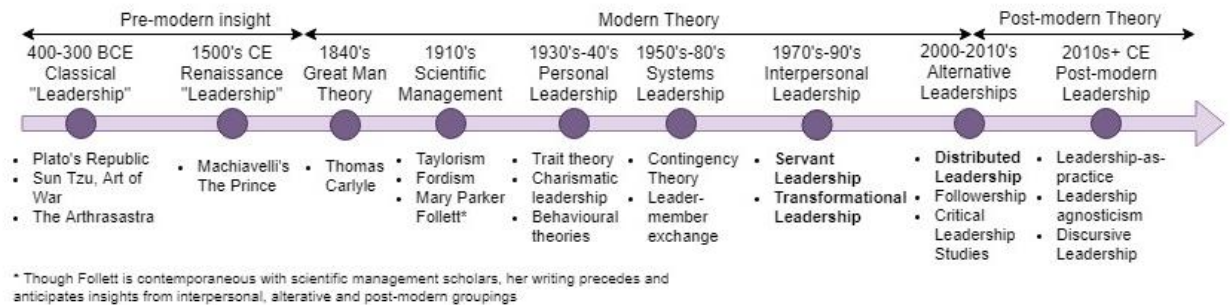


Figure 1 - Leadership Theory Timeline, author's own, drawn from Grint (2011) and Bolden (2011)

When discussing transformational leadership, one must consider Bernard Bass; for while Burns may have pioneered research in the field, it is Bass who emerges in contemporary times as the more prominent influencer between the aforementioned founding figures (Banks *et al.*, 2017; Díaz-Sáenz, 2011, pp. 299-300; Judge and Piccolo, 2004). In fact, Burns himself identifies Bass as the “driving force” behind transformational leadership in the foreword to the second edition of Bass’ book, *Transformational Leadership* (Riggio and Bass, 2006, p. viii; Van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999).

Bass’s paper, *Leadership: Good, Better, Best* (1985b), was released the in same year as his seminal text, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (1985a), and lays out in shorter form his initial conception of transformational leadership. A transformational leader is one who encourages employees to “transcend their own self-interests” and thus “work “ridiculous” hours” (Bass, 1985a, p. 29). The transformational leader is cast as a paternal figure who was “like a benevolent father”, who is “firm” and yet encourages and protects their followers (Bass, 1995, pp. 467-

468). If one looks to contemporary research, one sees this same characterisation is carried through to current work, though the explicit gendering which Bass engaged in has been muted (Deinert *et al.*, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2011).

There is much commonality between Bass' early and later publications in terms of the ideas presented also. One key difference which can be singled out in a comparison between the ideas of Bass in 1985 and in his later 2006 publication, however, is the landscape into which he is publishing; in the intervening period, neo-charismatic (including transformational) leadership theories had become something of a new orthodoxy in leadership studies (Antonakis, 2017, pp. 58-59; Díaz-Sáenz, 2011, p. 299; Dinh *et al.*, 2014).

Servant leadership actually was codified before transformational, but doesn't rise to prominence till later on around the millennium (Dinh *et al.*, 2014, p. 42). The theory was first put forward by Robert Greenleaf, a former management practitioner, in an essay or manifesto of sorts entitled "*The Servant as Leader*" (1970). However, it took a number of years before the approach was recognised by academics and included in the pantheon of theory, such that a 2013 systematic review paper refers to the perspective as "new leadership theory" (Parris and Peachey, 2013).

The core ideas of servant leadership rest in the notion of "service to others", but the idea itself as defined in Greenleaf's text is somewhat philosophical, as opposed to being functional or directly practicable from the text without interpretation (Parris and Peachey, 2013; van Dierendonck, 2011). The body of literature around this concept serves then, in large part, to provide these more concrete details (van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1229). The explicitly follower-oriented, service-based rhetoric is seen as aligned with the movement towards "post-heroic" leadership models which were a reaction

to, and rejection of, dominant leader-centric perspectives, such as the charismatic and transformational frames (Liu, 2019; Xu and Wang, 2020).

Gronn can perhaps be considered the first notable contributor to the body of work around distributed leadership. He defines leadership as “a status” gained through “legitimate influence” which may be attached to a selection of organisational units ranging from “individuals” to “plural-member organisational units” (2002, pp. 428-429). However, one can see that in his writing, as well as that of his fellow researchers, there is much discussion of leaders, of leadership roles and of leadership as a process or a phenomenon (Gronn, 2002, pp. 444-447; Paunova, 2015). Certainly, at least within the distributed leadership research selected, the term remains highly flexible regardless of whether a clarifying and final definition of “leadership” is offered (Chreim, 2015; Feng *et al.*, 2017; Paunova, 2015).

Moving on from Gronn, one may also highlight Chreim (2015) who points to the subsequently developed body of literature to emphasise the importance of “leadership roles” shared across a group of organisational actors. In the original literature, the authors themselves adopt a more inclusive position; many forms of leadership distribution, including processual models, are explicitly taken under consideration in the source (Denis, Langley and Sergi, 2012). Ultimately a surface diversity of potential usage is seen in servant and even transformational leadership work also, but the entity attributed leadership is generally singular. There are of course exceptions but even here shared leadership is generally treated as a separate but potentially compatible concept (Riggio and Bass, 2006, p. 222).

This contrasts sharply with the ways in which the term “leadership” is understood and employed by the “distributed” grouping of scholars (Bolden *et al.*, 2011, p. 7; Feng *et*

al., 2017; Paunova, 2015). That is not to say that the language in the latter, despite ambitions, is not leader-centric. Rather this concerns the space of acceptable displays or instances of “leadership”; the opening up of what is communally accepted as a possible example of leadership (Bolden *et al.*, 2011, p. 7; Gronn, 2002). Alongside this broadening of focus distinct trends develop within the way that leadership is seen to function and the purpose that it serves. The notion of shared leadership is often functionally associated with stabilisation or representation of a collective, integration of distinct individual entities, autonomous reaction to changing circumstances and the ongoing self-management of “professional” teams (Chreim, 2015; Feng *et al.*, 2017; Paunova, 2015).

In accordance with a wider movement to de-individualise leadership research and recognise greater complexity there has been a growth in the number and prevalence of relational perspectives on leadership which advance even further from an entitative perspective. These offer an alternative to the leader-centric charismatic and trait theories, based around a subjective or intersubjective paradigm. These relational and constructivist approaches, such as leadership-as-practice, have promised greater understanding and clarity in attempts to pick apart “leadership” (Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2010; Dinh *et al.*, 2014; Raelin, 2016b; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

However, there are many who now question this unreflexive presentation of these democratic, “practice centred” theories as a panacea for our leadership woes. For example, some highlight the difficulties in capturing ephemeral “leadership phenomena”, noting that they often seem to elude the grasp of the researcher in practice (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003b; Kelly, 2008; Kelly, 2014; Tourish and Barge, 2010). In addition to this, some feel that these conceptions still do not address

fundamental issues which have continuously plagued leadership. Grint and Kelly, for example, both critique the ontological argument presented in much relational/constructivist literature and point to a plurality which cannot be realised if leadership is to be conceived as purely democratised or decentralised (Grint, 2005; Grint and Jackson, 2010; Kelly, 2014). Furthermore, they, along with others, identify the risk of this unrealised plurality; such work does not address or may underestimate the political or ideological motivations which can be said to underpin democratic systems (Barker, 1993; Grint, 2005; Grint, 2010; Grint and Jackson, 2010; Kelly, 2008; Kelly, 2014).

While this puts in to question the potential utility of these specific theoretical perspectives for this project, these challenges do not necessarily mean abandoning the potentially fruitful subjective/intersubjective paradigm entirely; there are calls in the literature for work which can integrate and engage with, rather than merely acknowledge, plurality from a relational perspective (Dinh *et al.*, 2014; Fraher and Grint, 2016b; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016a). One could benefit, then, from characterising these different interpretations of leadership not as mutually exclusive and final explanations of what leadership is but rather as competing ways of thinking, or “discourses”. It is fitting then, given this contribution, that we are now seeing the names of many of these authors re-emerge in contemporary research along with their ideas; Wittgenstein, for example, has frequently been referenced directly in literature, including several recent papers which call for greater utilisation of his work (Bryman *et al.*, 2011; Fairhurst, 2009; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Kelly, 2008; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014; Tourish and Barge, 2010).

1.2 A Note on Adopted Research Philosophy

The foundation of this research project is very much built on the work of Wittgenstein, and the author himself says little explicit which helps to clarify some of the deepest underpinning assumptions in research design (Chia and Tsoukas, 2011). The following discussions serve to briefly introduce a consistent epistemology and set of key concepts. These notions are that which guide the investigation to address specific elements of language use in a systematic and methodical manner, as Kelly finds with the work of Laclau or Fairhurst with Foucault (Fairhurst, 2009; Kelly, 2014). This introduction is expanded upon significantly in the methodology chapter, where the work of Schatzki especially is drawn upon to articulate the engagement with Wittgensteinian thought which is pursued through this project (Schatzki, 2000, pp. 93-94).

While it is fairly apparent that Wittgenstein's admonitions to "describe" and not rely on "abstractions" dictate that a qualitative data analysis would be the most productive way forward, matters of "metaphysics" are rarely expressed in clear terms (Flick, 2014). There is, however, significant insight on this matter to be distilled from reading the publications of those many who have either drawn upon or interpreted his work in the past (McGinn, 2013; Schalkwyk, 2004). Augmenting the author's own reading of Wittgenstein are other scholars who seek to understand and apply his various writings. To lend structure, variety and a sense of coverage, the following sub-sections will frequently return to a discussion on the work of John Shotter, especially his notion of "social poetics" (Shotter, 2006a; 2006b; 2010).

Shotter is a major proponent of Wittgenstein's work within organisational studies, with a history of engagement that stretches back over twenty years (Katz and Shotter,

1996; Shotter, 1996), and it would be remiss of any thesis which draws heavily upon the same texts not to address his research. Despite similarities given the overlap in source material, there exist nuanced distinctions in epistemology, ontology and conceptual application which mark a difference in research design; these differences stem from a divergent interpretation, and operationalisation, of Wittgenstein's writing, primarily *Philosophical Investigations* (2009). So it is that the discussion in the following sections will utilise Shotter as a foil partially to show the departures between his "social poetics" and the approach utilised here, in addition to his serving as a useful starting point for an exploration into the philosophy of the method.

In articulating the exact nature of the differences, as well as the similarities, it is useful to turn to other authors, such as Cunliffe (2008; 2011), who discuss in broader terms the challenges facing the researcher with regards to philosophy and methodology; these authors will direct the searchlight of our inquiry and establish the terminological conventions which are employed in this thesis to express the aforementioned in explicit detail. The first issues to be addressed, for they sit as the foundation of any inquiry, are the matters of epistemology and ontology.

Notwithstanding their importance to research design, it is also worth exploring these key questions for another reason; they are the first of several points of departure from Shotter's work which will, like the few degrees which may separate two nearby ships, over time lead to rather distinct destinations. None of this is to say that the method outlined here disputes Shotter's interpretation of Wittgenstein's work and sets itself up as the "proper" approach. Rather, it is the author's own interpretive bricolage, assembled in the spirit of the aforementioned philosopher's wishes:

I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own

(Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 4, PI Preface)

1.2.1 Wittgenstein, Social Meaning and the Limits of Knowledge

There is little trouble in locating, in the broadest sense, the epistemological commitments of this project. That Wittgenstein talks so extensively on the communal achievement of meaning belies his, at least temporarily adopted, stance that the language all of us operate with indeed consists in what Shotter refers to as “linguistic constructions” (2006a). This position aligns his work, and so by transitive properties this work, with a large grouping of scholars whose research is “social constructionist-based” (Cunliffe, 2008). Indeed, this stance is evidenced well in one particular statement from Wittgenstein which invokes a notion to be returned to shortly:

“So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?” - What is true or false is what human beings say; and it is in their language that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life.

(Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 94, PI §241)

This idea is further characterised by Wittgenstein’s discussion of the consensus underpinning and enabling mathematics as a discipline to function and mathematicians to communicate effectively and not doubt. Of this, he says “What has to be accepted, the given, is - one might say - *forms of life*” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 238, PPF §345 [italics in original]). These excerpts point to the deeply subjective

underpinnings of the investigation which Wittgenstein is proposing to undertake, influencing profoundly the philosophy which this thesis hopes to implement. However, Cunliffe herself points out that “while social constructionism commonly rejects essentialist explanations of the world, a survey of the literature in this area reveals different orientations” (2008); it is clearly not enough to say that this project follows in the constructivist tradition and “call it a day”. However, this broad categorisation does begin to somewhat narrow down the search for both epistemological and ontological grounding.

The view of language as meaningful through the practical achievement of usability rather than through fixed phrases with “essential”, but hidden, definitions (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 49, PI §97) parallels the work of Chia and Tsoukas on organisational matters as “enactments” (2011). These authors are unpacking “performative” logic which underpins “emergent” and “practice based” ontological views of organisational phenomena. From this one can draw, at least, that there is potentially ontological affinity to be found with these areas of research.

Indeed, if one looks at Shotter’s work on “social poetics” which derives from his readings of Wittgenstein, supported with additional work from other philosophers, one will see he talks very much in terms of relationality and practice (Katz and Shotter, 1996; Shotter, 1996; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2011). Taking as an example Cunliffe’s classification of both social poetics and Shotter’s later situated dialogic action research, both are grouped under the “intersubjective problematic” and are explicitly identified as operating with a relational ontology (Cunliffe, 2011). Here, the work finds common ground with Shotter and some leadership practice theorists, for this thesis also draws on the idea of an ontology informed by emergence, where units

of analysis are generated from connections between individuals and their environments; an ontology which enables the author to discuss aspects of organisation with suitable sensitivity to the ongoing construction and emergence of these aspects (Chia and Tsoukas, 2011; Cunliffe, 2003; Raelin, 2016a, p. 10).

This emergence is easily understood in terms of Wittgenstein's "sketches": meaning is contextualised and can be thought of as determined not in essence but in the moment, in-situ and through use (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 53, PI §116-117); agreement relies not upon opinion, but convergence in "form of life" (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 94, PI §241). The aforementioned "forms of life", drawing on both the author's and others' interpretations of such remarks as those highlighted earlier, are in turn understood to represent "historical groups of individuals who are bound together into a community by a shared set of complex, language-involving practices" (McGinn, 2013, p. 55; Schalkwyk, 2004, pp. 70-71).

In this interpretation and application of "forms of life" there exists a departure from the way in which Shotter invokes the notion. For Shotter, forms of life are primarily cast as "[originating] in people's spontaneous reactions to events occurring around them" (Shotter, 2006a); this presentation has profound implications for his method as the focus on expression and reaction in the moment leads to a primary focus on discursive interactions to the exclusion of larger systems of ideas (Cunliffe, 2008; 2011). Under the approach outlined above, language use is recast as a relational achievement emerging from interdependent and recursive interactions between individuals not only in-the-moment and in situ, but also in the context of their potentially shared historical referential backgrounds or "forms of life". Having described the evident overlap between the ontologies discussed and that adopted to

facilitate this project, there are epistemological commitments adopted here which conflict with the position of intersubjectivity and it is these which must now be discussed (Cunliffe, 2003; 2011).

The epistemological positioning of this project is most influenced by the notion of the “object of comparison”, or “an order for a particular purpose”; Wittgenstein’s concept of “language games”, foundational to much of his interpretive dissection of our linguistic resources, fits into this category. Wittgenstein clarifies this, and the broader role of objects of comparison, at length across several remarks:

Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language - as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance. Rather, the language-games stand there as objects of comparison which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language. For we can avoid unfairness or vacuity in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison as a sort of yardstick; not as a preconception to which reality must correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy.) We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order for a particular purpose, one out of many possible orders, not the order.

(Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §130-132)

These statements act as not just an epistemological declaration but also a praxeological one (Chia and Tsoukas, 2011). While Wittgenstein claims that “we may not advance any theory” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 52, PI §109), this later quote seems to stand in clarifying quasi-contradiction; how can one establish an “order” without advancing some form of proposition which others may be disposed to call a “theory”

(Grayling, 2001, pp. 95-96). For in these statements one might see an approach to knowledge generation outlined; one can construct, as expository similes, models which may act as a reference point, almost an analytical foil, to a descriptive investigation of a subject. However, they also speak to the relationship that these models have to the practices of which they speak (Chia and Tsoukas, 2011). This does not allow for theory building in the sense of uncovering definitive truths, but neither does it validate the total rejection of assertive model generation on the part of the investigator which many feel the philosopher's admonitions that "all explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place" amount to (McGinn, 2013, p. 27; Shotter, 2010; Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 52, PI §109).

What of the need for direct presence in the context of use then? For Wittgenstein also has much to say on this, and these notions that he advocates for are influential in Shotter's work (Shotter, 2006b; 2010). Yet as was done above, one may choose to reject the age-old aphorism to do as one says, rather than what one does, and look instead at how Wittgenstein himself conducts his own investigation into language. Certainly, he is always talking with respect to context, yet is his method grounded in concrete, genuinely observed and emotionally sensitive relational material?

He opts, rather, to deconstruct texts, as with Augustine (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 6, PI §1-3), and to invent languages (ibid., pp. 8-9, PI §6-10), or have conversations with himself (ibid., pp. 105-106, PI §285-290), or imagine a situation and lead the reader through it with him (ibid., p. 77, PI §175); indeed, one could say without being too bold that, while in his talk one may perhaps find a mirror for ethnographic methods, in his practice there is the spectre of literary analysis, of narrative and perhaps even of dramaturgy (Gould, 2004, pp. 75-76; Schalkwyk, 2004, p. 66). Contrasting with

Shotter's recruitment of Wittgenstein to advocate for an intersubjective "knowing from within" or "withness" thinking (Shotter, 2006b; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2011), this approach preserves the researchers position as a commentator/interpreter; a position characterised by a double, rather than relational, hermeneutic approach to issues of interpretation (Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe, 2011).

This interpretive reading of Wittgenstein's practices, at the risk of beginning to sound repetitive, rests as the root of this thesis' claimed interpretivist epistemology (Cunliffe, 2011). Such a perspective calls for work which has been partially codeveloped through, yet also leaves room to challenge, practitioners and is designed to facilitate a better understanding, derived from a reflective yet still rigorous process which advances ideas while explicitly recognising the limitations of such theories. In summary, though summaries such as these can often be blithe given the nature of the topic, the praxeological emphasis of this method is less on action research and rather on generating more "actionable" research.

1.2.2 Depth Grammar & Investigative Aims

In the context of Wittgenstein's presented view of communication, disputes and misunderstandings over language take on "the character of depth... [for] they are as deeply rooted in us as the forms of our language" (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 52-53, PI §111). It is these deeply rooted forms of language and the disputes, then, which are interesting for the purpose of study; for it is here that one can get a sense of distinctive language practices revealed in the forms themselves and in disputes. In other words, the focus is directed towards the overlapping and divergent ways that terms are used in context, informed as they are by the "deep rooting" of forms of life.

When considering terms themselves, this variation in judgements is understood in terms of “depth grammar” (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664).

This notion of grammar is of great value to the research project in providing a concept through which to investigate the spaces of legitimacy which operate in Agile discussion; for Wittgenstein, grammar refers to both the way a word may be placed in a sentence so as not to generate a “mundane” grammatical error, but also this “depth grammar” which dictates how a word might be coherently utilized in specific relational contexts among those who share a form of life (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664). This broader conception of grammar is also reflected in the literature on systemic functional linguistics, the method which was used to inform the coding of language in context, but this will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 24-27).

It is important that the practical implications of this are discussed. In adopting Wittgenstein’s model of language use, the study develops particular focal points to be researched; the aim of the research project in this thesis is to identify areas of overlap and conflict in conceptual employment, suggesting divergent depth grammars, themselves pointing to departures in form of life and so practices. It is by tracking this variable expression of “depth grammar” that effective insight is derived into the various distinctive terminologies at play in the Agile context. These elements are investigated on a specific basis; not as concrete and “real” parts of conversation which are “out there” waiting to be understood. Instead, they are considered a useful interpretive framework to give the researcher some basis to work on, while lending the investigation a sense of structure and greater reflective rigor (Wodak, 2011, p. 624).

The aim of this study, then, was to establish a “surveyable representation” of a notion of “depth grammar” in the participants talk. The purpose of this representation was to gain insight into the differing terminologies of organisation which exhibit a notable character of depth and divergence in the accounts selected and thus seem significant parts of the wider Agile organisational language game (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 54-55, PI §122). In many ways, despite the significant departures highlighted earlier, this overall goal somewhat parallels that of the work of Shotter; aiming to “create a surveyable “landscape” and know one’s ‘way about” (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010, p. 185).

The contributions of such a study are severalfold and extend beyond the understanding established of organising discourse in Agile. Firstly, the project stands as a demonstration of Wittgensteinian inquiry and the capacity for open investigation on the basis of this framework. The research also provides, through this more sceptical understanding of the approach, a route to engaging in much needed reflection on the state of Agile practices versus rhetoric and the impact which this rhetoric has on the conduct of Agile organising. In this way, aside from presenting a clear and analytically justified interpretation, the purpose of this study was also to suggest critical questions which should be asked of managerial figures who are seen to be driving or getting involved in Agile transformation. Specifically, these questions relate to the ongoing role of power in Agile contexts and their asking is intended to highlight to practitioners the complicated rhetorical-practical landscape which emerges when one is influencing for Agile implementation or extension.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to best address the concerns discussed in the above sections, a series of research questions were devised. These questions were seen as addressing the problems which were perceived in the literature and the texts themselves. Each of these questions illuminates a facet of the overall issue of interest, rhetoric around organisational practices in Agile and the implications of this rhetoric. As was discussed previously, the deeper purpose of this investigation is the empirical demonstration of leadership agnosticism. Yet, in any project there may be several such layers of contribution. The drive to agnosticism is captured in the way the questions are framed, while the direct interest in Agile organisation is satisfied by the questions themselves:

1. How was organisational work discussed in the context of Agile and what were the focal points of this discussion?
 - a. Which intertextual touchstones are drawn upon for discursive resources?
2. Is the “leadership” concept important to Agile practice?
 - a. How do the practical findings correspond to the literature?
3. What pressures arose in Agile contexts around the highlighted issues of organisation?

The resolution of these questions contributed to the construction of a central argument for this thesis; that notions of leadership are problematic in their role by obscuring power but are also potentially weakly embedded within Agile practice, thus are open to challenge and substitution. Further, it is shown in the findings that such substitutes are already significant aspects of the Agile discourse. However, regardless

of these representational issues, the research also surfaced significant practical tensions around the matters of organisation which merited attention.

As was noted above, there was also a separate drive through the leadership literature review to bring coherence to the nascent body of leadership agnosticism. This objective is not captured through a formal research question. Nevertheless, the importance of the endeavour cannot be understated. Indeed, this act of review forms an important part of the basis for this research; the development of a coherent vision of “leadership agnosticism” is key to the ability to proceed with an analysis conducted with appropriate considerations, in that this act establishes which considerations must be taken. In other words, to conduct a study based on a notion of “leadership agnosticism” there must be some identifiable coherent centre to the idea.

1.4 Research Outputs

As has been stated previously, this research is conducted through a coding-based analysis, informed by the work of Wittgenstein, structured using systemic functional grammar and eclectic coding techniques (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 30-33; Saldaña, 2021, pp. 96-109, 177-186). The initial outputs from this research process are 138 codes, distributed across three main levels of analysis. The three levels of analysis referenced here are that of “Message”, “Moves” and “Figure”. These levels represent the semantic level of Michael Halliday’s textual, interpersonal and ideational metafunctions. These concepts are explored to significantly greater depth in the method chapter through sub-section 3.4.2, but in brief these terms refer to different aspects of language which can serve to construct or delineate relations and identity, convey messages and intent, and construct situations and events in text (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 24-31).

The aforementioned 138 codes are aggregated into 16 larger groupings, referred to as manifestations, through a process which is termed “seeking family resemblance”. This is in reference to the Wittgensteinian notion of “family resemblance”, which is viewed here to stand as a call towards interpretive grouping of that which is described on the basis of perceived similarities and overlaps (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 36-37, PI §66-67). This act of aggregation was the first of two, with the second reducing the codes further from 16 manifestations to 6 core categories. The aggregation of these codes was achieved through a comparative approach. A pattern coding was conducted using a code mapping approach with the aid of analytic memos (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 225-229, 253-256). Diagramming, part of the search for surveyable representation and one output of the memo process, was instrumental in the refinement of this emerging sketch (Clarke, 2016, pp. 211-219). There was a cyclical movement between this search and the pursuit of deeper resemblance, with the former constituting an important tool for applying understanding and attempting to generate suitable, useful descriptions. This process of iteration is discussed further in the method chapter and illustrations of the diagrams generated are included in the appendix (Appendices H, I, J, K).

The final output of this process was a table representing a depth grammar of organizational talk in Agile. This depth grammar in turn represents an understanding of the key focal points of organising in these Agile contexts, as well as of the ways that these focal points are discussed. In more detail, the grammar outlined consists of 6 key concepts, derived from the categories established in the findings. These concepts are each presented, with the space of prevalent rhetoric, practical mediation and the delegitimated aspects noted for each, along with their constituent manifestations and

categories. The concepts are as follows: “change”, “self-organisation”, “leadership concepts”, “command and control”, “purpose of Agile roles” and “drivers of Agile”.

The systematic review which follows this chapter has a vital role to play in the construction of the research outputs; it is through this systematic review that one starts to get a sense of how the Agile community relates to the notion of leadership, what language is used around the notion and the ways in which basic activity is translated into non-basic action which is articulated as “leadership” (Schatzki, 2000, p. 99). The findings of this research project itself also point to the contextual relevance of leadership, as shown in several of the concepts established. However, the second discussion chapter develops sceptical insights derived from the construction of the depth grammar with reference back to this communal understanding. In particular, the problematic role of leadership rhetoric as a camouflage for the ongoing role of power in Agile is a major argument of this thesis and this topic is the primary focal point of chapter 6.

These insights stand as an important contribution of the thesis in several respects. In relation to those seeking a better understanding of Agile practice, this work offers both a summary of key focal points and an insight into a major challenge which rests largely in the contradiction between existing organisational rhetoric and Agile ideals. For practitioners themselves, this thesis offers a warning about the risks and challenges of advocating for Agile implementation by highlighting the ways that this pressure can become self-defeating (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 321-322; Hohl *et al.*, 2018, p. 31). For those more invested in organisational research, the study stands as an empirical demonstration of the value in leadership agnosticism, realised through the ability to speak to and to challenge leadership without privileging the concept

above others in the analytical process (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 4-5; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, pp. 8-10; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211).

1.5 Thesis Overview

The research in this thesis is described across five primary chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion. A brief summary of each of these chapters will be offered here:

Chapter one serves as the introduction to the thesis, bringing into focus the problems which are of concern to the researcher. The introduction sets out those concepts which are to be expanded upon in the relevant chapters. There is a brief introduction to Agile here and the changes in terminology which accompany the method.

Leadership theory through history is also discussed in order to situate the reader. This process of context-setting leads on to the closing discussion of research questions.

Chapter two consists of a systematic review which investigates prevailing leadership rhetoric in Agile. This systematic approach serves to both establish the significance of the concept generally and to suggest which frames or theories of leadership might be most important in the Agile context. The findings of the review point to transformational, distributed and servant leadership discourses as being particularly influential, while there is also a strong strand of “general leadership rhetoric” identified.

Chapter three contains a literature review which reflects a primary interest in leadership agnosticism, and which collates the research done in this area to-date. In more detail, the chapter engages in three primary movements; the first section is a critique of leadership theory, the second is dedicated to the exploration, explanation

and codification of agnosticism, while the third looks at the role which discursive methods can play in the implementation of such a position. This chapter also serves to show the path by which a Wittgensteinian position was adopted by charting those influential works in this process.

Chapter four is concerned with the method used in the research project. This chapter is split into several key contributions. The first sections establish the philosophical and linguistic elements of Wittgensteinian inquiry as implemented in this study, by way of Schatzki. This discussion also serves to develop a general form for the analysis. Following this is a recap of details around the experience reports, which constitute the research data. This recap leads on to a development of the general form described earlier into a specific and practicable Wittgensteinian inquiry. Finally, the chapter closes on a note of reflexivity, considering the limitations of such an approach.

Chapter five consists of the analytical write-up, essentially the findings. The work here is a description of the deeper resemblances which were derived from the text and their connection to these texts, by way of reviewing the excerpts which were coded.

The aim is to produce reading effects which mirror the scholar's own journey through the practitioners' experiences, to introduce the coded results themselves and to begin the process of unpacking which continues on to the following discussions section.

This chapter develops the surveyable representation of Agile discourse which is later used to generate the depth grammar in the discussion chapter.

Chapter six, then, continues this project by initiating a discussion on the perceived significance of these results. This chapter develops the surveyable representation to include a more coherent sense of "depth grammar" and goes on to deploy this depth grammar in a descriptive/investigative capacity. This process provides significant

insight into the subject of the first and second research questions especially by suggesting clear focal points for talk about organising in Agile contexts.

Chapter seven stands as a second discussion chapter. Following the developmental movement of the previous chapter is a subsequent, deeper exploration of the organisational implications of leadership rhetoric in Agile contexts. This chapter argues for the role which leadership notions have in camouflaging the ongoing operation of power in Agile contexts. The chapter closes on a reflective note, with sections dedicated to considering the implications for practitioners of influencing for Agile, the limits of power as understood through research, the need to understand resistance and the contributions of the Wittgensteinian method itself.

Chapter eight contains the overall conclusions. As such, the focus here is on summarising the arguments and findings of the thesis, discussing potential directions for future research, namely in the areas of resistance, application of research outputs and new “empty signifiers”, and providing general reflections on the closing of the research project. In facilitation of this aim, the chapter has been split into three key sections, each of which deal with one of the previously described aspects.

Chapter 2: Systematic Review of Agile Literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis serves a dual purpose; as a robust introduction to organisational concerns within Agile for the reader and as a rigorous review of the current state of literature, as well as of the ideas circulating in the Agile community, around leadership. This review responds directly to calls from Agile researchers for a systematic review into issues of “organization”. Specifically, it helps to fill existing gaps around the notion of leadership and the relationship, and intended transformation, of “command and control” approaches to other, more participative, models of leadership which are in operation in Agile contexts (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, pp. 102-104; Hoda and Murugesan, 2016a, p. 256; Mergel, Gong and Bertot, 2018, p. 295); these issues have been discussed as both potentially under-researched in the first instance, despite being identified as of interest to industry practitioners (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 99; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 96; de la Barra *et al.*, 2015), and lacking in systematic overview of what research there is (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102; Mergel, Gong and Bertot, 2018, p. 295; Hoda *et al.*, 2017, p. 69).

This systematic review will also serve to locate the contribution of the work done in this thesis with respect to the existing scholarly research in the Agile literature, which has been identified as lacking in rigorous, exploratory qualitative studies; in this respect only moderate progress seems to have been made in recent years (Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008, p. 852; Hoda *et al.*, 2017, p. 69; Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 105). The completion of a systematic review into this topic will mirror the development of other areas of research interest in the Agile community; such

methodical overviews are common starting points for bodies of work in this field (Dybå, Dingsøy and Hanssen, 2007, pp. 225-226), as reflected in the calls of scholars (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102; Mergel, Gong and Bertot, 2018, p. 295) and the substantial tertiary review undertaken by Hoda et al. who identify 28 distinct systemic literature reviews on a variety of topics in agile from the period up to December 2015 (2017, p. 61). Following in the trend of these papers, particular methods will be employed to facilitate this review. These methods, including the important steps of scoping and the setting of research questions to guide the review, will be discussed before the results. However, to firstly establish some important context there must be a discussion of Agile as a whole and an exploration of its genesis, proliferation and nature.

2.2 Context: Agile and Leadership

Arising from the emphasis, discussed in the introduction chapter, on a more relational, agency promoting form of organizing is the general sense that leadership is an important part of this process. Indeed, common to many of the papers analysed was the motif of “leadership” replacing the traditional “command and control” approach (Hoda and Murugesan, 2016a, p. 248; Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016, p. 636; Jovanović *et al.*, 2017, p. 178). The following section addresses the pilot review materials in greater detail and makes clear why this concept was worth investigating in this context. The purpose of this systematic review has been to catalogue the existing research on leadership in Agile. This seems to presume the importance of the leadership concept. However, one must keep in mind the above when considering this; the relevance of leadership as a concept was not presumed but rather was

determined, at least in the literature, through the unfocused, preliminary review necessary for the determination of useful search terms.

The aspects of the Agile manifesto highlighted earlier give clear guidance that Agile involves much more than simply stepping away from the Gantt chart; teams working on these projects are supposed to be autonomous, given direction but handled with a “light touch” (Fowler and Highsmith, 2001, Augustine et al., 2005). They are intended to be tightly integrated, like the “scrum” in a rugby team; a metaphor which lends one popular Agile method its name (Bustard, Wilkie and Greer, 2013, Papatheocharous and Andreou, 2014). There are fundamental structural changes proposed to facilitate this; projects are directed or guided by a “product owner” and the team’s work is “facilitated” day-to-day by a “servant-leader” (sometimes called scrum master) applying the aforementioned “light touch” (Augustine et al., 2005, Jeff Sutherland, 2014, pp. 40-41). It is in the act of describing this facilitative approach, and the new roles which go along with Agile, where it is common to find the notion of leadership is invoked. A related area where there seems a similar prevalence of “leadership” talk is in the process of managing transitions from traditional to Agile (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 100; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102).

However, Gregory et al. found that, while the issues around leadership certainly seem to be a pressing concern for Agile practitioners, they have been under researched in this context and remain largely unaddressed through the literature (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102). This is seemingly confirmed if one takes into consideration the existing systematic reviews on Agile literature, which are notably silent on the issue of leadership (Hoda *et al.*, 2017; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008; Dingsøy *et al.*, 2012). In the case of Hoda et al.’s review of reviews, investigating further it was found the one

systematic review which is cited as including leadership uses this term in a very conversational sense, with no notable special emphasis on the concept (Tapanainen *et al.*, 2008, pp. 429-430). Some more recent review work demonstrates an awareness of leadership as a relevant challenge in relation to the transition to Agile, suggesting that this absence is perhaps in the early stages of being addressed (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 101). Of course, existing systematic reviews do not necessarily represent the full spectrum of research into Agile. As such, this chapter takes up the calls from Gregory *et al.* to pursue a more rigorous investigation of existing literature with an explicit focus on the notion of leadership (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102).

Overall, it is my tentative opinion that this preliminary review makes a strong case for an approach to the primary research based in leadership agnosticism. Yes, it is certainly true that many authors talk in terms of leadership and this is a fact that should not be downplayed. However, it is also fair to say that many established authors in the Agile domain manage to discuss the full gamut of organizational practices without any reliance on, or even reference to, the notion of leadership. The aim then remains, for this systematic portion, to ascertain the current landscape vis-à-vis publications on the topic in Agile literature. This is in part to establish a firm overview of the topic as a contribution to the ongoing tradition of systematic reviews in Agile (Dingsøyr *et al.*, 2012, p. 1219; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102). However, this process also serves a purpose for the thesis; in obtaining such an overview one also begins to see how leadership can be substituted out for other concepts and how it can be employed in a manner which implies little apparent theoretical baggage. In other words, one can attempt to find a firm basis for this agnosticism, a viable alternative to cast doubt on the object of scepticism; Vishnu, whose equally plausible existence would put question for many to the supremacy of a monotheistic “God”.

2.3 Method

As was discussed above, this review continues the extant tradition in the Agile literature of following guidelines for systematic review established in the domain of software engineering (Kitchenham *et al.*, 2010; Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016; Hoda *et al.*, 2017). Of particular note in this domain is the work of Kitchenham and Charters (2007), whose summary of the systematic review process is highly influential in the conduct of subsequent secondary studies in the field of Agile (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016; Dybå, Dingsøy and Hanssen, 2007; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008; Hoda *et al.*, 2017). This method draws upon a wealth of sources, many from the medical domain, to inform the expected conduct of systematic reviews (Kitchenham and Charters, 2007, p. 1).

The work done by Dybå, Dingsøy and Hanssen (2007) expands upon the guidelines set out by the previously discussed authors'; these scholars identify a growing trend of qualitative research in software which requires additional considerations with respect to quality assessment and also the methods through which data is synthesized into results (Dybå, Dingsøy and Hanssen, 2007, p. 227). Thus, drawing primarily on the guidelines set out by Kitchenham and Charters, and factoring in the subsequent innovations in process pioneered by later scholars (Dybå, Dingsøy and Hanssen, 2007; Kitchenham *et al.*, 2010; Mergel, Gong and Bertot, 2018), a systematic review is conducted here which is influenced by, and is in dialogue with, those reviews which have preceded it within the field of Agile (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008; Hoda *et al.*, 2017).

In the following sections there will be a discussion on the method of the systematic review. Specifically, it will focus on several distinct areas, based on those areas

addressed by the other studies cited throughout this chapter. These sections will set out clearly the research questions guiding the review, the search string and development process, the inclusion and exclusion criteria which aid in the selection of studies, the quality criteria and finally the data extraction, management and analysis processes. This explanation serves a dual purpose, for not only will it help the reader to anticipate and follow what is to come, it will also act as a clearly stated “review protocol”; this sort of step by step overview of how the systematic review will proceed is considered key to the process, allowing for fellow academics to see transparently the decisions which were made, and why there were made that way (Kitchenham and Charters, 2007, pp. 12-13). The full list of papers reviewed is included in the appendix as Appendix D.

2.3.1 Research Questions

As was noted previously, scholars have highlighted the absence of systematic reviews investigating the issue of leadership in Agile contexts (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102; Mergel, Gong and Bertot, 2018, p. 295; Hoda *et al.*, 2017, p. 69). While leadership is not necessarily central to the concerns of Agile practitioners, it remains under-researched in comparison to other variables identified in surveys of practitioners (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102; Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 100). The aim, then, is that this systematic review provides a useful foundation for future research into leadership in Agile by bringing together the current thinking on the topic by way of a coherent, yet critical, synthesis. This objective will be fulfilled through the pursuit of several distinct research questions through the method outlined below. These questions are as follows:

1. How many studies on leadership in Agile have been published to-date since the authoring of the Agile manifesto in 2001?
2. Which research methods have been employed in these studies?
 - a. How many such studies have investigated this empirically?
3. Are specific leadership “constellations” i.e. distributed, transformational etc. invoked in these studies?
 - a. If so, what is the relative prevalence of each of these “constellations”?

In addition to generating a sufficient overview of current research on the topic of leadership in the context of Agile, this systematic review also serves to aid in scoping the later research process and as a point of comparison for the eventual outputs; the findings of this systematic review will be taken into consideration in the pursuit of leadership within experience reports, which is the primary analytical thrust of this project. The findings will set expectations for what “leadership”, and talk of it, is expected to look like in this particular organizational configuration. These expectations also serve as a theoretical baseline against which to compare the empirically derived outputs; is what can be observed through the experience reports in accordance with what was found through a rigorous review of the literature.

2.3.2 Search Process

This review looks towards its peers in establishing the search process, relying on a range of online databases which have been variously identified as “standard” in these alternative reviews of the Agile literature. These databases are specialized towards software engineering and computer science largely and the list includes IEEE Xplore, ACM, Springer-link, Science Direct and ISI Web of Science (Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008, p. 838; Hoda *et al.*, 2017, p. 61; Mergel, Gong and Bertot, 2018, p. 292). The search

string was generated in an iterative process of experimentation, informed by the need to capture a wide range of studies to ensure a complete coverage of any research into leadership in Agile contexts. As such, the string had to be open enough to include this broad array but not so open as to unearth an unnecessarily large volume of “surplus” material. Following an unstructured pilot review of Agile literature, the following phrases were identified as having potential for returning useful search results which are pertinent to the review:

1. Agile
2. Leader (and leadership)
3. Distributed
4. Autonomy
5. Autonomous teams
6. Self-organizing

Boolean search operators were used to refine the returned results by adding the individual terms of interest together into one, more advanced search. The term “Agile” was connected to the other phrases using an AND operator, which means that any result returned must have contained the term “Agile” in addition to another phrase of interest, such as “leader” or “autonomous team”. In some cases, wildcard operators have been used to expand the possibility of individual search terms; the search phrase “leader*” will return any results which contain any phrase which starts with the element “leader”, whether this be “leadership” or only “leaders” or even “leaderly”. The “OR” operator was used to connect each of the identified phrases to each other, with the exception of the previously discussed “AND” operator. The final

search string for each database varied depending on the input options available.

However, in general form the query used can be summarized as follows:

“agile” AND (“leader” OR “distributed leadership” OR “autonom*” OR “self-organising teams”)*

2.3.3 Selection Criteria

In order for a study to be considered for inclusion into the review, the paper must have been identified as pertaining, at least in part, to the matter of leadership in Agile. This does not explicitly require that the studies be empirical, though this is of interest for the research questions. Similarly, while the review prioritizes academic studies, there is no specific drive to include only these works, given the initial exploratory purpose of this work. Research need not focus exclusively on the topic of leadership to be included, but the degree to which the concept is discussed forms part of the basis of research assessment; the aim here is to establish the current state of research into leadership in Agile project management, in whatever form that may take. As was discussed earlier, the range of dates identified as potentially interesting in is the time spanning 2001 up to the present (2018 as of writing).

As to criteria for exclusion, studies were omitted if they focused on forms of “Agile” other than that discussed earlier; this research is specifically centred on the mainly software focused idea of “Agile”, so no works on general notions of “organisational agility”, nor research on agile manufacturing will be included. Book chapters were excluded from analysis but were considered for relevance and integrated into the general literature reviewed where suitable. The full list of papers which were selected, as noted previously, is included in the appendix (Appendix D).

2.3.4 Quality Assessment

For the purposes of quality assessment in this systematic review, the checklist provided by Kitchenham and Charters (2007, p. 28) for qualitative studies provided a comprehensive starting point in assessing the quality of qualitative studies. Indeed, the authors actually provide a range of guidelines for both qualitative and quantitative studies. As such, this work acted as a vital reference for both the establishment of regular conduct, which is to say the qualitative guidelines, and any supplementary material for the specific assessment of any quantitative research addressed (Kitchenham and Charters, 2007, pp. 25-29). The quality checklist for qualitative studies has been included in full in the appendices (Appendix C).

It was determined that a full set of 18 questions was too granular, so following the lead of Dybå et al. these questions were condensed into three main areas of interest; the papers were assessed for rigor, credibility and relevance (Dybå, Dingsøy and Hanssen, 2007, p. 230). These quality criteria were applied after both the sorting and selection as well as the analysis of papers and the criteria were applied only to those papers identified to be pertinent to the issue of leadership. This decision was made to ensure the maximum number of studies possible were analysed, allowing for comments about the potential quantity of low-quality studies; delaying the quality assessment allows for a more detailed discussion of study quality in the area of interest, rather than a cursory approach aimed at weeding out particularly poor studies in general. This quality assessment will be discussed during the exploration of data extraction findings. The full results are rendered in note form for brevity in appendix E.

2.3.5 Analytical Process

2.3.5.a Data Extraction

As with other similar reviews, this work systemizes the parsing of research papers through the use of a data extraction form utilizing standard questions which have been custom selected for the review in question and honed through pilots (Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008, p. 840; Hoda *et al.*, 2017, p. 62; Kitchenham and Charters, 2007, pp. 29-34). This form covers standard information, such as bibliographic data, but also more review specific details, such as the leadership constellation employed, key findings, empirical status etc. as determined by the research questions. All of these questions are purely qualitative and are handled as such, with the exception of “relevance to leadership”. This was instead treated as a 5-point scale with qualitative implications, the exact nature of which is covered in Table 2. The data extraction form used was defined in a in a separate word document then operationalised through the design of an excel file designed as a reference database for the review process. This sheet was filled out with the relevant details for each study as it was analysed (See appendix E).

Value	Study Relevance to Leadership
1	No mention
2	Marginal (a mention, conversational/unmarked)
3	Some discussion
4	Full discussion
5	Study focal point

Table 2 - Rating of Study Relevance

In total, the excel sheet was used to record findings in the following categories: basic information, namely title, authors, year, publication, publication type, DOI reference

and URL, abstract and source database; data extraction questions, which are relevance to leadership, leadership theories used, aims, methods, findings and focal point; and lastly information relevant to the quality criteria, captured under rigour, relevance and credibility. This comprehensive document provided a sortable, searchable database of review results, including associated notes.

2.3.5.b Data Synthesis & Reporting

Unlike many of the systematic reviews which have already been discussed, the focus of this project is at the semantic level, looking to understand the employment of certain concepts in the Agile literature. The analysis and presentation of data undertaken here is what would be termed a simple “descriptive synthesis” (Kitchenham and Charters, 2007, pp. 34-36). While the questions which motivate the research may have quantitative elements, first and foremost the focus is a qualitative synthesis of the current state of research. It is through this initial qualitative synthesis that the quantitative questions of relative prevalence or study counts are made answerable. The information which was recorded on the extraction form acts as the basis for an analysis aimed at summary. This involves contrasting results in tables and discussing convergences and divergences across the papers identified. As with the extraction form, the review questions guide this process of comparison and dictate what elements are included in the tables.

It is important to keep in mind the early-stage exploratory nature of this systematic review; the aim here is not to attain a deep drill into the minutiae of the topic, rather it is to complete a descriptive survey of the field. Of course, as Dybå et al. point out, a good systematic review should serve both an academic and practical audience (2007, p. 232). In this case it is the view of the author that these contributions overlap

significantly; in the academic arena this paper contributes a rigorous overview or recap of existing research and an identification of gaps in the body of research, while for practitioners this paper looks to make the existing work more beneficial by offering a much needed quick primer into the current research on leadership in Agile (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102; Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 101).

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Result Filtration

The initial search of databases uncovered an extremely large number of publications as can be seen in the table showing SLR results. Several stages of filtration were applied to the search results in order to eliminate irrelevant papers, those which were duplicated and those which were actually book chapters. The papers in question were all manually checked by the author. References were filtered for titles on their respective platforms. Those citations chosen were downloaded and added to the excel sheet to bring the review together in one reference document. This excel sheet has already been discussed in more detail in the section on data extraction.

These selected “papers” were filtered to remove any book chapters, leaving 220 entries to be further sorted on the basis of their abstract. This process of sorting reduced the total to 127 and it was at this stage that duplicates were also accounted for, bringing the total down to 92 papers. Each of these was downloaded, then catalogued and read through a reference management software called Qiqqa. There were 2 papers that could not be obtained. Another 5 papers were excluded, all for referring mainly or only to other forms of Agile than that associated with the manifesto.

Stage	Quantity of Papers
Initial search	3474
Selection from title	261
Excluding book chapters	220
Selection from abstract	127
Unique entries	92
Papers finally selected	85

Table 3 - SLR Results

This process of reduction left the final number of papers due for a full analysis at 85; a far more manageable figure than that first uncovered. As has already been discussed, the next step in the review process was reading through each of the papers selected and filling the data extraction form with the relevant information.

2.4.2 Data Extraction Findings

The purpose of this form was to provide for a structured analytical approach which would yield enough information to give an understanding of the state of the field without capturing extraneous detail which may be interesting but is not necessarily relevant. The first question asked of every paper was the degree of relevance to leadership. As was already addressed, for the sake of categorisation this question was rendered down to a 5-point scale with qualitative associations (Table 1 Table 2). This offers the first opportunity for a bit of analytical quantification in this primarily qualitative undertaking (Figure 2).

2.4.2.a Paper Relevance

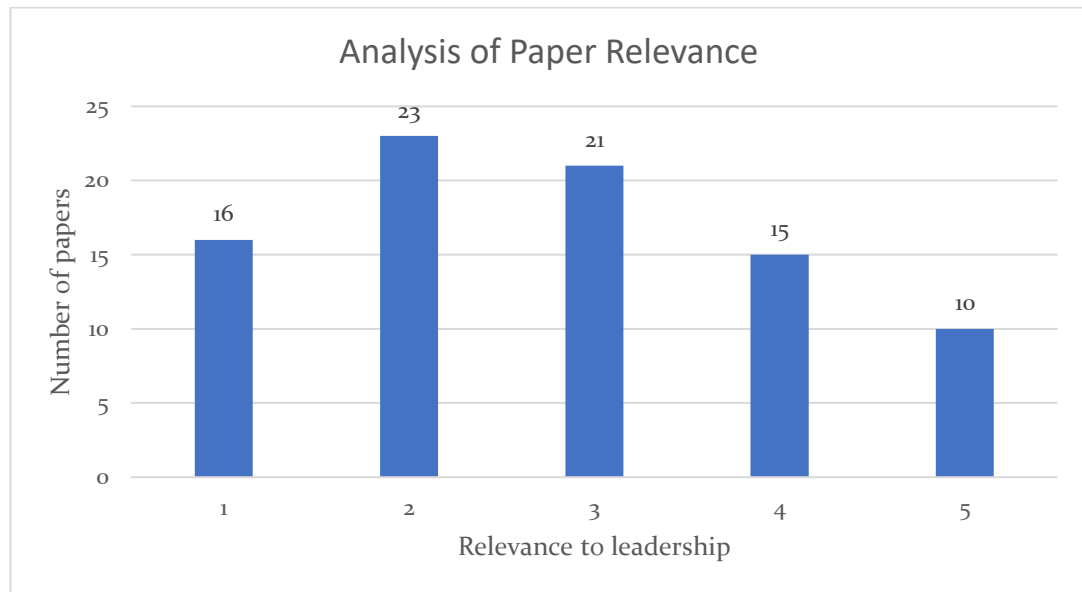


Figure 2 - Papers Sorted for Relevance

Relevance Level	Papers Included
5	[3], [8], [9], [10], [15], [27], [32], [35], [36], [39]
4	[2], [6], [11], [19], [20], [21], [25], [28], [29], [30], [33], [34], [37], [42], [43], [46]
3	[1], [4], [5], [7], [12], [13], [14], [16], [17], [18], [22], [23], [24], [26], [31], [38], [40], [41], [44], [45]

Table 4 - Papers Selected for Relevance

What this chart makes immediately clear is that there are indeed not many papers which explicitly focus on leadership in Agile project management (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102). Of course, it is important to note that when this is said the notion of focusing on leadership here is very specific; papers were only said to focus on leadership if they explicitly took this notion up during the discussions of study aims, background and so on. Thus, when leadership was positioned as one small facet of a larger framework, such as with [24], or was included as an “extra” part of the closing discussions, the highest that the paper could rank would be 4. This would be the case even if this

mention was quite in-depth. It was quite common, as with for example [14] or [41], to talk quite a lot about leadership and especially shared leadership as an aspect of self-organisation.

In line with the leadership agnostic position adopted through this thesis, strict care was taken to ensure that no substitutions were included; if papers talked in terms of management, direction setting, coordination, governance or any other number of potential analogues for leadership this was not considered to be relevant to leadership so long as the notion itself was not invoked (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a). With that being said, over half of the papers finally selected did make some notable comment on leadership. Every paper was analysed for relevance, use of leadership theories and aims. However, only those papers with a perceived relevance of 3 or higher were included for further analysis.

2.4.2.b Publication Types and Dates

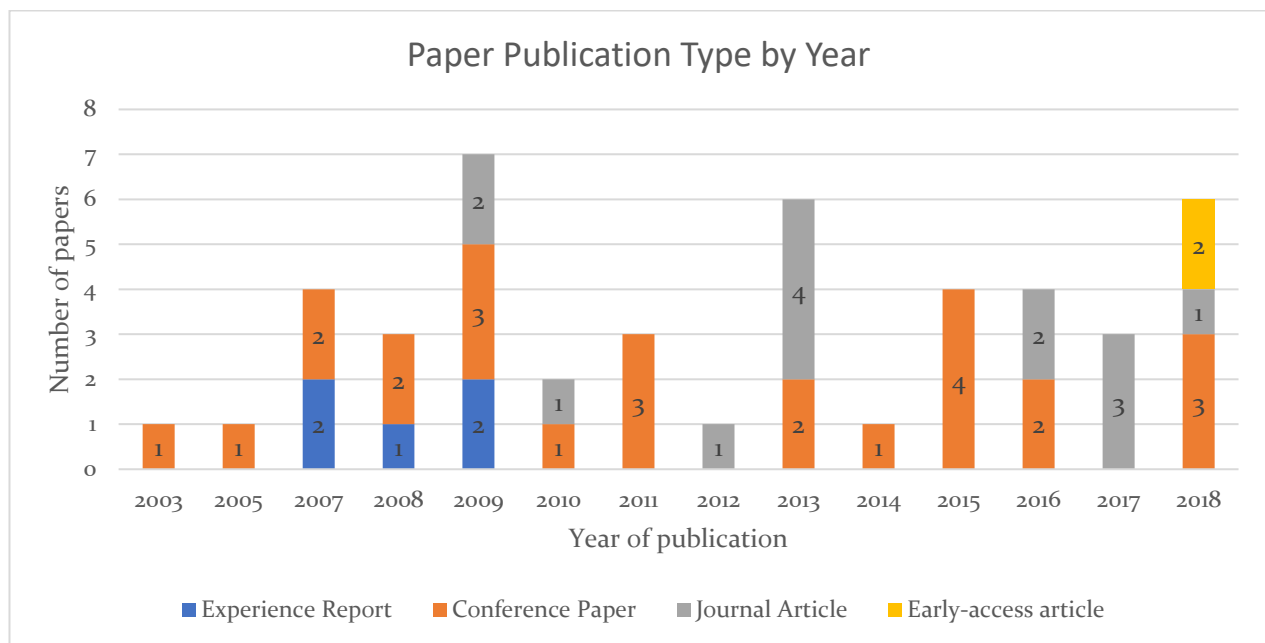


Figure 3 - Publication Type by Year

Looking at the publication dates of the papers selected for analysis, it is clear that there has been an upward trend in the number of publications exploring the relationship between Agile and leadership. The number of works authored on the topic in the early 2000's is low and the interval of publication intermittent. However, this picks up moving towards the 2010's with at least one work published every year following this. It is also worth noting an increase in scholarly interest, as denoted by the change in the proportion of journal articles to conference papers and experience reports. Put simply, without pushing for a more in-depth analysis at this point, it is fair to say that the topic of leadership seems to be of increasing interest to Agile scholars.

Interestingly, the number of experience reports found during review is low and the majority of these are older reports. The possibility that this is because practitioners are not as interested in the matter of leadership must be considered. However, this does not seem to gel with the preliminary readings of the experience reports analysed for the thesis itself. This suggests to the author that perhaps the databases selected are not comprehensive sources with respects to practitioner publications, such as experience reports. Instead, it is suggested that the optimal source for texts of this sort are practitioner managed collections, like the experience report initiative operated by the Agile Alliance (Wirfs-Brock, 2013).

2.4.2.c Methods Employed

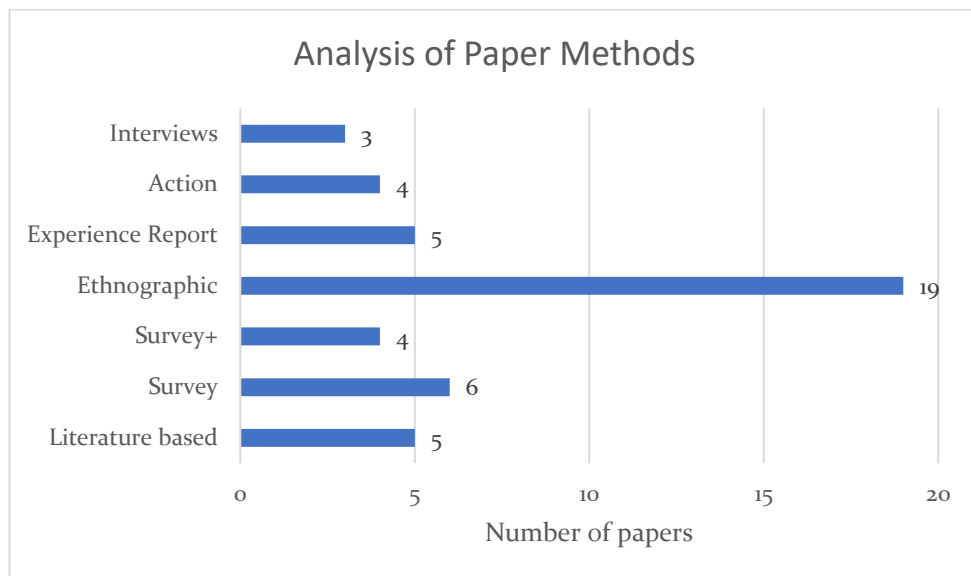


Figure 4 - Analysis of Papers by Method

When analysing the methods employed in these Agile studies, one finds a remarkable prevalence of contextually sensitive projects which employ a mixture of observations, interviews and participation to collect in-depth ethnographic data on working practices. Indeed, just under half (41%) of the relevant studies used this form of data collection, and it was the usage of other approaches which struck the researcher as a result. Surveys are the next most common approach to research on Agile, especially if one considers survey and survey+ to be a single category. Survey+ here refers to papers such as [21] and [38], which rely on a range of additional sources to “deepen” the insights provided by an initial survey.

There were an equal number of experience reports and secondary, literature-based approaches employed in the sample selected. The relative scarcity of experience reports is not seen to reflect practitioner interest, though this has already been commented upon earlier in the chapter. There were also a few papers which relied exclusively on interview data, namely [15], [30] and [33], as well as those which were

framed as action research “experiments” [5], [20], [34] and [46]. This prevalence of ethnographic methods suggests that there would be a good chance of at least one quality empirical research project exploring leadership in Agile. However, this shows the limitations of such a broad analysis; yes, it enables one to make general comments about the literature found, but it is some depth and detail that is required now in order that the current state of research is comprehensively addressed. Essentially, this portion of the review has uncovered some of the “what?”, but less of the “how?”.

2.4.2.d Quality Assessment

Overall, the quality of papers in this selection is more than acceptable. The criteria used were much broader and measured in a qualitative fashion, so an analysis as granular as the rest of those in this section is not possible. Aggregation of the qualitative notes showed that only 8 of the 46 papers analysed (17%) were described as low credibility, all for a lack of transparency and clarity on method. The commonplace occurrence of ethnographic research ensured a good degree of average depth.

All papers were identified as having some kind of either practical or theoretical value, even if that theoretical value was primarily descriptive. However, it is interesting to note that a good number of the papers (17 out of 46 or 37%) could be described as primarily or largely instrumental in their orientation, that is to say aimed at increasing efficiency. Barring those papers which showed a lack of rigour, most of the papers were at least fairly credible and clear. There was good attention to the scope of findings, but only 5 of the papers showed significant researcher-oriented reflexivity. All of these findings are shown in the full list of papers (**Error! Reference source not**

found. Appendix E). The qualitative comments have been condensed to note form for brevity and a key is provided.

2.4.2.e Leadership Theory

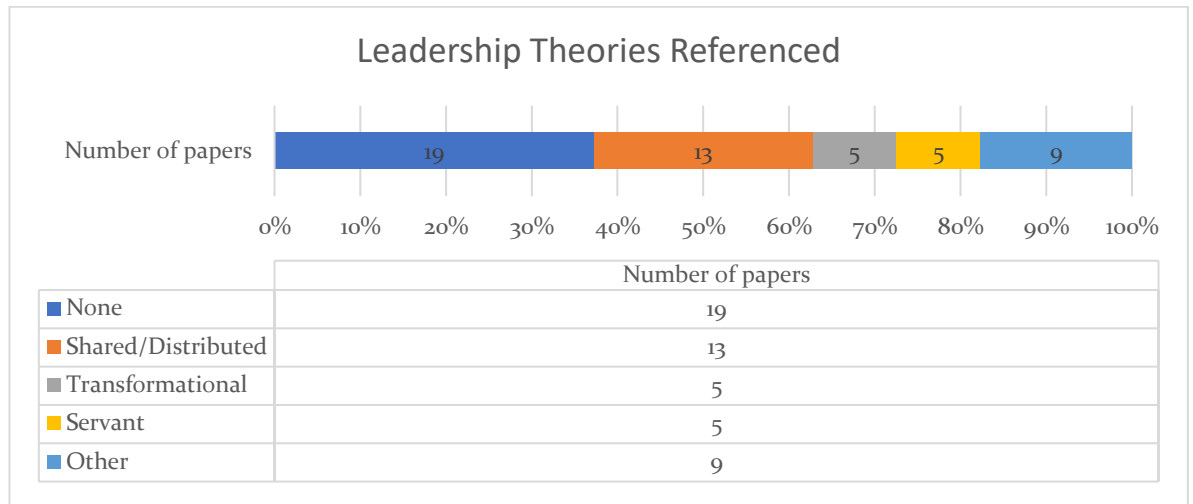


Figure 5 - Analysis of Papers by Theory Used

One last overall trend should be commented upon before the perspective shifts from a birds-eye summary to a “street-view” exploration; the question of leadership theory must be addressed. Of course, there will still be a discussion of each paper’s contribution on leadership. However, it is easier to discuss the relative prevalence of these theories while the aim remains overview. Looking at the data captured in Figure 5 one thing that immediately stands out is the overwhelming prevalence (41%) of studies which do not rely on any particular established theory of leadership. This does not mean that the papers in question did not talk about leadership, just that they used no particular theory of leadership in their discussions. An example of this would be the experience report by Baker and Thomas [3], which talks exclusively about “leadership” practice without referring to any academic theory. As a final note, if a paper referenced more than one theory it was counted multiple times. This was the case for 4 of the works analysed, [27], [34], [39] and [42].

The most common leadership theory to be referenced in the papers was some form of distributed or shared leadership, which accounted for 13 of the 46 (28%) selected works. Transformational and servant leadership literatures were both referred to with similar frequency (both 11%). Finally, there is the category of “other” theories. This includes a range of references to academic leadership theory, as well as a bespoke framework developed as an output of the research itself. The paper by Collin et al., for example, draws on leadership-as-practice in the closing discussions to comment on the changing face of “leadership” in the field, moving in to the future [8]. The early-access journal article by Gutierrez et al. refers to three authors’ works and brings them together to help analyse self-managing teams [11]. On the other hand, the conference paper authored by Rikkilä et al. develops a bespoke leadership framework for practitioners, termed “unproject leadership” [36]. The focus returning once again to paper specifics signals the end of birds-eye overview; the works themselves, rather than the trends among them, are now adopted as the object of interest. The following section will unpack the 46 papers selected for final analysis, grouping them by relevance and working from most to least relevant.

2.4.2.f Papers Focusing on Leadership

Study No.	Year	Publication Type	Relevance to lead.	Lead theories	Methods
3	2007	Experience Report	5	None	Experience report
8	2018	Journal article	5	Other theory	Ethnographic
9	2015	Conference Paper	5	Shared	Literature based
10	2010	Conference Paper	5	Other theory	Ethnographic
15	2016	Conference Paper	5	None	Interviews
27	2009	Conference Paper	5	Shared/Transformational	Ethnographic
32	2009	Experience Report	5	None	Experience report
35	2008	Experience Report	5	None	Experience report
36	2013	Journal article	5	Other theory	Ethnographic
39	2017	Journal article	5	Shared/Transformational/Other	Survey+

Table 5 - List of Papers with Relevance 5

The first set of works to be explored in greater depth will be those that speak directly to leadership as a concept. The experience report by Baker et al. looks to frame Agile leadership practices in terms of “memes”, or prevailing ideas honed through “natural selection” [3]. This is a fundamentally practical undertaking; the authors seek to inform the approach of fellow practitioners. It does not draw on any particular leadership theory to do this, despite focusing on leadership specifically. Instead, this work represents a contribution to “leadership” practice, where the term refers in an unremarkable, conversational way to those with authority. The article by Collin et al. is a more recent and academic piece which draws on leadership-as-practice and discursive leadership to put to question what it is exactly that leadership is [8]. As such, they explicitly direct the focus towards leadership practices, rather than “leadership” figures. The ethnographic approach provides for a deep understanding of the context. However, the aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between leadership and creativity. This being the case, there is discussion of leadership itself, but it is in large part subsumed in favour of exploring the connections between leadership and creativity.

The next four entries are all conference papers. The work by de la Barra et al. looks to explore leadership in Agile through a literature review strategy. The authors highlight the centrality of distributed leadership models to Agile in their findings. However, the quality of the paper is questionable; there is little clarity on method or significance [9]. Dubinsky and Hazzan dedicate their conference paper to developing a “leadership style” which they feel encapsulates the dynamic approach often observed in Agile, termed “ad-hoc leadership” [10]. Kautz et al. author one of the works, focussing on the change that Agile brought to “leadership roles”, again relying on no theory and emphasising the unmarked sense of the term where it is used somewhat

interchangeably with management [15]. Moe et al. [27] centre their research around shared leadership in Agile, finding that there are practical challenges in implementing this approach which remain underexplored. Balancing autonomy, especially, was noted as problematic for Agile teams. They also point to transformational leadership as an important enabler of the organisational changes necessitated by Agile.

Two more experience reports follow; Moore contrasts leadership with management in order to discuss the impact of organisational structure on leadership behaviours. He highlights the role that these structures play but ultimately concludes that one must identify leaders who exhibit the correct behaviours [32]. Ralston shares their experiences as a leader and relates their “top 10 value driven principles” for leading Agile projects; they use stories to emphasise the importance of concepts such as “value long-term relationships” and “do the right work” [35]. Neither of these reports explicitly relies on a particular theory of leadership to articulate their arguments, though each does deploy something of a model which sets expectations about what a leader is.

The final two entries in the table are journal articles. Rikkilä et al. frame the challenge of directing Agile as one of leading emergence; an emergence that is seen to arise from the self-organising structures common to Agile. In turn this environment of emergence is related to complexity theory. The authors then describe and validate a model of leadership, termed “unproject leadership”, which is designed to promote resilience in a changing situation [36]. The paper by Srivastava and Jain most comprehensively addresses the phenomenon of leadership in Scrum. Using a mix of open-ended surveying and interviewing, the authors develop a framework for leadership of distributed Agile teams. Consisting of leadership functions, behaviours

and approaches, this framework describes what is expected of “leaders” in Agile, what they are perceived to do and which resources they can be seen to draw upon in order to do this. They identify a range of leadership approaches, including situational, rotational, shared, expert and super-leadership [39]. One thing that is abundantly clear from this early stage of the review is the instrumental, or practical if one is being generous, orientation of most of the research; the main aim of many of these papers is not to contribute to academic discourse, but rather to offer advice to Agile practitioners. This is to be expected of something like an experience report, which has a specific audience. However, this trend continues throughout the rest of the literature reviewed.

2.4.2.g Papers Fully Discussing Leadership

Study No.	Year	Publication Type	Relevance to lead.	Lead theories	Methods
2	2005	Conference Paper	4	Other theory	Literature based
6	2016	Journal article Early access journal	4	Servant	Ethnographic
11	2018	paper	4	Other theory	Survey
19	2018	Conference Paper	4	Servant	Ethnographic
20	2008	Conference Paper	4	Other theory	Action research
25	2012	Journal article	4	Shared	Ethnographic
28	2009	Journal article	4	Shared	Ethnographic
29	2010	Journal article	4	Shared	Ethnographic
30	2009	Conference Paper	4	Shared	Interviews
33	2017	Journal article	4	Servant	Interviews
34	2018	Conference Paper	4	Servant/Shared	Ethnographic
37	2011	Conference Paper	4	Shared	Action research
42	2014	Conference Paper	4	Transformational/Other	Literature based
43	2015	Conference Paper	4	Transformational	Survey+
46	2007	Conference Paper	4	None	Action research

Table 6 - List of Papers with Relevance 4

The next set of papers to cover are those which engage in a full discussion of leadership but perhaps do not focus exclusively on the topic. The conference paper by Adolph explores the similarities between war and Agile. The framework developed emphasises leadership among other elements, relating this back to the idea of

“commanders’ intent” [2]. Chen et al.’s article on managing transitions to Agile relates the common refrain that Agile involves a shift from “command to leadership”. The article talks mainly in terms of management but identifies leadership and especially servant leadership as a necessary new management practice [6]. Gutierrez et al. look to explore self-management in Agile empirically. They do this by developing a survey-based assessment tool focused around three distinct models of leadership. These models are those of Daniel Goleman, David Marquet and Henrik Knigberg. The research is articulated in terms of self-management, though there is much talk of leadership based around the aforementioned models [11]. Lous et al. address the challenges of Agile working in a geographically distributed context. In their conclusions they highlight the importance of an “agile servant-leader” to the viability of such an arrangement [19]. Madeyski and Biela demonstrate the importance of capable leadership through the use of the DICE framework in a relatively short conference paper exploring Agile best practice [20].

The next four works all relate to shared leadership and are all written by Moe along with co-authors. Firstly, are another pair of papers which look to explore the challenges of democratic approaches in Agile. The first is similar in many ways to the other paper discussed earlier [27], though with some different collaborators and a wider scope in this case [25]. It frames shared leadership as central to empowered, self-organising teams but devotes relatively little space to exploring the notion. The work meditates briefly on the challenges of shared leadership, including balancing control and sharing, as well as the need to communicate comprehensively. This paper also identifies the risk of technocracy in Agile. The second is a shorter article, specifically exploring the barriers to self-management. It mainly repeats now familiar ideas common to work written by Moe, Dingsøy and other Scandinavian authors on

shared leadership and Agile. In particular the article notes the impact of conflict between new and existing models of leadership [28].

The next article is more general and applies an established teamwork model to help in explaining the practices of Agile teams. The framework applied recognises leadership as an important component of teamwork, so it is discussed in this context. They find that leadership was not distributed as it should have been, given the commitment to shared leadership which is recognised in Agile. They emphasise the importance of trust in developing a healthy arrangement of shared leadership [29]. The last article in this block is a practitioner oriented conference paper which looks to develop an instrument for assessing Agile teamwork. Among the factors identified are aspects such as autonomy and learning, but also shared leadership [30].

The journal article by Nkukwana and Terblanche investigates the contradictory pressures placed on managers in Agile contexts to behave in more or less commanding ways. They talk mainly in terms of management for the majority of the paper but do contrast leadership with control and also emphasise the need for the leader to serve their subordinates [33]. The next 5 entries are all conference papers. Rajeev and Vinod explore the transition from command and control to self-organisation through Siemens transition to Agile. They say relatively little about leadership in-depth but do discuss the importance of sharing across the team, as well as the centrality of a sensitive, facilitative approach [34].

Ringstad et al. talk about shared leadership when applying the instrument developed by Moe et al. [30] in an action research project with the aim of improving teamwork [37]. Sutling et al. look to describe effective project manager behaviour in Agile. Leadership is determined to be an important part of their framework, although not

the focus. Their work relies on leadership theories to articulate expected behaviours. The approaches referenced include transformational, adaptive and strategic leadership [42]. The work done by van Kelle et al. speaks to the factors relating to leadership and communication that are required for Agile success. The main aspect of leadership emphasised here is the transformational approach, as contrasted with the transactional. The paper's findings identify transformational leadership as a critical success factor for Agile [43].

The final conference paper to be addressed is that by Xu and Lippert which relates the lessons learned by the authors in managing in an Agile context [46]. This paper uses leadership mainly in the unmarked way, though it does cast a traditional contrast between leadership and control. The instrumental nature of Agile research is further demonstrated by the previously discussed works; there is not so much a scarcity of writing on leadership as there is a scarcity of research which seeks to understand, rather than optimise. Those papers which do seek understanding, such as those penned by Moe and others, seem focused more on other organisational issues; the importance and nature of leadership is presumed, though the presumption is rhetorically justified.

2.4.2.h Papers Briefly Discussing Leadership

Study No.	Year	Publication Type	Relevance to lead.	Lead theories	Methods
1	2009	Experience Report	3	None	Experience report
4	2007	Experience Report	3	None	Experience report
5	2003	Conference Paper	3	None	Action research
7	2008	Conference Paper	3	None	Survey
12	2013	Journal article	3	None	Ethnographic
13	2013	Journal article	3	None	Ethnographic

14	2017	Journal article	3	Shared	Survey
16	2016	Conference Paper	3	Servant	Survey
17	2013	Conference Paper	3	None	Ethnographic
18	2016	Journal article	3	None	Survey
21	2009	Journal article	3	None	Survey+
22	2009	Conference Paper	3	None	Ethnographic
23	2013	Journal article	3	Transformational	Ethnographic
24	2013	Conference Paper	3	Shared	Ethnographic
26	2015	Conference Paper	3	Shared	Ethnographic
31	2011	Conference Paper	3	None	Ethnographic
38	2018	Conference Paper Early access	3	Other	Survey+
40	2018	journal paper	3	Shared	Ethnographic
41	2015	Conference Paper	3	Transformational	Literature based
44	2011	Conference Paper	3	None	Survey
45	2007	Conference Paper	3	None	Literature based

Table 7 - List of Papers with Relevance 3

These papers are less pertinent to the issue at hand, so the exploration will be more fleeting. This is made much easier by the fact that the majority (14 out of 21) do not relate back to a specific model of leadership, instead relying on the unmarked sense that should be, by now, familiar. This is true of the first six entries in the table. The experience report by Abernathy talks about the work of middle managers and the pressures on them in the context of Agile, referring intermittently to leadership training and “senior leadership” [1]. Similarly, Beavers relates a story of Agile transformation and the changes that entailed. In this report leadership and management are synonymous and hierarchical in nature [4]. Blotner highlights the need for “strong, involved leadership” but places no emphasis on what leadership is, explaining it by way of managerial action [5]. Cichocki and Maccari, in their empirical analysis of a geographically distributed team, find that an empowered local leadership figure was key to the success of projects that are managed in such a way [7].

Hoda et al. discuss leadership in the framing section of their paper, engaging in fairly typical rhetoric about “light-touch” approaches. However, the paper itself does not talk in terms of leadership. Instead, the authors develop a more comprehensive set of roles which more specifically address the work of Agile “leadership” figures [12].

Hodgson and Briand, on the other hand, do not distinguish between leadership and positions of authority. In fact, they even discuss leaders seeing themselves more as facilitative “coaches” [13]. Next is Kakar, who connects self-organisation with shared leadership in his attempt to assess the former. However, he says little specifically about the latter [14]. Kropp et al. use survey methods to assess the perceived benefits of Agile across organisations with varying lengths of engagement with the method. Interestingly, they found that the commitment to servant leadership, as well as team empowerment, was rarely being realised in practice [16].

The next four entries continue the trend of theoretical absence. Licorish and MacDonell tread familiar territory, talking about team leaders, leadership roles and such. They do also point to leaders’ responsibility being to lead but offer no clear definition here [17]. Lindsjörn et al.’s work is very similar in their treatment of the concept, talking little about leadership outside of as a role [18]. Maruping et al. are interested in the methods of control used in Agile, but this is framed from a control theory perspective, so discussions of leadership are again somewhat restricted to specifying roles rather than practices [21]. McAvoy and Butler also use role centric leadership language when discussing the role which project management can play in ineffective decision making [22].

Contrasting with this trend of “basic” leadership, the next three entries again refer to some overarching theory of leadership to get their point across. Melo et al. rely

heavily on transformational leadership theory to articulate the range of plausible supervisory behaviours in order to frame their investigation. Their findings, however, are not in terms of leadership [23]. Moe, maintaining continuity with his other works on the topic, highlights the barriers to effective shared leadership, namely specialisation here, in the findings of his conference paper investigating Agile teamwork [24]. This interest in shared leadership is also reflected through the framing of another of his co-authored papers analysed here. However, most of the discussions and findings talk about leadership as a role [26].

Of the final six papers analysed in-depth, the first again did not rely on any particular theory of leadership. There was some discussion of the way that team supervisory behaviours impact on self-managing team effectiveness and a large part of this is expressed in terms of the search for a leader who engages in these behaviours. The authors also use existing research to point to the paradoxical tensions of leading a self-managing team [31]. The next conference paper, by Srinivasan and Mukherjee, looks at Agile teams through complexity theory in a similar way to the paper written by Rikkilä et al. reviewed earlier [36]. Leadership is established as a part of their framework for success and, while they do not discuss it in the text, the authors reference complexity leadership theory [38].

Stray et al. use their observations and interviews to gain an understanding of the dynamics in Agile stand-up meetings and suggest potential improvements. One of their suggestions is to share leadership in the context of facilitation to encourage empowerment and there is some talk of team leads also [40]. The 2015 conference paper by Sutling et al. develops the ideas represented in the earlier paper [42]. However, in doing so it moves away from expressing strategy in terms of leadership so

much. The relevance remains somewhat high as the concept is still invoked as one of the necessary behaviours of a manager [41]. Wan et al. frame leadership in terms of authority, highlighting the need for top-level support and engagement with Agile among other critical success factors [44]. The final paper explores coaching as a management method, referencing the work of Warren Bennis, but no specific leadership theory. Coaching was seen to supersede leadership as a key competency [45].

2.5 Discussions

2.5.1 If Not Leadership?

The previous comments around coaching superseding leadership are a good place to start the current discussion. It is worth commenting on some of these less relevant papers before moving on to remark on the research questions posed at the beginning. Many works were excluded on the basis of talking mainly in terms of management and not relying on the notion of leadership particularly to express ideas around organisation. Looking at much of the work co-authored by Hoda, there is much more talk about managers and scrum masters than leaders. Where there is something one could call talk in terms of leadership, it is isolated to referring to specific roles such as testing leads (Hoda and Murugesan, 2016a, p. 12; Hoda and Noble, 2017; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2012).

Similarly, the insightful research by Berger into the tensions afflicting Agile in a bureaucratic context uses terms of management and hierarchy to articulate the organisation (Berger, 2007). This notion of tensions in the management of Agile is carried forward by Thomson and Vidgen in their conference paper, which talks about

governance instead of management or leadership (Thomson and Vidgen, 2013). One paper by Hoda, which was included in the review as it was framed heavily in terms of leadership theory, shows the diversity of ways in which it is possible to refer to the roles and practices of organisation which are often grouped under the banner of leadership [12]. This review has shown that a significant proportion of Agile literature seems to recognise a distinction between some notion of leadership and the idea of management. Thus, it is perhaps it is in this kind of contextually defined, specific and granular language, rather than a return to the blanket terminology of “management” that may provide a viable route towards practicable leadership agnosticism (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a).

2.5.2 Addressing the Research Questions

The research questions guiding this systematic review are simple, which reflects the early-stage exploratory nature of the work. The chapter itself fills a gap existing in current Agile systematic reviews (Hoda *et al.*, 2017; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008; Dingsøy *et al.*, 2012). It also responds to calls within the Agile literature for a more systematic overview of the state-of-the-art regarding research on leadership in Agile project management (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102). The review process has been extremely revealing and has successfully addressed the aims set out in the introduction. Each of the research questions will now be addressed with a dedicated section.

2.5.2.a How Many Studies?

The initial number of papers identified was very high, at nearly 3500. However, after the application of various stages of filtering this number was reduced to 85. The subsequent grouping based on relevance to leadership further reduced the scope of

investigation to 46. This can be said to be the number of studies which related to leadership to a great enough degree to be notable. However, this is not the number of studies which focus specifically on leadership. Studies with a relevance of 5 were those which investigated the topic of leadership as an exclusive focus of the research. This is a much shorter list again of only 10 studies in total. Within this selection of 10 works were 3 experience reports, 3 journal articles and 4 conference papers. Notably, with the exception of the article by Srivastava and Jain, these papers all address some facet of leadership in Agile. This aforementioned article is perhaps the only academic study which comprehensively addresses, more generally, the phenomenon of leadership in Agile project management [39]. Of course, as the preceding discussions will make clear, it would be untrue to say it was the only study which addresses leadership; this notion seems to have received less attention in the past but there is a growing amount of focus devoted to leadership in the Agile literature.

2.5.2.b Which Research Methods

The overwhelming preference for ethnographic methods was one finding which arose from this systematic review. Indeed, this preference for in-depth empirical approaches is to be expected given the widespread calls for additional empirical insight into a diverse range of topics in and around Agile [11; 12; 25]. However, this increasing proportion of empirical studies in Agile shows a significant increase in researcher interest since the review conducted in 2008 by Dybå and Dingsøy. In that case, only 36 papers were eventually selected after filtering and that review was looking at research across all of Agile, rather than a specific topic. Of course, the date range for the review in question was 1996-2005, so the window was significantly shorter than the 17-year range used for this systematic overview. This trend of

increasing publication quantity confirms the findings which Dybå and Dingsøy reported about the number of studies increasing between prior reviews and their own work (2008, p. 849). The quality of these empirical studies was generally acceptable, with some papers even showing significant reflexivity about the role of the researcher [19; 25; 29], the need to present multiple perspectives [12] and the scope of the research itself [7; 13; 15].

However, one criticism that could be offered related to the research is the prevalence of highly instrumental research which is aimed mainly at optimising Agile teams. It is the opinion of the author that the widespread engagement in efficiency focused research has resulted in a relative scarcity of high-quality exploratory research. This kind of research, which would seek to ask questions and investigate without the search for an optimal configuration or the assumption of certain “realities” would serve to enrich the Agile community. This enrichment would be as the result of a better understanding of the genuine empirical experiences of Agile practitioners; an investigation less grounded in the existing dogma around how Agile is managed and more open to seeing Agile working practices in a new light. Thus, the call is not so much for more empirical research in general, but more open-ended, exploratory research.

2.5.2.c Which Leadership Theories?

As much as there is plenty of talk about organizing which is not in terms of leadership, it must be said that there is also a lot of leadership theory referenced throughout the papers analysed. The most common of these reference points was shared leadership. This is unsurprising, as this particular theory of leadership is commonly used to explain the management or coordination of the self-organising

teams which are fairly endemic to Agile. Indeed, one of the reasons why this theory ranks in as the most commonly referenced was that it was fairly standard practice to talk about shared leadership when framing a paper about self-organization or Agile teams [12; 24; 26]. The shared leadership discourse, at this point, seems fairly internalized to Agile in the sense that it is often seen as a part of the principles themselves, rather than something like transformational leadership which is seen more as an enabler [23].

The transformational leadership theory, along with servant leadership, are the joint 2nd place for most referenced in the works which were analysed here. Both servant and transformational leadership are often discussed in the context of expected or optimal manager behaviour, rather than the often-processual understanding of shared leadership [6; 19; 42]. The expectation here is that, in Agile, leaders must change, and that change will enable them to support the organisation and its members through the necessary transition [23; 43]. There are clearly expectations set in the literature about what that change in authority figures should look like. These expectations are set by the leadership theories referenced and highlighted to prospective Agile leaders. Outside of transformational and servant leadership, there are also scattered references to a range of other academic perspectives on leadership. This included some particularly up-to-date work, such as leadership-as-practice, which shows that at least some of the Agile community is aware of the ongoing developments in leadership research.

The focus earlier was on how expectations were set for leaders by the theory referenced in the Agile community. However, they are also set through the description of behaviours without any specific touchstone; there is plenty of reference

to leadership which does not at all rely on an academic perspective. Instead this type of leadership is colloquial, generally related to position or hierarchy rather than any sense of differentiation between leadership and other essentially synonymous business terms such as management. Common also is reference to a divide between leadership and management, or between leadership and command or control [6; 30; 36].

Overall, what the review suggests is that there does seem to be a distinction broadly held in Agile between the notion of leadership and other related concepts in organisation. However, the review also suggests that there is some trouble in Agile implementation arising from efforts to pursue certain leadership aims; Moe often highlights the challenges of shared leadership, while some question the viability or impact of the servant leadership idea in Agile. The solution proposed for this, which will be further addressed in the discussions on impact, is to engage in more research from a position of leadership agnosticism. A few in-depth empirical studies into leadership in Agile from this neutral position could help to clarify the state of leadership discourse and practice in the field, problematising current outdated assumptions and bringing understanding more in line with the experiences of Agile teams.

2.6 Implications for Future Research and Practice

The systematic review undertaken here has several key takeaways for researchers and practitioners. For the researcher, this serves as a much-needed overview of the current state of leadership research in Agile and a solid foundation from which to undertake new studies and set a research agenda for understanding this particular aspect of organisation. The review has also shown the need for more exploratory

studies into Agile which are less grounded in assumptions about how Agile teams practice their work; many of the studies reviewed reported “surprising” findings about the state of shared or servant leadership arrangements in practice versus the way they are presented in theory and research [16; 27; 28]. This is potentially problematic; there is an often repeated “folk wisdom” that Agile means self-organising teams sharing leadership amongst themselves and so on. If the research community continues to repeat this common-sense statement without examining further the evidence that such a practice is actually frequently achieved, there is the ever-present risk that one conducts research based on a faulty premise.

The review otherwise shows some promising trends in Agile research. Especially, the relative abundance of in-depth empirical studies was refreshing and reflects a drive within the community to rigorous, context sensitive, useful knowledge. A future review could take the work done here further by considering not only those cases where leadership is discussed specifically, extending the review to include various organisational synonyms like management or governance. It could be extremely revealing to gain insight into the relative prevalence of these potential substitutions.

In terms of utility for practitioners, the review will hopefully serve a purpose as an introductory reader’s guide to Agile leadership research. The need for such a guide was identified by Gregory et al. in their 2016 analysis of challenges facing the Agile community (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102). Indeed, the material covered in this review should be of more help to practitioners than researchers perhaps, given the preponderance of instrumental research. As such, the main practical contribution is the indexing of a significant body of knowledge on leadership and the issues surrounding it as they relate to Agile. There are, as was highlighted earlier,

suggestions through this review that there are significant challenges associated with achieving the organisational aims set out in Agile [16; 27; 28]. Thus, the rigorous accounts of these challenges, as well as the ways in which they were solved or mitigated, should be of considerable use to the Agile community.

2.7 Challenges and Limitations

Efforts were made to match the level of rigour applied to the review process that was demonstrated in other systematic overviews of Agile literature. However, one of the main limitations of this review in comparison with other similar papers is the fact it was conducted by only one researcher (Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008, p. 852; Hoda *et al.*, 2017, p. 69; Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 105). This means that the opportunities for mistakes to occur is higher than in situations where the work will be checked meticulously by several involved parties. This could be an issue with relation to, for example, the ranking of relevance to leadership; this is ultimately a highly subjective issue and determined whether a study was included or not.

Another potential issue is the possibility that important works have been missed. There are two key risks here; the omission of a hard-copy search may have resulted in some important, well established knowledge going uncaptured and also the digital search itself might not be complete enough to capture all relevant works. The former is perhaps less of an issue given the recent, post-millennium timeframe of the search window. The latter issue is certainly pressing, and it is not possible to exclude the possibility. The search string utilised was subject, as with other similar papers, to a process of piloting and refinement with the aim of at least reducing the likelihood or impact of this problem (Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008, p. 853). Efforts were made to ensure that as many as possible of the papers selected by abstract were located.

The decision not to filter on the basis of quality did allow for a broader commentary on the existing state of the field. However, a more discerning approach may be required for a future review which catalogues those papers which should be considered exemplary and worth archiving. The tight focus on leadership talk was an important commitment for this particular review. It is possible that this narrow brief led to the exclusion of otherwise important and relevant research. As was highlighted earlier, it might be desirable in the future to conduct another review which casts a slightly wider net with a scope around the general principles of organisation which are in play in Agile practice and research.

2.8 Conclusion

As has been stated several times throughout the preceding sections, overall this systematic review has met the aims set out in the introduction to provide a rigorous, structured overview of the existing research investigating leadership in the context of Agile project management. The total number of studies fully analysed was 46 and this included 10 which addressed specifically the matter of leadership in Agile project management. Broadly, the papers were practical and instrumental in outlook, serving to compare and assess different approaches as well as to provide advice on best practice. Thus, the number of rigorous, empirically driven descriptive studies was very low. A clear finding of this review, then, is the need for more open-ended exploratory research into Agile which looks to understand anew and even perhaps problematise some aspects of the organisational discourse generated around Agile (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 102).

Leadership theory is certainly “out there”. In that respect, it is important that when discussing the adoption of a leadership agnostic stance that one keeps in mind the

genuine importance of some notions of leadership to the Agile community; it is not really fair to say that one could simply replace the “leadership” in much of this research with some analogue such as “management” (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, pp. 360-361), at least not without reinterpreting the utterances of the practitioners significantly (Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, pp. 6-7). At the same time, this review also shows that, in many ways, Agile is ripe territory for the application of leadership agnosticism; substitutes are already prevalent and in common usage, leadership in many cases does seem to be a synonym for “person of authority” and there is serious doubt in the literature around the practical impact of notions such as shared and servant leadership [16, 27, 28].

To recap the key findings, it was noted that the most commonly referenced theory was shared leadership. One perceived source of this prevalence was the standard practice of talking about shared leadership when framing a paper about self-organization or Agile teams [12; 24; 26]. This equivalence of shared leadership and self-organisation means that for some the former is seen as a part of the Agile principles themselves. Transformational leadership theory, and to a lesser extent servant leadership theory also, was found to act as an enabling concept more than a central principle [23; 43]. These concepts were of equal prevalence in the literature found and both were seen as representing good practice for management actors, setting expectations for how these figures should act and engage with the wider organisation [6; 19; 42]. There was one notable reference to contemporary leadership theory in the form of leadership-as-practice [8]. Beyond the reliance on theory, the review also highlighted a prevalent language of leadership without reference to specific theoretical content. This was often rendered in the form of a divide between leadership and either command and control or management [6; 30; 36].

What this systematic review shows is that the theory and language of leadership has penetrated, at least, Agile theory. However, the review also suggests that this emphasis may be somewhat misplaced and there is room for further sceptical investigation of the notion in its many forms [16; 27; 28]. The proposed approach of leadership agnosticism is seen as a solid foundation upon which to build such a study. The value of this research, then, lies in the investigation of leadership in Agile from this neutral position. Such an investigation as this serves to bring discussions of Agile teams closer to the organisational experience as they would describe it. In doing so, as the next chapter will explore, it might also be possible to learn something of leadership itself in the process.

Chapter 3: Leadership Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This thesis looks to make academic and practical contributions to the literatures of both Agile (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 99; de la Barra *et al.*, 2015; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 96) and also the emerging body of work referred to here as leadership agnosticism (Alvesson, 2019; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b; Parker, 2018). This area of leadership contribution exists at a crossroads between distinct and more established domains of research. To be more specific, agnosticism is informed by the concerns and work of critical leadership studies, but also has significant affinity with discursive leadership research on the grounds of referential community, method and broader analytical focus. It is the work of agnostic scholars which pre-establishes the fundamental doubt under which this research is conducted (Alvesson, 2019, p. 7). There is still relatively little work on this topic to date, so there is no need to focus specifically on those works which have been influential in the composition of the research. Instead, a comprehensive summary of the texts published up to date is provided, along with an exploration of their contributions to the research.

The chapter opens with a brief section discussing key Agile literature which was foundational to the initial direction established in the study. This is followed by an exploration of leadership agnosticism and the codification of this body of work. In service of this aim, the next section investigates discursive leadership, with subsections dedicated to exploring those works more relevant to the research at hand. Discursive leadership was included for review due to the previously noted affinity

with agnosticism. However, another factor in this decision was the influence which this body of work had on the methods utilised in this project. In this way, the review serves to signpost methodological influences while also showing the connections and diversions between discursive and agnostic research, establishing the latter as a related yet distinct and valuable perspective. In reviewing these two bodies of work, progress is made in delineating new and potentially insightful positions in organisational research, while key theoretical and philosophical contributions are simultaneously attributed to their proper sources.

This thesis is amenable to the “problem oriented” attitudes of discursive scholars (Fairhurst, 2009, p. 1609). The noted contrast with leadership psychology’s literature focus reframes the discussion which one might usually expect in a thesis:

This overall orientation contrasts sharply with mainstream leadership psychologists who are decidedly literature driven... concerned with gaps in the literature, convergences, inconsistencies and the like

(ibid., p. 1609)

The focus shifts from showing an arbitrary gap in the literature; instead, the aim becomes the identification and resolution of perceived practical problems in both Agile and leadership research. Leadership agnosticism identifies just such a practical problem, one which cuts across the discursive habits of both scholars and businesspeople alike; the rapid growth and proliferation of a conceptually vague “language of leadership” (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 377; Alvesson, 2019, pp. 13-14; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 11; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 4). The aim of this chapter is to show agnosticism as an increasingly coherent and valuable area of

research, which draws on similar methods to other areas, such as discursive leadership. To this end, discursive leadership and leadership agnosticism are explored separately. This sets the groundwork for a productive exchange between these two bodies and the further development in the discussions of leadership agnosticism as a distinct and worthwhile area of contribution within a broader frame, not just in the context of this project (Fairhurst, 2009, p. 1616; Parker, 2018, p. 211; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 4).

The research completed into Agile for this thesis provides, ultimately, a sensitive analysis of a broad empirical dataset; an analysis which has been undertaken with the express aim of depicting how “leadership” as a concept was, or was not, brought into use by practitioners. This analysis was operationalised through the use of systemic functional linguistics, which will be discussed in the section focusing on method. However, it is also worth exploring somewhat the current scholarship around the issue of categorisation as it pertains to notions of leadership discourse; in large part the focus of this research project has been on practitioners use of the word leadership as a label or category to describe either individuals or groups, their actions or communal processes. While the aim to avoid bringing a raft of etic, that is to say researcher-generated (Fetterman, 2008, p. 249), concepts to the study has meant that these literatures are perhaps underexplored, they will be discussed here to address potential compatibilities and affinities for future research to investigate. The chapter closes with a reflection on the literature reviewed and the areas of potential contribution which were identified. These conclusions serve to recap what has been covered in the chapter and reiterate the key points of interest moving onwards to the research itself.

3.2 What Kind of Leadership (if any)?

Unconcerned with the search for essences or causal connections among variables, discourse analysts instead want to know how a text functions pragmatically, how leadership is brought off in some here-and-now moment of localized interaction. In complementary fashion, Discourse analysts query, what kind of leadership are we talking about?

(Fairhurst, 2008, p. 517)

The preceding systematic review of Agile literature suggests that there are a number of leadership frames which one could investigate as being of importance to Agile practice. The following section will look to discuss how the concept of leadership more generally will actually be approached in this study. The discussions will start with an exploration of key perceived problems in leadership research which pose a serious challenge to the open-ended, descriptive aims of this research project. This is not to say that these issues are universal arguments against the concept, rather the following discussions look to show why various forms of the notion are not a good fit for this particular endeavour and why the agnostic view is.

3.2.1 Problems in Leadership Research

To somewhat quell the suspense raised by the opening title and quote, the answer here is “no particular kind at all”, or rather “every kind we happen to come across”. It is important to note that the work on leadership agnosticism responds directly to mainstream leadership literature, including what might be termed mainstream critical literature, such as leadership-as-practice (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, pp. 359-365; Blom and Alvesson, 2015, pp. 480-481; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp.

119-139). The relationships between these bodies of work is explored in the next section. This section serves to form this thesis's own response to these bodies of work, bringing the research into direct conversation with these leadership theories.

It is important to note that leadership agnosticism exists as an alternative to these still viable other positions within the field of leadership studies. There is no claim here laid to the reality of leadership in a universal sense. Rather, the point of departure here is the view that there is work worth doing through the label of leadership as imposed by the researcher in the form of a distinct etic concept, where the agnostic offers the option to refuse this privileging and to explore the implications of this shift in ways of seeing (Calas and Smircich, 1991, pp. 567-572; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 140-150).

3.2.1.a Walking on Air – Absence Reified

Each applied theory of leadership is its own reification of the concept into a particular form (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 34-35). This is not an issue in isolation and leadership is not unique in this aspect, but the argument is important as a starting point in the discussion here. The issue of reification in leadership studies is not a new concern. Gemmill and Oakley's influential 1992 paper criticising leadership as an "alienating social myth" represents a sort of proto-agnosticism within the leadership sphere which sets the stage for later publications taking a similar sceptical stance (Antonakis and Day, 2017, pp. 11-12).

The notion of reification is particularly important as a central concern of this thesis relating to other bodies of leadership theory. Put simply, for an exploratory project aiming to understand, a framework like distributed, servant or as-practice leadership represents a problem in that it emphasises a particular, pre-established vision of the

work which a thing, whether that be processual or entitative in character, does in an organisational context (Crevani, 2018; Greenleaf, 1970; Raelin, 2020). For a project looking to understand the depth grammar of participants in their usage of terms, this reification, at least on the behalf of the researcher, is not just a challenging intellectual barrier, it is inherently opposed to the achievement of key goals.

The proto-agnosticism of Gemmill and Oakley is practically realised through their treatment of leadership. They note, with scepticism, that scholars conflate the existence of the word leader or leadership with the concrete existence of such phenomenon:

It is assumed by researchers and practitioners that because there is a word (“leader” or “leadership”) there must be an independent objective reality it describes or denotes.

(Gemmill and Oakley, 1992, p. 114)

Particularly central to their critical analysis of leadership is the idea of reification, which they describe as “a social process which converts an abstraction or mental construct into a supposed real entity” (ibid., p. 114). Their claim is that the overemphasis of leadership as a concept represents a reification of the leadership “myth” into a real phenomenon, with implications for how organisational work is seen to be performed:

With reification, social progress is viewed as “caused” by or “determined” by a leader, a cadre of leaders, or “leadership.”

(ibid., p. 114)

It is important to underline that the paper, when read as a whole, clearly does not deny the potential import of leadership as a concept; whether leadership is a myth or not, the authors recognise the tangible impact which the concept can have (ibid., p. 123). Nor does it deny the utility of pushing for a better understanding of what “leadership” means in context. Indeed, on the latter it offers suggestions as to how one might better achieve this aim (ibid., p. 120).

Gemmill and Oakley may refer to leadership as a myth and call for scholars to seek out alternatives wherever possible, but they are also very concerned with the impact that this myth has; they don’t seem so inclined to question the existence or importance of the myth itself. This is, in its own way, a form of agnosticism; the authors recognise the work of leadership and the importance of critically understanding the concept:

Making discussable what is typically undiscussable about leadership and alienation is a step toward demythologizing and personal “reskilling.” Amplifying personal awareness of the leadership myth and its social function allows one to examine their own projective identification and ways of deskilling themselves unnecessarily.

(ibid., p. 127)

One way of reading these comments is that they are an indication of this proto-agnosticism; despite the express desire to emphasise that “members of an organization can be free to relate to each other in the work process any way they choose”, leadership is seemingly the elephant in many rooms which must be tackled before such relation is possible (ibid., p. 126). The notion of agnosticism is seemingly quite applicable here as the authors seem torn on the status of leadership; Gemmill

and Oakley talk about the idea as a myth, they ostensibly do not believe that it “exists”. Yet, the issue remains that the notion itself, even as myth, retains importance. If one is interested in practice and practicalities, then rituals matter even if they are dedicated to a “false idol”.

Gemmill and Oakley are leadership scholars, but it would be disingenuous to suggest that they advocate in largest part for a “better” understanding of leadership. In their conclusions they underline the need for “disenchantment and detachment from the central social myth and ritual of dependency on leadership” to enable “new possibilities... in the ways we structure life at work” (1992, p. 127). This commitment is an important area of overlap with the work of the more contemporary agnostics discussed below and serves as a conceptual link between the work of early sceptics and this later strand of contribution (Antonakis and Day, 2017, pp. 11-12; Parker, 2018, p. 211).

Turning to more contemporary leadership research such reification is in clear effect. Indeed, such reification is implied within the effort to offer a pre-established definition of the concept which includes certain forms and precludes others, pre-codifying leadership as something real by associating it with aspects of participants experiences (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 34-35). It is these images of leadership which inform the initial scripts of Alvesson and Sveningsson’s participants in their notable 2003 study on the disappearing act of leadership when studied (2003a, p. 374). This point is of significance specifically because there is so much leadership research out there which exists and trades solely on this reification of leadership as a concept; work which serves to say “if one sees leadership in this particular way, then one finds leadership”. This is fine for the purpose of exploring some researcher generated

concept (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 39-40). Yet for the purpose of understanding what is there to be understood, rather than what baggage we as researchers bring to the table, this strikes myself and others as being a particularly poor starting point and one which points recursively back, surprising nobody, to the romantic notion of leadership (Calas and Smircich, 1991, p. 569; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b; Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich, 1985).

Even to take something such as leadership-as-practice, which takes so much pain as a body of theory to emphasise emergence, one still sees this reification in play through the privileging of the leadership concept (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 128). It is leadership-as-practice one looks to understand; there is, explicitly, a leadership practice to be described (Collinson, 2018; Raelin, 2016a, p. 3; Raelin, 2020). If one wants to research organisation and to allow for the possibility that leadership may not emerge then one must seek a framework which is able to articulate the absence of a thing or the presence of an alternative (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Blom and Alvesson, 2015; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b). It is not fruitful, in such a context, to adopt one which seeks to reinterpret other forms of organising in the light of leadership and thus expand the existing conceptual hegemony enjoyed by this notion on any activity of coordination beyond the mundane and the undesirable (Blom and Alvesson, 2015; Ford and Harding, 2007).

3.2.1.b Leadership Tinted Glasses – Seeing Leadership Everywhere

This discussion of leadership-as-practice leads neatly onto the next issue for agnostics. Not only is leadership seen variously as every or anything, it is also seen everywhere; it is both pervasive and hard to challenge (Alvesson, 2019; Blom and Alvesson, 2015). Some go so far as to position the concept as being a part of our

natural experience or even as a biologically determined, innate capacity one can measure through neurological means (Diebig, Bormann and Rowold, 2016; Dinh *et al.*, 2014, p. 42). Even among those more critical scholars, there is still the unerring assumption that there is and always has been some leadership out there being done (Grint, 2011), some individual, group or process ongoing which one can call or relate to “leadership”, and that it is worth investigating (Raelin, 2016a, p. 3; Raelin, 2020).

With some notable exceptions (Calas and Smircich, 1991; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992; Kelly, 2008; Meindl, 1995), the extent of critique in more conventional leadership research seems limited to the idea that there may be an excess focus on individuals or entities, rather than that there may be an excess focus on leadership in the whole (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 119-134). The problem with such characterisations is that they serve to expand further the plausible scope of what might be called “leadership”, rather than to modify and counter existing views (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 4-6; Parker, 2018, p. 211). Of course, this assumption of import is not problematic for those who wish to investigate the phenomenon. However, the aggregate effect of these manifold characterisations is that leadership is cast in ever more roles, creating an ambiguous homogeneity in organisational concepts (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 4-5; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, pp. 8-10; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211).

There is one notable limitation to this expansion of leadership as discussed earlier, the concept generally comes to express organisational roles and processes which one could deem more desirable (Blom and Alvesson, 2015; Ford and Harding, 2007; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019). In a way, this issue links also to the final problem in leadership to be discussed: the tendency to represent leadership as “all good”, or as a benevolent alternative to management. The combination of these two factors is

particularly problematic. Put plainly, practitioners are at risk of being seduced by a notion which acts to erase or crowd out a more diverse organisational vocabulary (Ford and Harding, 2007; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019; Parker, 2018). Even more open-ended research still operates upon a foundation afflicted by the issues described here, and so is poorly positioned to engage in the kind of questioning required to surface and emphasise alternatives which are in use by practitioners without representing these in terms of leadership (Raelin, 2016a, p. 3; Raelin, 2020). The aim of this research project is to pursue concepts which “cover less and reveal more”, not to feed the hegemony of leadership concepts (Blom and Alvesson, 2015, p. 488; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211).

Take as an example here the massive expansion of traits associated with quality servant leadership; as Tourish notes, the number of characteristics associated with this approach has ballooned from ten to 44 distinct areas for attention (2013, p. 204). In this way, servant leadership becomes increasingly everything and nothing; any positive or constructive action can be brought into accord with the role, while the label is so broad that little to no specific guidance or content is implied in the usage (Alvesson, 2019, p. 34; Parker, 2018, p. 210). Another example here is the work around charismatic leadership, where there has been a similar documented growth in the indicating factors and vestiges of the concept into a space of problematic ambiguity (Dinh *et al.*, 2014, pp. 42-43; Van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013).

Beyond the expansion of any one leadership frame, there is the proliferation of frames themselves. The systematic review work available on the subject shows the massive expansion in mainstream perspectives on leadership, an expansion which has also been noted by a number of organisational scholars outside the explicit context of

review (Dinh *et al.*, 2014; Grint, 2011; Tourish and Barge, 2010). It is argued by agnostic scholars that processual views of leadership exacerbate, rather than remedy, this particular issue through the interpretive expansion of what can be considered leadership activity (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 33-34; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 127-128). Going back to the Wittgensteinian roots of this study briefly, the concern here is that the scope of what is included under the broad non-basic action of “leadership” has seemed to expand over the preceding decades of practice and research on the topic (O’Reilly and Reed, 2011; Schatzki, 2000, p. 99; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664).

The notion that the term, and ideas attached to manifestations as practice or role, has begun to colonise organisational spaces is a key concern of this thesis (Bresnen *et al.*, 2015; Ford and Harding, 2007; O’Reilly and Reed, 2011). This growth is a recent enough development that contemporary academics still in the midst of their careers have witnessed themselves the transition from administrators, to managers and now to leaders (Bresnen *et al.*, 2015; O’Reilly and Reed, 2011; Reed, 2016). Language has, at least historically, evolved and so it is not the shift in itself that is problematic. Rather, it is the baggage which is brought along with the transition. The change is not just a renaming, but a broader reconceptualization.

What of management in such a context? The “manager” in leadership theory often becomes an empowered bean counter or an organisational advocate, while the practice itself is seen as workmanlike maintenance of processes or rules (Antonakis and Day, 2017, pp. 5-7; Conger and Kanungo, 1998, pp. 6-13; Ilie and Schnurr, 2017, pp. 1-2). This picture of management in of itself is not problematic, but it is more so when leadership stands as an appealing alternative into which powerful actors can retreat,

or worse still a position from which they can adopt a mantle as liberators from the tyranny of “management” (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 5; Reed, 2016). In other words, it is more pertinent to ask, “what becomes of managers in such a context?”. As noted previously, the answer to this question is seemingly that they often become leaders, in name, if not in deed (Bresnen *et al.*, 2015; Ford and Harding, 2007; O’Reilly and Reed, 2011).

3.2.1.c It’s All Good – Valorisation of Leadership

In contemporary leadership literature it is not simply the case that leadership is over-employed in the explanatory capacity, rather it is also employed generally to refer only to those actions which are viewed or construed as wholly or largely positive in nature (Blom and Alvesson, 2015; Ford and Harding, 2007; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019). The archetypal example of this built-in valorisation relevant to this research project is found in servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Liu, 2019; van Dierendonck and Patterson, 2015). However, there is certainly a strong element of this rose-tinted view manifest in other relevant leadership literature; the work on transformational/charismatic leadership positions the “leader” in an explicitly positive role, more a personal trainer and life coach to the organisation at large than a powerful actor given licence by an executive authority (Bass, 1985a, p. 34; Conger and Kanungo, 1998, pp. 12-19; Riggio and Bass, 2006, pp. 2-12).

The valorising tendency described above even persists through distributed leadership to an extent; where the focus is less on leadership in the entitative sense, there is still a prevailing tone that leadership rests in the generation of positive content. There are marked differences certainly, the organising unit may serve as a substitute for an individual actor and there may even be a sense of shared process and a non-entitative

focus (Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2010; Gronn, 2002; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

However, the function is still ostensibly providing motivation, direction, solidarity, engagement and even a sense of belonging for the constituent members of the implementing organisation (Collinson and Tourish, 2015, pp. 577-581; Denis, Langley and Sergi, 2012, pp. 225-231; Ilie, 2017, pp. 71-72).

Blom and Alvesson, in particular, talk about the issue of “hurrah vocabulary” (2015, p. 488) and the associated problem that “many things are not necessarily best captured through positive vocabulary” (Blom and Alvesson, 2015, p. 487). This valorising language is one of the central concerns of leadership agnostic scholars with regards to the eponymous notion, who feel that employing leadership concepts unreflexively risks an ongoing and systematic “flattering” of bosses and simultaneous “flattening” of workers (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 4-6).

The leader, or leadership as a process, is seen as responsible for influence, dynamism and progressive action (Collinson and Tourish, 2015, pp. 577-581; Ilie, 2017, pp. 71-72; Riggio and Bass, 2006, pp. 2-12). Workers become followers, with their consent to be influenced, even if for practical reasons beyond the “seduction” of the leader, implicit in the term itself; a follower chooses to follow (Conger and Kanungo, 1998, pp. 19-21; Meindl, 1995, p. 337; Riggio and Bass, 2006, pp. 6-12, 216). There are important components to be drawn out here. The implied consent of the follower contributes significantly to the valorisation of leadership actors and processes by framing them as more humanistic and democratic. The notion of power through influence also feeds into the view that “leaders” derive their power from the will of the people, compounding this issue (Antonakis, 2012, pp. 265-274; Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014; van Dierendonck, 2011, pp. 1230-1239). The foregrounding of proactive, innovative action

contrasts against the characterisation of management as a reactive or disciplinary force oriented around rules (Antonakis and Day, 2017, pp. 5-7; Conger and Kanungo, 1998, pp. 6-13; Ilie and Schnurr, 2017, pp. 1-2).

In many ways one might say this problem of valorisation is “baked-in” to much of leadership research even without the comparison to management. In such theories, leadership, at least of the right sort, comes to stand as a representation of positive, affirmative action and broad social good (Antonakis, 2012, pp. 265-274; Ilie, 2017, pp. 71-72; van Dierendonck and Patterson, 2015). How can one argue, for example, with a “spiritual leader” whose purpose is to “convey an organisational vision that is deeply and personally motivating to followers” (Dinh *et al.*, 2014, p. 42). Servant leadership, already identified as prevalent in Agile literature in the preceding review, is another example of a positively loaded theory which invites the reader to view leadership in an implicitly positive light (Greenleaf, 1970; Liu, 2019; van Dierendonck, 2011, pp. 1248-1251).

One can bring this right back to the roots of leadership research; the issue of valorisation inherent in leadership research was noted over 35 years ago by Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich in their critical work on the “romance of leadership” (1985). These authors note the role which the concept plays as an explanatory concept, employed to help describe organisations in causal terms (Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich, 1985, pp. 79-80). In its role as an explanatory concept, the authors suggest, this concept has been over-emphasised and, as stated in the title of the paper, romanticised at the expense of attention to the role of the wider organisation (Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich, 1985, pp. 98-99; Meindl, 1995). In this way, concepts of

leadership can obscure the contribution of other processes, or indeed less powerful actors.

Coming back to an issue noted in the previous section, the implied benevolence around the notion of leadership can also serve as a convenient camouflage for the continued role of powerful actors in an ostensibly flatter structure (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019; Parker, 2018; Reed, 2016). Indeed, it is the shielding offered by the implicit good of leadership which is a key concern for this thesis. The foregrounding of leadership protects the authority of powerful actors, groups or institutions by retaining privileged positions in the achievement of organisation, while excusing that authority as either benevolent, or exercised through consent, consensus and so on (Antonakis, 2012, pp. 265-274; Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014; van Dierendonck, 2011, pp. 1230-1239). This is where the notion of being “all-good” becomes so insidious; if “management” transitions to “leadership”, and “leadership” is seen as good in-and-of-itself, then it becomes significantly more challenging to oppose the views, actions or dictates of powerful actors who exploit through these frameworks (Blom and Alvesson, 2015, p. 486; Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998, pp. 466-467; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 102).

The notion of a “dark side” to leadership is a growing concern of critical leadership scholars, so this section doesn’t look to suggest that criticism of the concept and the problems within hasn’t been engaged (Collinson and Tourish, 2015; Tourish and Barge, 2010; Tourish, 2013). If this work has a critique to offer of these scholars’ efforts, it is that often the recourse seems to be towards some “right sort” of leadership which is seen as an appropriate remedy to the perceived evil of the offending body of theory (Collinson and Tourish, 2015, pp. 581-590; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Liu, 2019, pp.

1099-1100; Zoller and Fairhurst, 2007). However, by providing ever more ways one can engage in leadership, these scholars expand the vocabulary of the evasive executive actor and equip institutions with new processual language to obscure or reinterpret, but not truly redress, old patterns of doing (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 33-34; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 127-128).

It is for the above reason, in part, that agnosticism is adopted here as a theoretical position from which to critique leadership. Treating leadership as a discursive achievement primarily which groups different non-basic actions enables one to address a range of the ideas in play without having to adopt a different positive position on the topic, or privilege any particular researcher generated concept as a substitute. In other words, agnosticism is seen as best equipped to answer questions like “what is the term “leadership” doing or signifying here?” through a sceptical and even critical lens, without offering some new leadership concept onto which readers and practitioners subsequently fixate as “the right way to do leadership” (Alvesson, 2019, p. 11).

3.2.2 Leadership Agnosticism

3.2.2.a Agnosticism and the Search for Alternatives

For the purposes of this thesis, leadership agnosticism is understood to refer to a position of fundamental scepticism as to leadership when one is studying organisational work. This means that one must refuse to impose the label when it is not utilised and must look to question the distinct contribution and supposed implications of the term when it is used. This does not mean that one ignores the concept if it arises in the talk of participants, for example. Rather, it is a general

acknowledgement of several key movements which essentially respond to the issues described above:

1. Leadership in itself is an empty signifier which is used in a wide variety of often mutually exclusive ways
2. Leadership, as a concept, is problematic as it crowds out more specific or less controversial terms
3. Most leadership research is complicit in perpetuating these issues by continuing to valorise or otherwise over-emphasise the notion

Looking back at the Agile literature which was discussed in the previous section, one can see each of these issues manifest in the treatment of leadership concepts through the majority of papers. The simultaneous operations of various leaderships, especially concepts like shared and servant leadership, stands as compelling evidence of the first two points. The issue associated with leadership research is also very much perceptible in this case, with the publications mostly being favourable towards the notion and emphasising the importance of the various leaderships they describe (Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016; Collin *et al.*, 2018; Srivastava and Jain, 2017). The exceptions to prove this rule are a subset of works which take a more sceptical approach to the concept which were notable specifically for their valuable minority outlook (Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Moe, Aurum and Dybå, 2012; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017).

Perhaps, then, beginning with a quote from Fairhurst on the search for leadership was a trifle deceptive. To further explain, it is perhaps better to think of this project as asking the question “what kind of leadership are we talking about, if any at all?” (Alvesson, 2019, p. 7). The addition of this last modifying element may seem

inconsequential, but it represents an important concession to a simple but nevertheless seemingly underexplored idea; that leadership might not always be the best way to describe what it is that “we are talking about” (Alvesson, 2019, p. 11).

Agnosticism in the context of leadership is perhaps not best understood in the theological sense. Scholars who explicitly engage with an attitude of agnosticism here do not so much doubt the universal existence of leadership, but rather its contextual importance (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 379; Alvesson, 2019, p. 11).

This notion of doubt and scepticism is the central conceit of several papers authored throughout the last three decades which each explore, in distinct ways, the possibility of leadership’s contextual irrelevance (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, pp. 377-378; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992, p. 127; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, pp. 11-12). That is not to say the leadership as a concept is ignored in its entirety, for to do that would be to lose the potential to understand this lamentably influential notion (Alvesson, 2019, p. 11; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 131). Not to mention it would involve ignoring a legitimate form of expression from participants, going against any ambition to understand natural language use, the imposition of an etic conceptual void. Rather, leadership agnosticism can be thought of as the drive to articulate alternatives and not rely on researcher-developed notions of leadership as a shorthand for work which could also be described as administration, communication and so on (Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 11; 2019, pp. 132-133). Alvesson, in his 2019 paper describes the “need to consider more positive routes within LS [leadership studies] and investigate “real organizational life”” (Alvesson, 2019, p. 12). In short, this is a small body of works authored by a group of scholars who are attempting to articulate a rejection of the burgeoning leadership literature and its perceived colonisation of other forms of

organising talk (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 363; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992, p. 118; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, pp. 1-2).

Alvesson and Sveningsson acknowledge the need for engagement with the growing mass of leadership work in the conclusions of their 2003 critical paper, “The great disappearing act: difficulties in doing “leadership””. They underline the “need for a more open and questioning approach” to studies of the concept and are careful to note that “it would be premature to kill off leadership as a concept”. Ultimately, they conclude that “the possible existence of leadership... should be critically studied, not be taken for granted” (2003a, pp. 379-380). This paper is important to any understanding of leadership agnosticism because it is that in which the term “leadership agnosticism” itself was coined (ibid., p. 377). Like the previously discussed work from Gemmill and Oakley, they too are concerned with the reification of leadership concepts:

Most people seem to have little doubt that leadership is a “real” phenomenon and indeed an important one in the large majority of organizations. Most leadership researchers tend to agree that it exists, although there are a few that at least acknowledge problems with confusing the label leadership with an assumed empirical reality... Hence, leadership “is” even though there are divergent opinions about its substantial significance.

(ibid., p. 360)

What is fascinating about these parallel sentiments is that these papers are not in direct conversation with one-another. Indeed, Alvesson and Sveningsson do not reference or acknowledge this other publication at all. That is not to say that the authors lack a sense of history; they refer to a conference paper from 1979 which

articulates similar “agnostic” notions of fundamental conceptual doubt. Fred Luthans problematises situations where “the hypothetical construct is treated as the empirical reality”, though as his later writing demonstrates this ends with a recourse to “leadership” behaviours (Davis and Luthans, 1980, p. 281).

Alvesson and Sveningsson reject this kind of recourse back to some still universal notion of leadership which is understood as a concrete “thing”, simply acting through a different medium, an approach which they broadly term objectivist (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 360). Instead, they offer that the best approach here may be to assume “one possibility” is that talk of leadership represents some “real phenomenon”, while also maintaining that it is possible “that there is not [leadership], at least not in any direct and nonambiguous sense” (ibid., p. 361). It is this rationale which guides the research project set out in this thesis. Put more succinctly, agnosticism has meant that, in performing the study, a primary aim is emphasising “the ambiguity of that which may be interpreted as leadership” (ibid., p. 364). Their paper represents not only a call to action, but also an attempt at fleshing out the empirical basis of their push towards agnosticism. This empirical material consists of six minicases, derived from a series of 40 “loosely structured conversations” with managers at a biotech company (ibid., p. 366). The summary they provide of leadership sentiments expressed by the participants is somewhat damning:

In virtually all these examples the interviewed managers put forward a notion, that is, several versions of leadership in accordance with contemporary fashionable scripts concerning how one should conduct leadership. In this respect all managers appear fairly informed and progressive. However, when explaining the topics, the view of their leadership

becomes vague or even self-contradictory, the initial positioning almost melts away. At the end of the interview accounts, there is not much leadership left intact.

(*ibid.*, p. 374)

This process of seeming evaporation is the eponymous “disappearing act”. This idea of leadership and the “disappearing act” associated with conceptual vagueness is interesting. However, it is connected by Alvesson to weak criticisms of leadership which are based around a particular and thus reductive scoping of leadership as “an active subject trying ambitiously to exercise a coherent and systematic influence within an asymmetrical relation” (*ibid.*, p. 375). This framing ignores the fact that there are many alternative perspectives which would recognise some of these practices as “leadership”. The authors are aware of this fact, but they reject these more democratic models as the top of a slippery slope to a situation where leadership is “everything and nothing” (*ibid.*, p. 375). In sum, by retaining a preference for a particular essentialised understanding of leadership the authors focus partially on what might be said to be the “wrong issue”; that is arguing that “weak influence” is categorically not leadership, rather than focusing on the ambiguity created by these diverse leadership theories being proliferated through businesses.

It is in this way that Alvesson’s later continuation of this theme through his subsequent publications could be seen as an improvement. Alvesson’s 2017 article, fully published in 2019, addresses eight issues that he perceives with organisation studies as it exists today. In many ways, these issues are extensions of the ideas described in the 2003 paper. Notably, the term leadership agnosticism has been dropped from use. However, the concerns are mirrored despite this change in terminology. Not only are they reproduced, they are expanded and specified. Alvesson

talks, for example, about the issue of reification, paralleling Gemmill and Oakley (Alvesson, 2019, p. 8; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992, p. 114). He also describes the imposition of leadership categories on social relations, picking up on Learmonth and Morrell's concern about the spread of these labels at the expense of a more diverse organisational vocabulary (Alvesson, 2019, p. 7; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, pp. 11-12).

In sum, Alvesson advocates quite comprehensively here for a cooling towards leadership, an increased scepticism and a wariness of the specific issues which he identifies in his paper; Alvesson provides a rigorous critique of existing leadership research based around a selection of key problems he finds. For clarity, those issues are Hollywood and Disneyland "templates", a "closed system view", "assuming two kinds of people", "bees and the honeypot", "reification", "tautology" and "hyperreality" (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 11-13).

There now follows a brief exploration of each of the aforementioned problems: the Hollywood and Disney concepts refer to the tendency towards "heroic" narratives and implications of morality, such as with transformational and servant leadership theories (ibid., p. 4-5); "closed system", which describes the situation where leaders and followers become the sole units of analysis in an isolated equation without senior executives and so on (ibid., p. 5-6); "assuming two kinds of people" is in some ways a similar issue, where there is a tendency to frame all relations in terms of leadership (ibid., p. 6-7); "bees and the honeypot" describes the conflict of interest which Alvesson sees the popularity of leadership creating for scholars of organisation studies (ibid., p. 7-8); "reification" is, as was described earlier, the process of turning leadership into a solid and distinct phenomenon to be found and measured (ibid., p.

8-9); “tautology”, where the results of studies into leadership are shaped by the very nature of the questions in that any affirmative outcome for leadership implies some actual unproven benefit (ibid., p. 9-10); and “hyperreality”, which encapsulates the tendency for researchers to gather data without engaging in “careful observation or checking of accounts” as to whether they correspond to the actual experiences of participants (ibid., p. 10-11).

After years of wrestling with the notion of leadership and attempting to articulate effective critical perspectives on the idea, it is clear that Alvesson is no less close to the edge of the metaphorical cliff. Perhaps, he notes in despair, leadership studies “is so problematic that we should leave it and return to the more substantive field of observational studies of managerial work” (ibid., p. 11). This evokes similar sentiments to those expressed by Learmonth and Morrell, as will become clear shortly (2016b, p. 12). However, ultimately, he recognises the need to study leadership, if only to provide decent alternatives. In doing so he calls for research which adopts an agnostic perspective:

We need to study leadership in depth in order to see what happens and occasionally provide inspiration for reflective practice – something rather different from advocating transformational, authentic, servant, shared ... leadership as a recipe for the good organization or correlating abstract independent, mediating and dependent variables.

(Alvesson, 2019, p. 11)

Thus, a solid understanding of the topic is required if one is to battle against this form of easy, “default” expression where complexity is subsumed under the “readymade phrases” of leadership language (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. xiii). Providing such

an understanding is one of the primary aims of this research, as shown through the construction of the research questions and the search for organisational focal points, one of which may be leadership, in the Agile context.

As was briefly discussed before, it is the increasing prevalence of this “leadership” language which worries Learmonth and Morrell (2019, p. 1); they note, with concern, the “slippage between manager/leader and worker/follower” (Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 2). Their primary issue, then, is the colonisation of organisational discourse by the language of leadership. Such colonisation is in evidence through the Agile literature. Consider the contrast between the Agile manifesto, which contains no mention of leaders or leadership (Beck *et al.*, 2001), with the current state of the academic Agile discourse. The latter, when it comes to organisational matters, is increasingly infatuated with notions of shared, servant, transformational and other such forms of leadership (Appendix C).

More generally, Learmonth and Morrell are opposed to organisational “trend following” in working practices. This is an issue they claim to have first-hand experience of:

We have been troubled by the practice of habitually calling people leaders and followers, as if they were synonyms for manager and worker, ever since starting to notice it; not least because of the experiences one of us (Mark) had while working as a manager in the UK National Health Service (NHS) in the 1980s and '90s

(*ibid.*, p. 2)

It is interesting to mention that the experience they describe is not that of Mark encountering the colonising discourse of leadership, but rather that of management. The paper reflects on the move from “administrator to manager” and how this change “represented a shift in power dynamics” within the organisation (ibid., p. 3). They relate this story because, in their own words, “a generation on, [they] can see a comparable shift occurring across all sectors and industries”. Only, in this case “we are calling the managers leaders” (ibid., p. 3). This thesis is sympathetic to the worries of Learmonth and Morrell that the academic community is not doing enough to challenge the casual usage of such terms, taking them instead as an assumed starting point for analysis (ibid., p. 3). This concern with the colonisation of organising language is interesting, but more informative is the authors’ drive “not so much to debate what leaders and followers are, but to show what the use of these terms does” (ibid., p. 3).

The article serves to criticise not only mainstream leadership theory, the primary targets are fellow critical theorists who are seen as failing to show sufficient reflective awareness when drawing on the “language of leadership” (ibid., p. 6). Three papers from the critical leadership studies literature are selected; papers which are otherwise to be considered “highly successful – and critical – in many ways” (ibid., p. 6). They use these three papers to note three different issues that they see in critical leadership studies: Harding’s 2014 paper is problematic in that it relies on a conception of “leader” which is functionally identical to “manager”, as the authors demonstrate by performing a direct semantic swap (ibid., p. 6); next, they address the work of David Collinson in a longitudinal fashion, showing the linguistic drift in his work and eventual re-presentation of a 1988 paper (ibid., p. 7); finally, they discuss the 2015 paper by Collinson and Tourish, which they claim fails to achieve a deeper level of

criticality by continuing to use the language of leadership unquestioningly (ibid., p. 9).

This thesis is particularly interested in the first and last of the issues stated above. On the former, this notion of what one might call semantically empty leadership, directly substitutable for other similar notions, is worth investigating and developing further. On the latter, with a sceptical mindset one cannot help but feel sympathetic to the concerns they espouse about “critiques [that] might be absorbed or otherwise appropriated by the mainstream”. They note, with almost a tone of mischievous glee, that “the mainstream can deal much less readily with the idea that its fundamental categories – leader and follower – may be interest serving in themselves” (ibid., p. 9). They criticise Collinson and Tourish for recognising “leadership” as both contextually socially constructed and harmful yet failing to actually question or try to move outside of the concept itself (ibid., p. 11). Like Neo, they have seen the truth and were offered a choice to fight but have seemingly taken the blue pill and chosen to remain within the “leadership” matrix.

Some criticise Learmonth and Morrell, however, citing their overreliance on a similar dichotomization between manager and worker (Collinson, 2017, pp. 1-2); this is an interesting critique, given that the authors do problematise the earlier shift in language from administrator to manager at the NHS (Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 2). Collinson suggests that the authors miss the opportunity for greater criticality by failing to consider that both management and leadership processes are at play in organisations (2017, p. 3). This thesis is not so compatible with the idea of privileging the concept of leadership so much as to assume its import (ibid., p. 6). However, Learmonth and Morrell do seem to rely heavily on a “Marxist binary” as a substitute

for the problematic leadership ideas at points (Collinson, 2017, p. 11; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 11). Overall, then, this critique is valuable insofar as it points back towards the sort of moderate agnosticism which seems to be increasingly advocated for (Alvesson, 2019; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 6; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211).

Learmonth and Morrell continue to advance a staunchly critical program of leadership research, aimed at combating what has been described multiple times as the “language of leadership” (2019, pp. 2-3). Their recent textbook, “Critical Perspectives on Leadership”, published as a part of the ongoing series “Routledge studies in leadership research”, fleshes out some of their earlier ideas; leadership is something to be roundly critiqued and worked against, yet it is not something that one should simply ignore:

Despite our cynicism about the language of leadership we are also not suggesting that when any of these terms are used that our eyes should simply glaze over and that we ought to disregard whatever is said next because it is bound to be nonsense

(ibid., p. 2)

It would be wrong, however, to downplay the firm critical ambitions of the authors; they set their face against the notion and they still argue that critical researchers “should simply stop using the term ‘leader’ when referring to bosses” (ibid., p. 6). They warn that one must be wary of the role which these terms can play in quite literally shaping the social realities which organisational members must contend with (ibid., pp. 58-59, 119); Care must be taken to address talk in these contexts as “it is through ordinary, day-to-day language that we create the world at work” (ibid., p. 4). This interest in the relationship between language and worldview is familiar from the

introduction; the strong constructionist perspective which these authors adopt is highly compatible with the Wittgensteinian philosophy which underpins this thesis (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000a, p. 142; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 94-95, PI §242).

Furthermore, it is not a distant leap to relate their conceptualised “sub-vocabulary” of leadership to that of “language games around leadership” (Kelly, 2008, p. 764; Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 8, PI §7). In both, there is a sense that a plurality of linguistic communities can be seen at play in sustaining and expanding these vocabularies. The understanding which Learmonth and Morrell seek to demonstrate through their table is not a comprehensive, all-inclusive knowing. Rather, what they present is an illustrative slice of this vocabulary (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 2-3). This slice shows the diversity of leadership language; the range of ways that the notion is employed or invoked in both the literature and, increasingly, in industry (ibid., pp. 3-4).

Going further, one can relate Wittgenstein’s concept of “forms of life” to the idea that such “terms come bundled with assumptions about how we should understand relations of power in work organizations” (ibid., p. 4); this is sharing of not just opinions, but deeper judgements about life which allows for a mutually intelligible leadership “language game” to potentially come into play (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 14-15, PI §23). The ultimate goal of Learmonth and Morrell, then, is to “unravel the language of leadership by identifying the connotations and associations ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ have in contemporary organizational life” (2019, p. 4). This is a succinct presentation of the similar goals derived for the completion of this thesis. The aim of this research project is to unravel the “language of leadership” as it relates to Agile

and to explore the “contradictions and tensions that come bundled with terms like ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’” (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 4).

However, this compatibility should not be overstated; Learmonth and Morrell do seem hesitant about the possibility of any criticality arising from work which is based in the language of leadership. More specifically, they decry those who would seek to “salvage something positive” from the notion of leadership (ibid., pp. 120-130). In this sense, Learmonth and Morrell remain interested in the same sort of inquiry as Alvesson and also Parker; in their reflections on “what can be done” they note that it is their “hope [that] the book will help to unsettle habits of thought and assumptions in this readymade language” (ibid., p. 134). It is fair to say that these authors are pushing researchers to engage in a spirit relatable to agnosticism, even if this isn’t the terminology used. At least, this is true insofar as they seek to “encourage people... to think more deeply and critically about [leadership] itself” and in their “hope we can encourage some readers to think about how we might talk about things differently in the future” (ibid., p. 134).

The authors are ultimately hesitant to offer “simple, straightforward ‘answers’ to what anyone should do [when] faced with a workplace saturated by terms like leader and leadership” (p. 133). They note, instead, several tactics to which they are amenable which they describe broadly as “positive cynicism” (ibid., pp. 130-131). Perhaps, then, it is possible to say that cynicism is a good analogue for agnosticism in the case of Learmonth and Morrell (ibid., p. 44). Their closing thoughts finish on a somewhat inclusive note, suggesting there is room yet for collaboration among critical scholars of different stripes who are passionate about opposing the harmful linguistic monoculture of leadership:

Whatever the future may hold, our book should make it easier for those who share similar views about leadership (however many there may be) to know they are not alone. It may also help others to articulate their own objections and to better discover their own modes of resistance.

(ibid., p. 139)

3.2.2.b Signs of Life & Finding an Ecological Niche

In a broader sense, these moves to reject the assumption of leadership do indeed seem to be gaining traction. This traction, however, is not so much empirical but rather in the form of textbooks (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 140-141). Learmonth and Morrell's textbook is one example of this trend, another is the similarly timed and imaginatively premised "After Leadership". Drawing on a book called "After Virtue" for inspiration, the text poses a scenario; "a post-apocalyptic world where society has turned against the [leadership] sciences" (Carroll, Firth and Wilson, 2018, p. 1). Learmonth and Morrell remain broadly critical of this work; they see it as seeking primarily to "reinvent or detoxify", and thus perpetuate, leadership (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 6).

This is, for the most part, a valid criticism. However, particularly noteworthy for the interests of this thesis, and perhaps overlooked by Learmonth and Morrell, are those chapters grouped under the heading of part three in the book "Discarding, Deconstructing, Starting Again". In this section they look to explore an important question:

if critical leadership scholarship succeeds in radically redefining what we mean by leadership, in what sense does it continue to still be leadership – and indeed why would we persist in calling it so?

(Carroll, Firth and Wilson, 2018, p. 12)

Here leadership is interrogated by several authors from different perspectives; Suze Wilson, for example, draws on Foucault in order to dismantle the “special” status of leadership. Martin Parker explores the self-explanatory question “Can We be Done with Leadership?” as he “sets about debunking the necessity of leadership myth” (Carroll, Firth and Wilson, 2018, pp. 12-14). Not all of the authors pursue what might be called a cynical agenda. Some “maintain hope in the power and purpose of leadership” (ibid., p. 12). However, there are also those who look to “reconstruct organisations without the meddlesome assumption that leadership is an essential ingredient” (ibid., p. 12). Thus, despite the slow start, it seems as if notions of leadership agnosticism are gaining traction amongst even more “gently” critical scholars (Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 4). Whether this emerging area will be expressed in those terms by the scholars engaged in the pursuit of criticality remains to be seen, but there is something to be said for rallying under identifiable banners if researchers expect to generate momentum against the colonising “myth” of leadership.

The chapters by Martin Parker and Donna Ladkin are particularly indicative of this trend (Ladkin, 2018; Parker, 2018). Parker, as was discussed before, is concerned with “the troublesome consequence of leadership for organisation theory” (Parker, 2018, p. 207). He is ultimately pessimistic about the possibility of being “done with leadership”

(ibid., p. 210); he points out the contradiction inherent in a search emphasising plurality which denies, out of hand, one facet of that plurality (ibid., p. 210). However, this does not mean he has given up on the idea of a critical project conducted under the assumption that “organising [does] not necessarily involve leadership” (ibid., p. 210). He closes his chapter with a call to action which is seen as very much in line with the aims of this thesis, conveying a sense of resignation tinged with the will to push towards alternative perspectives; he states that “we might not be able to be done with leadership but should keep trying to put the signal-man back in his box” (ibid., p. 211).

Ladkin engages in an altogether more novel project. In the introduction, Carroll et al. discuss her chapter, providing a basic summary of its content which suggests an unusual perspective which is deeply entwined with the overall theme of the text. They explain that “she paints the picture of a grim post-apocalyptic future in which we have laid waste to our planet exploiting her to the hilt and violently destroying one another in the process” (Carroll, Firth and Wilson, 2018, p. 13). Resisting the urge to point out this seems somewhat like a description of the present, the editors continue to discuss Ladkin’s “rueful confession” of “our complicity in humanity’s downfall” (ibid., p. 13); complicity that she notes was “secured through docile faith in our leaders” (ibid., p. 13). However, in this landscape there is “a hint of hope” as the chapter goes on to explore “the possibility of life ‘without the fantasy of leadership’” (ibid., p. 13). In looking back on the “before” of her post-apocalyptic dialogue, Ladkin laments that the reliance on “leaders” meant that “we traded our birth right as humans for the fantasy of someone who would ‘make it all better’” (2018, p. 226).

In this fictitious post-collapse society, where survivors have “banned leadership”, there are rules to prevent the emergence of such figures; they still “encourage

initiative taking and agency”, but Ladkin explains that “those who develop any kind of following are temporarily ostracised” (ibid., p. 227). This has led to a culture where leadership is seen as “an idea, like that of slavery, or the quest for perpetual youth which was of another time” (ibid., p. 228). For Ladkin, then, the issue is not so much one of leadership’s reality. Rather, it is around the necessity of the notion and the negative impact which those associated with the term have wrought through their sway over humanity (ibid., p. 225).

These two chapters, when contrasted, show two distinct ends of leadership criticism which are almost working at cross purposes. On the one hand is the work of scholars like Parker, who look to question the necessity of an all-encompassing leadership concept; a linguistic monoculture which is harmful for the impact it has on expression and for the implicit beliefs that the term leadership is seen to perpetuate. On the other hand, the work of scholars like Ladkin can be considered commendable, but not truly compatible; leadership here is given definitive form, an abhorrent idea with specific content which is to be railed against. This drives Ladkin to talk about a world where anybody who develops a following is ostracised; to Ladkin, leadership definitively is this process of acquiring and influencing followers. The distinction may seem fine, but it is key to understanding how leadership was tackled through this research project; it is this the specific notion of leadership agnosticism, rather than a general sense of “leadership criticality”, which guides the research in this thesis. In practical terms, this means that the importance or significance of leadership is not presumed, that it is treated as an empty theoretical construct which may or may not be in play in any given context. Going further, the ambiguous “language of leadership” is problematised, insofar as it emerges to displace existing forms of organisation with “leaderly newspeak” (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 133).

It is hard to define where this area of “leadership agnosticism” is best placed in relation to the “pantheon” of overall theories. In truth, this is because these categories function rather more like musical genres, Venn diagrams with areas of overlap, some larger than others. In addition, the long timeline of works discussed here means that the literary environment in which Gemmill and Oakley were publishing is somewhat different to that of Alvesson and Sveningsson and so on. Thus, it is something of an interpretive act to connect these works on the basis of some neatly shared banner. Indeed, Learmonth and Morrell are aware of Gemmill and Oakley’s work but see them as arguing for a rather different “blanket ban on using the term leadership in organizational scholarship” (Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 5). This chapter has made the argument for agnosticism as a distinct, useful and emerging field in itself. However, it is also interesting to see the affinities this group of works have with notions of discursive leadership, by way of their focus on “the language of leadership” (ibid., p. 11). The idea that these bodies of research are in conversation with one-another is perhaps recent, but not novel (Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 4). Schnurr and Schroeder note that “the discussions around what is (not) leadership and which terminologies best capture the closely related issues of power and agency have recently gained momentum”. Underpinning this argument are the previously discussed papers by Collinson and Learmonth and Morrell (Collinson, 2017; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b). Not only is the debate framed as current, it is also described as making “important contributions to current scholarship” which is based around “conceptualisations of leadership as co-produced” (Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 4). Kelly is the other author whose works are referenced in this section of discussions. As the focus shifts to his work it also begins to move towards discursive research more generally.

The area of closest overlap between these two bodies of research may, in fact, be their objects of interest; the fact of the matter is that, while those conducting research under the banner of cynicism or some other such critical distance may not consider themselves in conversation with discursive leadership, the concerns of these scholars are often inherently discursive in nature (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 12-13; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 58-59; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 4). As such, they can be hard to distinguish from research into discursive leadership on the basis on method or object of interest alone. In order to produce their recent critical textbook, Learmonth and Morrell “analysed databases of ordinary language using an approach called ‘corpus linguistics’” (2019, p. 28). Alvesson and Sveningsson’s 2003 paper, which coined “leadership agnosticism”, is meanwhile influenced by conversation and discourse analysis (2003a, p. 367). Many of the currently available papers focus more on inward facing projects exploring the discursive practices of leadership researchers. As such, they don’t always state a clear method, opting instead to deliver a sort of critical and linguistically/conceptually focused literature review (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 1-2; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992, pp. 113-115; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 6). Given the still emerging state of this area, especially with respect to the number of academic research papers available, it is difficult to provide a wider array of examples than those already surveyed here. However, this seems enough to state that discursive methods are compatible with, perhaps even key to, this type of semantically-oriented critical project.

3.2.3 Bridges to Discursive Research

Simon Kelly brings the notions of discursive leadership and leadership agnosticism into contact through several works, with a recent ebb in emphasis on the concept.

Kelly's work is important to this thesis for reasons beyond the connecting of these two bodies of leadership research. These will be discussed in the following section, but for now the focus will be on his scholarly relationship to the notion of leadership agnosticism (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010, p. 183). This is mainly true for his earlier work on leadership (Kelly *et al.*, 2006, p. 197; Kelly, 2008, pp. 770-772), with more recent publications moving away from this idea for reasons which will become apparent (Kelly, 2014, p. 910). The only appreciable reference to any of the works discussed above in this latter publication is a reliance on the work of Alvesson and Sveningsson to emphasise that leadership is essentially "defined" through action (*ibid.*, p. 910).

Looking back at his earlier works, it is clear that Kelly has had a developing relationship with the notion of agnosticism. Going back to 2006, Kelly showed an awareness of the, at that point recent, paper by Alvesson and Sveningsson which called for researchers to engage with an attitude of agnosticism. It is important to note that these remarks do not so much inform his research as much as represent a note of interest in the concluding discussions (Kelly *et al.*, 2006, p. 197). However, the main concern of this particular project is "the meaningful design of leadership training and development". As such, they privilege the packaging of "leadership work" for teaching "in a concrete and recognisable form" (*ibid.*, p. 197).

His 2008 paper represents a more critical form of scholarship, directed primarily towards the current state of leadership studies and the ongoing challenges in identifying leadership "among the milieu of everyday life" (Kelly, 2008, p. 765). This sentiment is a development of both his own reflections and Alvesson and Sveningsson's work. What is important to note here are the statements he makes about the relationship between his work and the notion of leadership agnosticism:

While the present article is encouraged by and supportive of the interpretative approach to leadership research advocated by the authors – particularly their call for ‘leadership agnosticism’ in future studies (2003a: 377) – the question remains as to whether it is leadership that is mysterious and pre-disposed to dissolving and disappearing, or whether it is a consequence of the research methods being used to make leadership visible and researchable in the first place.

(ibid., p. 770)

Ultimately, Kelly concludes his discussion of leadership research by pointing to a potential solution which he sees in the form of “re-categorizing” the notion as a language game in the tradition of Wittgenstein. This move will be addressed again later as it is central to the “story” of this thesis, but for now the main point to emphasise is that this move of re-categorization is presented as an alternative to “practising leadership agnosticism” (ibid., p. 772). Perhaps it is best to summarise, then, Kelly’s relationship to agnosticism using a metaphor extracted from his own work. There is no overlap to speak of and the bodies curve away from one another, but one may build a “bridge” between the two:

the bridge is unique in that it does not seek to occupy territory, or blend territories to make them indistinguishable. Bridges simply provide a link between two or more land masses at their shortest distance from each other.

(ibid., p. 778)

If there is a bridge to be built between these two areas of research then the point of closest contact is unlikely to be the aims of the scholars, so much as their focus on the “language of leadership” (Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 6; 2019, p. 1; Alvesson, 2019, p. 12). Admittedly, in the case of the agnostics the focus may well be on the absence of the aforementioned. Nevertheless, there is clearly a linguistic bent to all of the research which has been addressed so far, as a preoccupation with the use of the term “leadership” might imply.

The inescapable fact is that leadership agnosticism remains an underdeveloped notion in comparison to other fields of leadership research. It is certain that, as a standalone area of contribution, it is somewhat wanting. As has already been discussed, there is a lack of empirical material to inform and underpin this emerging body (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 13-14). That is why it is an important aim of this thesis to develop the literature around agnosticism as a potentially useful and distinctive approach to leadership, based around discursive methods. Scholars of discursive leadership, especially those interested in pursuing more critical ends (Clifton and Dai, 2019, pp. 2-3; Fairhurst, 2009, pp. 1617-1619; Zoller and Fairhurst, 2007), potentially have much to gain from integrating some degree of agnosticism into their research. Conversely, the notion of leadership agnosticism would benefit greatly from increased exposure and development by a wider range of sympathetic scholars. The codification of leadership agnosticism conducted here serves to improve exposure by facilitating future research. However, for now the main priority is providing a clear and succinct summary of discursive leadership research in order to clarify the methodological roots of this study. Thus, the journey continues, away from the islands of agnosticism and the linguistic bridge, deeper into the yet unexplored territory of discursivism.

3.3 Discursive Studies in Leadership

Discursive leadership can be thought of as the backdrop to, and part parent of, the ideas which underpin this research project. Given the primary focus which this thesis maintains around leader critique and agnosticism, a full review of the discursive literature will not be undertaken here. For a more comprehensive overview of the field without the blinkers of utility and relevance it is worth reading the papers by Fairhurst and Connaughton (2014) and Schnurr and Schroeder (2018). What this chapter will do is give a more basic overview of discursive leadership with an especial focus on those works which were relevant to the thesis and to leadership agnosticism. That is not just to say those that went into the final design of the research, but also those which are important to the wider conversation in which this work participates or those which were at one point informative. The purpose, moving forwards, will be to establish “what exactly is a communication-centered view of leadership?” (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014, p. 8), “what does it contribute to this thesis?” and “where does the thesis depart from this position?”.

It is interesting to note that the increasing number of communication based approaches to leadership studies come not just from the area of discursive leadership, but also from communication studies as well (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014, p. 8; Tourish, 2016). A historical review is certainly off the cards given the decision to shy away from a comprehensive functional overview of this literature. However, it is interesting to note that this move towards communication is underpinned by what is known as the “linguistic turn” in the social sciences. The integration of insights such as Wittgenstein’s “blurred concept” into leadership theory are representative of this shift towards alternative research philosophies; authors such as Wittgenstein and

Michel Foucault played a vital role in re-casting society and our very selves as non-essential and “produced” but each contribute their own perspective (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000b; Deetz, 1996; Deetz and McClellan, 2009, p. 122).

3.3.1 Discussing Discursive Leadership

Building from these varied positions of “constitutive” language, communication-based studies into leadership “do not advocate a universal definition of leadership” (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014, p. 8). Instead, the focus is on “how leadership is done in and through discourse” (Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 2). This ultimately takes “leadership to be a practical accomplishment”, rather than a universal variable (Clifton and Dai, 2019, p. 3). What is particularly intriguing is the stated aim to demonstrate how “leadership is brought off in some here-and-now moment of localized interaction” (Fairhurst, 2007, p. 15). However, unlike with the preceding scholarship, there is often an underlying acceptance of leadership as a concept of some import; perhaps as focus on “what leadership actors... do”, for example (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014, p. 11). Thus, there are some key departures from this communicative perspective. Perhaps this is best summarised by a mild rhetorical shift; a search for how leadership is contextually “brought off”, but with greatly increased scepticism and a heavy emphasis on the modifying question, “if at all?” (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 13-14). The broadening horizon of discursive (now communicative) leadership research suggests promising things for a potential place for this approach amongst the body of knowledge on linguistic studies into organisation (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014).

Fairhurst and Connaughton address the influence of Wittgenstein on this field and place work influenced by his writing under the heading of “constructionist

approaches” (ibid., p. 16). Overall, it is a heading which sits easily with the overall aims and orientations of this project; constructionism envisions a world where “leaders must persuade themselves and others of their leadership” (ibid., p. 17). Particularly, as will be shown in this section, Kelly’s drive to “understand the logics and labelling of situated applications of the term “leadership”” is deeply informative to the aims of this thesis, albeit this is pursued towards a more critical end in the case of the latter (ibid., p. 18).

There is something of a chronological reshuffling which goes on when one arranges a thesis from the various disparate parts of research which often exist at the time of a first draft; so it is that certain aspects which came before end up positioned after. One such aspect is the constructionist discursive focus of this particular project (ibid., p. 17). Initially, the work of Keith Grint was the “gateway” to this theorisation of leadership research (Grint, 2005; 2010; Grint and Jackson, 2010). In particular, Grint’s 2005 paper reflecting on the relationship between the social construction of issues as a response to environment and the necessitation of either command, leadership or management was highly influential in this process (Grint, 2005, pp. 1478-1479). This led to the discovery of further discursive scholarship such as the work of Kelly (Kelly *et al.*, 2006; Kelly, 2008; 2014), Fairhurst (Fairhurst, 2008; 2009; Zoller and Fairhurst, 2007) and others who sit outside the traditionally recognised bounds of discursive leadership (Clifton, 2014; Clifton and Dai, 2019; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018).

One well-recognised referential cornerstone in this area of research is Fairhurst’s 2007 textbook on the topic (Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 2); this resource pulls together much work on leadership influenced by the linguistic turn under a common identity, one that is almost defined in productive opposition to mainstream, essentialist

research (Fairhurst, 2007, pp. 3-6). Perhaps there is no more adequate demonstration of this than the full title of the text itself, *Discursive Leadership: In Conversation with Leadership Psychology*. Discursive leadership represents and encapsulates a range of attempts to understand leadership as a phenomenon constructed through a social, discursive process. These approaches can cover a wide array of methodological approaches, each with distinct features and a slightly different method for the study of discourse (Kelly, 2008; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, pp. 2-3; Wodak, 2011).

If there was a single discursive work to which this thesis could be said to owe its theoretical foundations to, it would be Simon Kelly's aforementioned 2008 paper entitled "Leadership: A categorical mistake?". This paper introduces the notion of investigating leadership not as a thing-in-and-of-itself, but rather a "blurred concept". This is an amorphous conceptual space in "which language-games orient themselves and can be played out in the practical accomplishment of other kinds of work" (Kelly, 2008, p. 775). In doing this, the paper did not only contribute massively to the operationalisation of leadership; the reliance on the work of Wittgenstein sparked interest, which led to the broader philosophical foundations being established on the grounds of his radical interpretivism. It is fair to say that, without this paper, the thesis as it is now may have taken a very different shape and path.

As was already stated, the papers discussed above are important to the way in which leadership was conceptualised, especially at an earlier stage of the project before other, more specific sources were found which further fleshed out these ideas. Still, it is key to show the genealogy of these ideas, lest there be an implication that they are being presented as novel in isolation. It is merely the synthesis of these ideas in this particular form which is proposed to be a source of novelty. It is important not to

linger on these publications too long; Kelly's work is not the only important piece of discursive leadership writing which was influential in the conduct of this research project. The methodological tone of the section will continue as the focus shifts more explicitly to addressing those papers which made a distinct or notable contribution to the methodology of the project, rather than its theoretical aspects.

3.3.2 Methods in Communicative Research

Scholars pursuing an agenda of "discursive" research do so in a wide variety of ways. Despite generally being focused around the issue of language use, there is a surprising degree of heterogeneity in the way these authors go about their work (Clifton and Dai, 2019, p. 3; Fairhurst, 2007, p. 7; Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014). Admittedly, this variation is around a central theme which means that the methods are heterogenous to a point. The point in this case would be the common interest in matters of "linguistics" (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014, p. 8; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 2). The heterogeneity, then, comes into play when one considers the wide variety of methods which are used to better unpack the communicative aspects of "leadership": Kelly, for example, draws mainly on ethnomethodology in his 2008 attempt to reframe the leadership debate around the notion of a "category mistake" (2008, p. 766); Clifton and Dai continue in a similar vein by utilising membership categorisation analysis (MCA), a subset of ethnomethodology, to address participants "methodical practices in describing the world" (2019, p. 6); Wodak, on the other hand, draws upon a specific sub-branch from the tradition of critical discourse analysis to inform her co-authored 2011 research paper on discursive leadership strategies in team meetings (2011, p. 597); Clifton has published other papers in the past which have drawn on a range of other methods as well as the

aforementioned, for example actor network theory (2017, pp. 303-304) and conversation analysis (2019, p. 7); Judith Baxter has contributed works based around “interactional sociolinguistics” (2015, pp. 432-434); and this still does not represent an exhaustive list of the potential approaches to the study of leadership from a discursive perspective (Fairhurst, 2007, p. 7; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 9).

For context on why this is important to a thesis which claims affinity with those aforementioned “leadership cynics”, there are a few factors one must consider: firstly, note the previously highlighted lack of clear methodological guidance arising from the literature around leadership agnosticism, save a general sense of what one should try not to do (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 1-2; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992, pp. 113-115; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, p. 6); secondly, consider the significant and also previously discussed overlap between the methods employed in those more critical empirical projects which exist and those utilised in discursive leadership research (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 367; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 28; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 9; Wodak, Kwon and Clarke, 2011, p. 597). Thus, it was this body of discursive research which was perceived as most informative in finding a way to operationalise the agnostic research process. The full details of this project’s method, including the relation to those works which are drawn upon, are discussed more specifically in the methods chapter. The aim of this section is to provide sufficient background to these papers and to show how those works which are relevant fit in to the wider field of discursive research.

Simon Kelly contributes much to this thesis, especially in terms of philosophy. However, his method is quite different from that adopted in the pursuit of this thesis; Kelly uses the work of Louis Pondy to connect Wittgenstein’s notion of language

games to ethnomethodology's drive towards "understanding how a setting is organized as 'sensible' by its members" (2008, p. 775). His focus is on "the production and performance of families of language-games" which, when studied, may offer "an insight into leadership-in-action" (ibid., p. 776). Kelly's research aims are highly compatible with the ambitions of this thesis, to say the least; his comments about pursuing an approach which is not "explanatory" but rather is concerned with "description" (ibid., p. 779) are taken as illustrative of this statement. Likewise, his closing remarks on the direction of future research are seen as highly compatible and somewhat methodological in nature:

What is needed, therefore, are not more observational studies, longer periods in the field, or more detailed descriptions of supposed 'leadership work', but instead an interpretive approach that is sensitive to the production of and relationships between language-games.

(ibid., p. 779)

However, while the aims of the project may be compatible, the method is not significantly unpacked such that it could be followed based on this paper alone. As Kelly himself points out, this is not ethnomethodology by the book. Rather, it is a bespoke method which Kelly derives from a synthesis of Wittgenstein, Pondy and ethnomethodology (ibid., p. 776). Beyond this, the aims of and data used in this thesis are somewhat incompatible with what was required or lauded by ethnomethodologists; these researchers look for a particular kind of pre-study theoretical neutrality. In the case of this thesis, the study begins with a desire to avoid privileging "leadership" and this represents something of a pre-formulation of problem and research question (Rawls, 2008, pp. 724-725).

Considering the above problems, a process of review was continued with a specific eye to establishing suitably sensitive discursive methods which offered a good degree of guidance as to the conduct of research; many papers exhibit the same sort of “black box” problem, where methods or underlying rationale are explained generally rather than in specific detail (Wodak, 2011, p. 628). With this in mind, works authored by specialists were given particular attention; there have been a number of discursive scholars working with, or calling for an increased reliance on, approaches derived from the field of “applied linguistics” (Clifton and Dai, 2019, pp. 3-4; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018, p. 11; Wodak, Kwon and Clarke, 2011, pp. 592-594). Of course, to what extent this process was already underway as part of the linguistic turn is debatable (Deetz, 2003, p. 427). However, it is true to say that there is an increased recognition among discursive scholars of the work done by specifically qualified linguists and vice versa (Clifton, 2018, p. 5; Wodak, Kwon and Clarke, 2011, p. 595).

Wodak is one such scholar and her work is, perhaps, the biggest inspiration in terms of method; her 2011 paper on discursive leadership brings to bear existing linguistic expertise on the issue, providing a clear and well-informed discussion of “making visible” the work of discursive leadership (Wodak, 2011; Wodak, Kwon and Clarke, 2011, pp. 593-594). More specifically, the focus on critical discourse analysis was particularly informative as this method was picked up and eventually pursued. In practice, it was found that the notion of criticality which is emphasised under critical discourse analysis (CDA) is very focused on power and the method was thus felt to be incompatible with the more open-ended intentions of this research (Fernández Martínez, 2007, pp. 126-127; Wodak, 2011, p. 626; Young and Harrison, 2004, pp. 1-5). However, Fairclough himself drew heavily, in turn, on the work of linguist Michael Halliday to provide a “theory of language” for his approach to discourse (Baker *et al.*,

2008, p. 297; Fairclough, 1995, p. 131). Wodak is seen as similarly drawing from this body of research into systemic functional linguistics, although some dispute this (Baker *et al.*, 2008, p. 297; Fernández Martínez, 2007, p. 125). As the following chapter about methods will show, the work of Halliday is deeply enmeshed also in this thesis. Clifton and Dai's 2019 discursive analysis of Japanese leader identity is seen as exemplary of the sort of scholarship to which this thesis aspires. Using the previously mentioned method of MCA, the authors aim to show "how the meanings of "Japanese" leadership and leader identity are construed through talk" (2019, p. 4). This paper is considered exemplary for its transparency and clarity with regards to the methods; MCA is introduced briefly and given a contextually suitable explanation (ibid., pp. 5-8) and the steps and logic of the analysis are laid bare, allowing for a great degree of what Wodak terms "retroductability" (2011, p. 624). To unpack this slightly, this means that "interpretation of the text in question is based on explicit systematic analysis" (ibid, p. 624). In the case of Clifton and Dai, it is clear what they are looking for, membership categorization devices (2019, p. 6), and how they are looking for it, conversation analytic techniques for breaking down texts (ibid., pp. 8-9). They are not only reflexive about their results, but also about the data used to obtain those results (ibid., pp. 12-15).

3.3.3 Categorization, Identity and Systemic Functional Grammar

Continuing with the theme of showing awareness, a brief discussion of the research into leadership, categorisation and identity is undertaken in the following section. The aim of this discussion is to address an area which shows significant overlap with the concerns of this thesis, but which was not included explicitly due to an emphasis on the avoidance of etic conceptual baggage before the conduct of the research study.

The benefit here is twofold. On the one hand, this section serves to show an awareness of this literature, ensuring any particularly close overlaps are noted so unjustified claims to originality do not slip by the researcher to any knowledgeable reader. On the other, the identification of similar works sets the groundwork for future publications by highlighting those bodies of research which are likely to serve as fruitful grounds for further conversation.

The fact is that some of this focus on identity has already come through; take, for example, the well-discussed work of Clifton and Dai which focuses specifically on the issue of membership categorization (2019, p. 4). This is an emphasis, as the description might imply, on “members’ practical socio-logical reasoning as they make sense of their social world... categorizing people and defining the predicates... and their relationships (obligations and duties) vis-à-vis each other” (ibid., pp. 5-6).

Identity is a well-established area of concern for discursive scholars, which can be traced back from the linguistic turn and through the CMS tradition by way of authors like Du Gay (Clifton, 2017, pp. 301-302; du Gay, Salaman and Rees, 1996, p. 9; Ford, 2006, p. 78). This can manifest simply as an interest in “a person’s sense of who they are” (du Gay, Salaman and Rees, 1996, p. 9), or as a more complex desire to unpick “the self, subjectivity and identity” (Ford, 2006, p. 78).

Jian and Fairhurst note that this interest in “the study of individual and collective identity” is heavily interwoven with a similar focus on “leadership sensemaking and framing activities” (2016, p. 9). Explaining further, they note that researchers studying these processes could do this for a range of purposes:

They may want to know how... leaders and followers introduce, understand, or adopt a new organizational change initiative. They may also want to contrast its framing by multiple stakeholders to reveal how frames conflict and coincide. Finally, they may want to understand the identity work of leaders and followers as they try to reconfigure new individual and/or collective selves from within a change initiative; such identity framing may signal how much they are identifying with the requested change and thus likely to adopt it

(ibid., p. 9)

There is clear affinity here, then, with the aims of agnostic or cynical scholars of leadership who may want to understand how identities other than that most frequent and odious of labels may come into play. This affinity is reflected both in the talk of these scholars themselves, which can often focus on identity (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 380; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 99-100), and the record of their previous works.

In their influential 2008 textbook on the subject, Ford, Harding and Learmonth note the significant impact which this type of categorization and labelling can have on those subjected to it. They explain that “the power of the performative... penetrates the psyche and allows for the construction of identity or a self”. Stemming from this construction of identity is the impetus to go beyond “doing” a role to “being” that role; these organisational members “must incorporate leadership into the very sense of their selves” (2008, p. 21). They note that this process of becoming is linked holistically to one’s way of being in the organisation, that it involves “the psyche, the memory, interactions between selves and texts, interactions with others, interactions between different aspects of the self, the local context, the geography, the culture”

(ibid., p. 29). This conception of a “leadership” notion or identity arising from the holistic, shared lived experiences of situational participants is directly relatable to Wittgenstein’s notion of “forms of life” as underpinning the mutual intelligibility of language games (2009, pp. 94-95, 238, PI §241-242, PPF §345-346).

The form of categorization described above could also easily be related to the form of identity work identified by Halliday in his discussions of the functioning of grammar, especially relational clauses. His concern is with the grammatical mechanics which enable these sorts of in-the-moment classification. He notes that “class-membership is construed by attributive clauses and identity by identifying ones” (2014, p. 262).

This distinction between identity and class membership is a grammatical one, relying on the presentation of the relational clause; if one was to say “a platypus is a mammal”, that is a form of membership categorization, but if one was to say “balance means you hold it on your fingers and it doesn’t go (fall)” then that is a form of identification. Thus, it is this level of specificity and circularity (all x’s are y’s, all y’s are x’s) which determines how one might see this. In this way, identifying clauses can arise from membership categorization where those categories are identified with their members, such as in the sentence “The fuels of the body are carbohydrates, fats and proteins” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 263).

The interest in this type of identity work was maintained as a key part of the framework used to guide coding efforts, as the relational clause remained a focal point in the analytical process. However, it was only the work of Halliday which was used to inform reflection on identity work, with other relevant publications being noted in dedicated sections across the second discussion and the conclusion chapters (Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998, pp. 467-468; McCabe, Ciuk and Gilbert, 2019, pp.

4-7; Thomas and Davies, 2005, pp. 685-687). What the preceding section has shown is that there is significant room for the conversation between the research conducted in pursuit of the thesis and the work done around identity and categorisation. This room arises not just from a compatibility in aims or interests, it arises also from the affinity in research rationale and theoretical positioning. However, it is important to emphasise that the pursuit of these links is best left to the later chapters discussed above; this thesis clearly has affinities but ultimately a grounding in this area of research would be counter to the broad ambition to leave out, wherever possible, etic concepts in the framing or early conduct of the investigation.

3.4 Conclusion

This final section of the chapter will serve to recap the previous discussions with an eye to providing a summary of the key points made through the preceding writings. Through the preceding discussion of Agile literature, as well as research on leadership from the discursive and agnostic frames, a set of interests and emerging issues have been established which were foundational to the establishment of research questions as they now stand. The growing prevalence of leadership rhetoric in the Agile literature, combined with the relative scarcity of sceptical perspectives on the subject, implied that the practical context represented a fruitful venue for the implementation of leadership agnosticism. While the review suggested that there may be a similar tendency towards leadership in the rhetoric of practitioners, it was the possibility of investigating this potential which drives the research project.

With this interest in the possibility of leadership in mind, it is not assumed that the concept is impactful in these practical contexts. Rather, the review has shown that leadership may have relevance in these contexts due to the preference for various

leaderships in the literature which informs and comments upon practice (Appendix C). These review findings inform the first and second research question, dictating that the questions asked are framed around general focal points of organisation and around whether or not leadership is important to Agile practice. Similarly, the interest in pressures around the highlighted issues of organisation arises from the small amount of sceptical Agile research available, which points to the issues and contradictions which can arise from the conflict between rhetoric and practical experience in these contexts (Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017).

Broadly, the review focused around two key pillars of leadership agnosticism and discursivism. Each of these was discussed in turn with an eye to developing a sense of both literatures. This serves the purpose of providing background which makes clearer the rationale underpinning the study; the conceptualisation of leadership, establishment of philosophical positioning and selection of methods were all based, at least in part, on the work done by more senior scholars (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a; Fairhurst, 2007; Kelly, 2008). Leadership is conceptualised as a discursive phenomenon, in the vein of both the agnostic and communicative literatures, which can be seen to act through speech. However, as per the agnostic commitments of this research, the importance or even the contextual existence of leadership is left an open question. This open question is to be resolved through an attention to the actual speech of participants; the disappearing act of leadership is to be addressed by privileging literal uses of the term while discounting that which is thought to resemble some notion of leadership. This is framed as engagement with some “language game” of leadership which is shared amongst communities who share judgements and “forms of life”, in the tradition of Wittgenstein.

Considering this philosophical positioning underlines the importance of existing scholarly work to the design of this thesis; Kelly calls towards Wittgenstein, Alvesson, Learmonth and Morrell towards agnosticism and, as was seen, others towards the method. Given that the notion is treated as a linguistic phenomenon in this way, discursive methods were almost necessitated for conduct of the research. The work of Ruth Wodak around CDA was particularly informative here for deciding on the direction eventually taken, though others' work was equally as helpful for bounding a space of negative possibility or what it was felt would not work. Finally, an important aspect of this chapter which is yet to be discussed is the efforts to show continuity with those bodies of work which are seen as compatible, yet which were not brought into the conduct or design of the thesis. The theme of these methodological discussions will continue into the following chapter, which will focus explicitly on the approach developed from this starting position of agnosticism.

Chapter 4: Methodology & Method

4.1 Introduction

As was stated through the leadership literature review, the methods associated with discursive leadership are seen as key to facilitating an agnostic approach to leadership which is capable of rendering the concept interpretable without engaging in undue reification of this amorphous notion. Obviously, the philosophy of Wittgenstein and the concepts of form of life, language games and depth grammar are central to this process, acting in a similar role to that in which Kelly employs them (Kelly, 2008). However, there are also the practical steps of analysis itself to be considered here, which were supplied in Kelly's case by a reliance on ethnomethodology (Kelly, 2008, pp. 778-779).

The method proposed here is a novel approach to interpretive discourse analysis, bearing some resemblance to critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Heracleous, 2004, pp. 180-187), by way of a reliance on the systemic functional grammar of Michael Halliday (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). The distinction from established approaches to research comes primarily in the form of investigative rationale and the epistemological positioning of claims; rather than the explicitly critical aims of CDA, this method is based on an open-ended, interpretivist exploration of depth grammar and its relations to "form of life" (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664). One might, then, think of the method as adjacent to Heidegger or Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics; adjacent because there are still significant departures from these bodies of work. Especially relevant here is the nature of language games as a subject for investigation, where Wittgenstein is interested in "a plurality of relative games", as

opposed to a more porous, transcendental and assimilative linguistic phenomenon (Gadamer, 2008, p. xxxvi; Hekman, 1983, p. 220).

In practice, the Wittgensteinian investigation conducted for this thesis takes the form of a representative/interpretive process, where a depth grammar of organisation in Agile is explored and refined. To reiterate, the key interests which emerged in this investigation were “what forms of organisational talk are legitimated in Agile?” and, more specifically, “what role do leadership concepts play in this legitimated discussion?”. As a result of this focus on the space of perceived legitimate expression, a secondary research aim emerged around the shadow of these findings; foregrounding that which was delegitimated.

This research is a coding-based analysis which runs across three strands of “metafunction”, linguistic categories defined by Halliday (2014). A total of 35 experience reports, making up nearly 150,000 words of reflection on practice across 239 pages, were interpreted through this analytical process. The codes derived in the first pass were aggregated into groupings based on the perceived relation of events captured, termed manifestations. These manifestations were then themselves aggregated into a smaller set of categories. In practice, this meant a reduction from 138 codes, grouping similar exemplars, to 16 manifestations and then 6 categories. The full surveyable representation of this process is included in the appendices (Appendix H), but each section will also start with an overview of the relevant elements. This will simply be included as part of the introductions to each category to show the codes which were ultimately aggregated into the category (Figure 6).

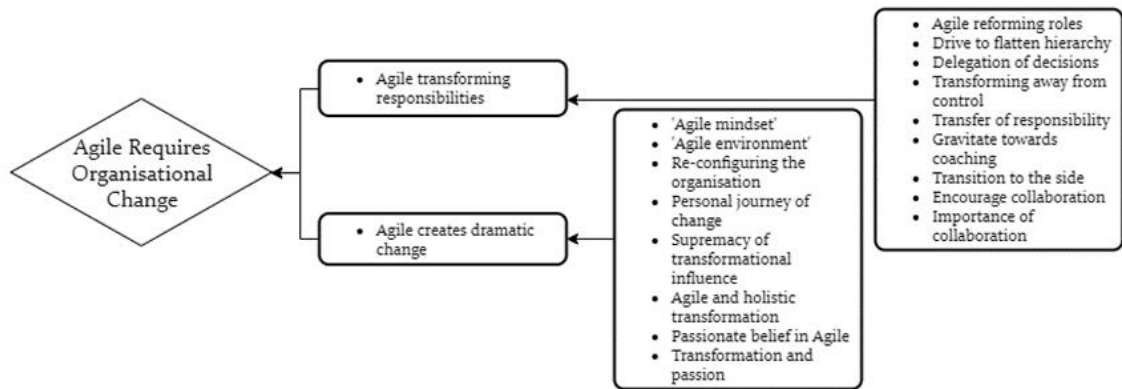


Figure 6 - Aggregation of Codes to Categories

4.2 Philosophical Wittgenstein

To understand the research method developed and deployed in this thesis, one is best to turn to the work of Schatzki, specifically his reflections on the various potential paths for the application of Wittgenstein’s work. Schatzki sketches out three such paths: the first is the application of his writings as the “kernel” around which one forms a full philosophy of social science; the second is to take “his epistemological and methodological remarks” and draw on these to inform one’s approach to social science; and the third is to take forward the insight he offers on more narrow topics, such as rule following or “mental concepts” (Schatzki, 2000, pp. 93-94). This thesis primarily treads the second path described, but there are elements of the third in play also in the adoption of language games and depth grammar as investigative focal points. In broad strokes, the following paragraphs will explore the ways this thesis pursues the second path, of epistemological/methodological application, while the section proceeding this will look at the implementation of Wittgensteinian remarks on language, in other words this thesis’s partial pursuit of the third path.

This work draws inspiration from those scholars, from both within and without discursive leadership, who have pursued an engagement, to varying degrees, with the

work of Wittgenstein (Pondy, 1989; Kelly, 2008; Shotter, 1996; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2011). In the vein of Kelly particularly, the aim here is to apply his work to give us a “way in” to understanding and studying leadership as a highly contextually variable and ephemeral phenomenon. Perhaps the primary philosophical argument of this thesis is the assertion that Wittgenstein understood language well, and merely used this familiar avenue to explore the deeper philosophical ideas he was hoping to refine through his “series of examples” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 57, PI §133).

Indeed, it is not only language that gets treated to investigation, but rather language in the majority of cases with additional discussion of mathematics throughout both books of *Philosophical Investigations*. The epistemology which underpins these investigations represents the philosophical insight of Wittgenstein which is relevant to the generation of this analysis which has been termed a “Wittgensteinian Comparative Analysis”. The following excerpts will serve to explain what it is this analysis consists in:

All explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light - that is to say, its purpose - from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; but they are solved through an insight into the workings of our language... not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with.

(Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 52, PI §109)

Schatzki outlines, succinctly, the descriptive aim of such Wittgensteinian inquiry, and here his remarks align with the stance adopted in this thesis regarding the realisation of this goal. The kind of “insight” which Wittgenstein discusses is practically achieved

through the arrangement and re-arrangement of descriptions deemed evocative of the context or concept in question when taken as a whole:

As we have seen, the comparative, context-constructing method Wittgenstein advocated for interpretive social science is descriptive in nature. Executing it consists in arranging descriptions of phenomena that are related to the practice under investigation in such a way that there results a grasp of the spirit of the practice and the practice is thereby rendered natural. This procedure does not require explanations or hypotheses about origin, although as indicated, explanations and hypotheses can help construct the context... Furthermore, since Wittgenstein tied theories to hypotheses and explanations (see, e.g., PI, sec. 109; and BB, p. 18), it follows that theories, too, are not required in interpretive social science.

(Schatzki, 1991, p. 324)

To express this approach in terms of his 1996 work, my research looks to connect depth grammar, as a discursive phenomenon which integrates practical components, to observable practices as realised within the organisational language game associated with Agile, of which leadership notions form a substantial part. The depth grammar refers to common reference points, actions and judgements which inform and shape language games and are, in turn, informed and shaped by them (Schatzki, 1996, p. 105). Expression in these terms is key because Schatzki, in his writing here, offers an impactful condemnation of Lyotard as reducing the “social” to mere discursive practice (Schatzki, 1996, pp. 134-136). Instead, this work looks to connect discursive frameworks of describable judgement and rule-following to the practices of Agile teams and organisations as depicted through self-reflective accounts to understand

better how the “problem” of a democratic language game in tension with organisational norms is, or is not, resolved through action in such contexts.

Some others have pursued this second path of application, adopting Wittgenstein due to epistemological arguments laid out in his writing (Hekman, 1983). Regardless of whether one endorses fully this position, he clearly has much to say on the possible limits of what we, as philosophers (read: researchers), might definitively know about meaning (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 47-48, PI §90-92). However, he also ruminates at length on how one might go about generating knowledge, or insight, in spite of these limitations (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §130-132). The epistemological positioning of this project is most influenced by the notion of the “object of comparison”.

Schatzki’s 1991 text, *Elements of a Wittgensteinian Philosophy of the Human Sciences*, talks about the formation of such comparative objects and surveyable representations as a necessary and pivotal step in the process of “grasping the spirit expressed in a practice” (p. 318). Such an inquiry as this, which is concerned with overview of the rules and judgements as experienced at the surface, is suited to the subject of this project; Agile represents a context where participant behaviours and space of legitimate action are defined or guided by an overall system of rules and judgements referenced in the course of action (Schatzki, 1991, p. 321). In particular, the emphasis placed here on spaces of ambiguity, in addition to spaces of legitimacy/illegitimacy aligns with his later discussions on acceptable action, as opposed to correct and incorrect activity (Schatzki, 1996, p. 102).

Wittgenstein explains this concept of comparative objects by way of “language games”, a notion which will be revisited in greater depth later in the chapter as it, along with depth grammar, is foundational to much of his interpretive dissection of

our linguistic resources. Wittgenstein clarifies the status of this construct, and the broader role of objects of comparison, at length across several remarks:

Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language - as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance. Rather, the language-games stand there as objects of comparison which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language. For we can avoid unfairness or vacuity in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison as a sort of yardstick; not as a preconception to which reality must correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy.) We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order for a particular purpose, one out of many possible orders, not the order.

(Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §130-132)

These statements, at least in the eyes of this author, act as a powerful epistemological statement. It is from this statement, and the others like it, that the overall positioning of this project as an interpretivist study derives; it is this ambition, first and foremost, which is to be carried forward from the foundational philosophy. While Wittgenstein claims that “we may not advance any theory” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 52, PI §109), this later quote seems to stand in clarifying quasi-contradiction; how can one establish an “order” without advancing some form of proposition which others may be disposed to call a “theory” (Grayling, 2001, pp. 95-96). In these statements one might see an approach to knowledge generation outlined; the scholar constructs, as expository similes, models which may act as a reference point, almost an analytical foil, to the descriptive investigation of a subject. However, one must also bound the relationship

that these models have to the practices of which they speak (Chia and Tsoukas, 2011). This does not allow for theory building in the sense of uncovering definitive truths, but neither does it validate the total rejection of assertive model generation on the part of the investigator which many feel the philosopher's admonitions that "all explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place" amount to (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 52, PI §109; Shotter, 2010; McGinn, 2013, p. 27).

What is it that Wittgenstein does when he aims to describe? The author of this thesis encapsulates the notion with the hybrid term "de-cribe", playing off of the notion of both mundanely "describing", yet also going further and "unwriting" the object of investigation; this is to say that the process Wittgenstein is engaged in is one of both depiction, but also of dissection preceding a reconstruction. The whole range of the method can be demonstrated well in the handling of Augustine's writing in his early remarks (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 5-10, PI §1-10). The first remark is dedicated solely to Wittgenstein presenting an excerpt of Augustine and unpacking it at a basic level, addressing what it is Augustine is saying and how he is saying it, with special emphasis on the topic and implications of his words. In the later remarks Wittgenstein develops, from and in response to Augustine's writing, comparative objects which serve to facilitate his discussion of the excerpt.

Breaking it down into a general form, the author identifies three broad analytical "movements" which Wittgenstein performs here: data selection, "de-cribing" and re-description. These movements are cyclical; Wittgenstein addresses each point of "data" selected for comparative analysis in sequence, rather than in aggregate from the beginning. In other words, the aggregation of "findings" is not done behind the

stages at the point of collation, but rather on the page in an act of visible-to-the-reader accretion.

This cycling is fast, it is not done at the level of “chapter”, for there is not such structure present in Wittgenstein’s writing, but rather at the level of the remark, a unit measuring anywhere from a couple of lines to over a page. The form set out overleaf (Figure 7), then, is a very general template for the progression of this research project. It describes only the broadest of brush strokes, yet articulates a guiding sense of direction; a goal to refer back to when crafting the more finely detailed specific method. It does not end definitively because there is no definitive end to the investigation, instead the end consists in the choice to “break off” the examples as “problems are solved”. In essence, the cycle of data identification is repeated, describing and re-description until such a time as “problems should *completely* disappear” (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 56-57, PI §133). Problems here refer to that which troubled the scholar prior to the investigation; the grain of sand at the core of the pearl, if one likes. This cycle of description, analysis and re-description mirrors the (more critically focused) trinity established by Ruth Wodak in relation to critical discourse studies, of explanation, interpretation and critique (Wodak, 2011).

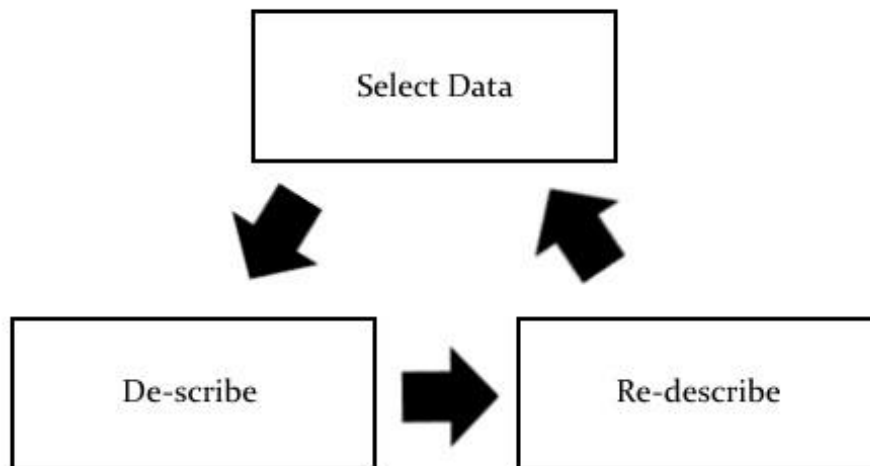


Figure 7 - Wittgensteinian Comparative Analysis

4.3 Linguistic Wittgenstein

It is clear that this general form is not sufficient to deliver us to our required destination alone. In fact, it says much about what the destination may look like, but does not describe the vehicle used to get there. However, this is by design; the work of Wittgenstein in the philosophical frame informs a general approach to knowledge generation which is, by its stated nature, ecumenical and amenable to multi-method, diverse modes of study (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 57, PI §133d). This is, in the author’s view, most worth preserving and, as such, the philosophy is detangled from the more “base” method as the driving rationale which must be respected and which sits at the core of the study. Layered on top of this foundation are the elements necessary to conduct, as Wittgenstein did, an investigation into an issue of substance beyond that of pure philosophy.

As has already been discussed throughout this thesis, the primary concern of this research project is in the ambiguous use of language in Agile project management and especially of concepts around the notion of “leadership”. This thesis adopts,

enthusiastically, the considerations and broad label of discursive leadership which has informed the design of this research project (Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012). In order to facilitate this discursive perspective on the issues highlighted above, this thesis will also draw upon what Wittgenstein had to say about language itself. These discussions serve to provide a consistent and justified ontology and also a compatible set of key concepts which guide the investigation to address specific elements of language use in a systematic and methodical manner, as Kelly does with the work of Laclau or Fairhurst with Foucault (Kelly, 2014; Fairhurst, 2009).

The notion of language games was already raised earlier in the chapter. This concept is important for understanding the basic “model” of language use adopted in the study, which in turn informs the ontological chunking of the project. This term refers to “the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 8, PI §7). This conceptualization sees language not as a task of assembling units of meaning, like some kind of linguistic Lego set built from component terms. Rather, language is a social achievement; each of our language games have “various possibilities” and such possibilities are collapsed not by nature, but through use and in each moment (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 30, PI §53).

This perspective on language is not just social in nature, it is also practical or practice oriented. As discussed by Schatzki, the goal of such an analysis is not simply to describe the language used itself. Rather, there must be an effort to describe the goings on which this language relates to and is so resolved through:

to grasp linguistic meaning one should carefully describe actual activity (i.e. the use of language, the circumstances of use, and what takes place during this use).

(Schatzki, 2000, p. 102)

This has relevance to the research conducted here and strong ties to the notion of leadership agnosticism; the aim is to describe meaning as it relates to, and is resolved in, actual activity. Such a descriptive approach facilitates a grasping of emic notions around leadership on the terms implied or stated in context by participants and as codified in texts which stand as yet another element in the milieu of activity and actors which constitute the space of legitimate or acceptable Agile practice (Schatzki, 2000, pp. 104-105). In other words, such an analysis equips one well to ask and answer questions around what comes to constitute “leadership” for these practitioners. It can be said that “nonbasic actions are performed when someone performs specific basic ones [which are] tied to the understandings of actions carried in the practices in which the actor participates” (Schatzki, 2000, p. 99). Answers to the preceding question, given the social nature of intelligibility, then rest in a thorough description of the relation between word and deed.

Wittgenstein sets out a radically relational theory of language in *Philosophical Investigations* which dictates that, in this frame, “what is true or false is what human beings say; and it is in their language that human beings agree” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 94, PI §241). This commitment to view language as a practical negotiation rooted in utility, usage and action rather than consisting in fixed phrases with “essential”, but hidden, meanings (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 49, PI §97) has been adopted in the wider field of practice studies. For example, this position on language partially mirrors the

notion that Chia and Tsoukas invoke in their talk of “organizational change, routines, mind and competence [being] not viewed as entities or accomplished events... but as *enactments*” (2011) when they discuss the “performative” imagery which runs as a common thread through the “emergent” and “practice based” ontological reframings of organisational phenomena.

Similarly, one can see that this notion of language games has already been influential in leadership research for some time, cropping up in early works (Pondy, 1989) and being worked into the foundational literature on discursive leadership, though “language games” in these studies are a subordinate concept aimed at facilitating an analysis based mainly on distinct and non-wittgensteinian positions (Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst, 2009; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012). From this one can draw, at least, that there is potentially ontological affinity to be found with these areas of research. The work finds common ground with many leadership practice theorists here: this work also takes, as an underlying ontological organising logic, relational units of analyses. Such relational units are generated from connections between individuals and their environments; it is this ontology which enables the author, among other rhetorical shifts, to recast leadership notions as emergent, rather than inherent (Cunliffe, 2003; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012; Raelin, 2016a, p. 10).

If it is “in judgements” which speakers agree, then how is one to actually go about studying this phenomenon (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664); it is all well to say that there has been a clear philosophical foundation established of ontology and epistemology, yet still there is little clarity in method. Wittgenstein, unpacking further the statements identified above, discusses the nature of this consensus which

can be said to underpin communication. He sees this as a consensus not “in opinions, but rather in form of life” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 94, PI §241). This idea of the “form of life” represents the shared consensus which, in Wittgenstein’s model of language use, underpin mutual understanding. A notable example given by Wittgenstein is that of mathematicians, whose mutual understanding is based upon their training in mathematics (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 238, PPF §345).

In this thesis “forms of life” are understood to represent “historical groups of individuals who are bound together into a community by a shared set of complex, language-involving practices” (McGinn, 2013, p. 55; Schalkwyk, 2004, pp. 70-71). This is an important point of departure from Shotter’s work with Wittgenstein, where forms of life are primarily cast as “[originating] in people’s spontaneous reactions to events occurring around them” (Shotter, 2006a). When taking a historical perspective as this thesis does, disputes and misunderstandings over language then take on “the character of depth... [for] they are as deeply rooted in us as the forms of our language” (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 52-53, PI §111). Agile participants shared engagements in Agile discourse constitute a distinct and interesting “form of life” to be studied.

It is these judgements and disputes, then, which are interesting for the purpose of study; for it is here that one sees difference in language practices revealed in the disputes, informed as they are by the “deep rooting” of forms of life which influence the judgements. One such area of dispute identified by Wittgenstein frequently is that of grammar. The notion of grammar is of great interest to the author, who identifies the concept with a wider sense than the traditional focus. For Wittgenstein, grammar refers to both the way a word may be placed in a sentence so as not to generate a “mundane” grammatical error, but also the “depth grammar” which dictates how a

word might be legitimately utilized, or an action be seen as “right”, in specific relational contexts (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664).

This notion of depth grammar is not to be thought of as an individual framework or phenomenon, nor an exclusively discursive one. To utilise, again, the words of Schatzki, depth grammar speaks to “the array of understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structure that organize” practice (Schatzki, 1996, p. 105). In essence, the aforementioned structure represents a set of norms and established judgements which demarcate participation in a particular language game, and indeed a particular form of life. This broader conception of grammar is reflected in the literature on systemic functional linguistics, the method which was used to address the language in context, but this will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 24-27).

It is important that the practical implications of this are discussed. In adopting Wittgenstein’s model of language use, the study develops particular focal points to be researched; the aim of the research project in this thesis is to identify areas of conflict over depth grammar, uncovering the differences in judgement which themselves suggest a departure in form of life (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664). It is by tracking this variable expression of “depth grammar” that this research aims to gain effective insight to the various forms of life at play in the situation. These elements are searched for, not as concrete and “real” parts of conversation which are “out there” waiting to be understood, instead they are considered to be a useful interpretive framework to lend the investigation a sense of structure and rigor.

The aim of this study, then, is to establish a “surveyable representation” of a notion of “depth grammar” in the participants talk, with the aim of gaining insight into the

differing judgements, understandings, rules and actions (read: forms of life) which effectively constitute this depth grammar (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 54-55, PI §122). In many ways, despite the significant departures highlighted earlier, this overall aim parallels that of the work of Shotter: looking to “create a surveyable “landscape” and know one’s ‘way about” (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010).

4.4 What Data?

Departing somewhat from the philosophical focus of the preceding section, the discussion now gets down to brass tacks; what data was analysed in the pursuit of the research aims? It was already stated in the introduction that the original design for this project had the researcher engaging in an ethnographic project, becoming embedded in Agile contexts to get a sense of a lived experience which would resonate with practitioners, rather than being a primarily academic contribution (Barroca *et al.*, 2015; Gregory *et al.*, 2016). The lack of access created a challenging situation, but there was a resolution, albeit an imperfect one, in the form of the experience reports which have been discussed previously. These documents are, in essence, auto-ethnographic accounts of Agile implementation. They give a level of insight into the lived experience of Agile, as captured by a specific set of actors who generally are influential in the implementation or maintenance process. The insight provided by these documents is certainly limited in comparison to primary ethnographic research, but crucially this data is accessible for analysis.

With the above issues in mind, textual sources will be the primary form of research data employed in this project. However, as with all scholarly efforts, this choice is not made lightly. Rather, it is the opinion of this researcher that the type of data employed in this project speaks to exactly the sort of communications and

community which this investigation aims to access. Given that this project has particular philosophical leanings there are considerations which should be taken with regards to textual data:

the concerns for constructionists relate to the appropriateness and utility of particular sets of documents for the purpose of revealing or identifying a process of social construction. This means... that we must determine who the participating actors are, how they go about constructing or contesting the aspect of reality we are interested in, what the interpretive content of their activities and claims are, and what documentary venues for identifying these processes we might consult.

(Linders, 2008, p. 469)

Such a dataset was identified in the public domain, which held the potential to play this pivotal role in the project laid out in this thesis: the collection of 35 experience reports which are analysed in this project, listed at the end of this section (Table 8). In order to effectively discuss the potential contribution of this dataset though, it is vital that the reader first understand the nature of said texts (Linders, 2008, p. 468).

The “experience report” is a reflective technical account which, in the particular context of Agile, aims at capturing “the subjective experience of communicating and collaborating in [agile] software development teams” (Whitworth, 2008). The history of this form of document is hard to track; the Agile Alliance, a “non-profit organization” whose stated purpose is to support Agile practitioners (Alliance, 2018), outlines the “Experience Report Initiative” which they began in 2015 with the intention that it “promotes the writing and timely sharing of first-hand agile experiences” (Wirfs-Brock, 2013). While this is a vital resource, and will be returned to

shortly, it is not the origin of the experience report as a document. There seems to be no definitive point which marks the genesis of the role this confessional practice plays in the Agile community. There is no explicit reference to the notion in the “holy text” of Agile, the *Agile Manifesto*, published in 2001 (Fowler and Highsmith, 2001).

However, only two years later there are “experience reports” being published discussing the progression of Agile implementation, and there exists an increasing density of documents as the temporal window moves into the mid to late 2000’s, with highly relevant publications continuing to emerge even today (Kane, 2003; McDowell and Dourambeis, 2007; Poon, 2006; Tune, 2017).

The reader may be left with some questions still, chief among these being the simple issue of what these documents actually look like, which forms they take and how they are presented. It was already noted previously that this particular collection of reports originates with the Agile Alliance experience report initiative and that they have been collected in an online database for public consumption. The documents themselves have a consistent form, with a variable but relatable structure. Each of the reports analysed here takes the form of a longform written report, with the writing being broken generally into key sections. An exemplar has been provided in the appendix to indicate the general form common to this family of reportage (Appendix F).

While this project is not based on grounded theory, Charmaz does offer some interesting reflections on the challenges surrounding the use of secondary textual data. This research has been conducted with the same baseline assumption Charmaz outlines that “people construct texts for specific purposes and they do so within social, economic, historical, cultural, and situational contexts” (2006, p. 35). Of course, as the study draws on extant texts, the researcher has no input or in-situ

insight on the construction of these documents (Linders, 2008, p. 468). As such, one must accept the possibility that these accounts have been “tailored” in various ways: to fit particular perspectives or to avoid incriminating the authors, for example (Charmaz, 2006, p. 37).

What, then, are the challenges and limitations posed by this kind of dataset? One primary issue is the drive to establish, retain or indeed uncover context for the texts. Literature would encourage the researchers to locate these documents, as much as possible, with specific actors, places, issues and times all playing a role in establishing the “background” for these accounts (Charmaz, 2006, p. 39; Linders, 2008, p. 473). Another key issue to consider is that “documents, like other forms of data, do not speak for themselves but must be made to speak by the analyst” (Tierney, 1997; cited in Linders, 2008, p469). Obviously the veracity of documents is also a concern for constructionists; even with the notion of truth being put aside one must consider bias and the potential for outright error (Linders, 2008, pp. 476-479)

Returning again to the experience reports, it is the very nature of these documents, their broad network of reproduction and their entanglement with the agile community as a whole, which makes them such an interesting data source for in-depth, analytic, intertextual consideration. Looking once more to the Agile Alliance initiative and its description of the documents, there is a great degree of potential locked in these texts:

The Agile Experience Report initiative promotes the writing and timely sharing of first-hand agile experiences. The primary activity of the Agile Experience Report initiative is to recruit potential authors and a broad and diverse group of authors from the agile community and

aid them to write short (6-8 pages) insightful reports about their experiences... A good experience report explains what happened, why it happened, who it happened to, and why we should care. What makes an experience report unique and compelling is that it is also a personal story.

(Wirfs-Brock, 2013)

These are not value free accounts by any means, but they are carefully compiled empirical “personal stories”, the kind of data which scholars might have to work hard to compile through participant diaries and journals. This description of experience reports fits well with the conditions laid out by Linders in the discussions highlighted earlier, with regards to suitable constructionist textual datasets. The broad nature of the documents collected under the initiative might not enable the kind of generalisable claims one would associate with a more traditional, positivist approach to research. Instead, this author argues that what has been accessed with this dataset is intra-disciplinary discourse; what is presented is not the generalisable state of Agile, but rather the specific state of communication between Agile practitioners within their own community of practice. Certainly, these efforts are often also aimed at reaching out to the unconverted in an act of proselytism (Martin *et al.*, 2006). However, a great many of the documents are meant for consumption by other practitioners (Meszaros, 2015).

Charmaz, in her expository walk through grounded theory methods, discusses the need for “rich data” which “get beneath the surface of social and subjective life” (2006, p. 13). This drive, to identify, isolate and ultimately interrogate revealing and “exciting” empirical data sits at the foundation of any grounded theory project, and indeed much of qualitative research as a whole (Brekhus, Galliher and Gubrium, 2005;

Lempert, 2007, p. 262; Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014, pp. 23-24). Charmaz offers a series of questions that the researcher may ask oneself to “evaluate” whether or not data is “rich and sufficient”: Is there revealing background data? Does one have full depictions of a range of participants views? Does one get “beneath the surface” with the data? The list goes on, and it is certainly useful to any scholar (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 18-19). However, as stated previously this work does not rely on grounded theory and the idea of “rich data” is not itself a term inherently tied to this aforementioned method.

Indeed, as was alluded to earlier, this notion of “rich data” reaches out from beyond this particular methodological base, having a long history and a strong stated relation to Clifford Geertz’s concept of “thick descriptions” (Brekhus, Galliher and Gubrium, 2005; Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). As such, if it is a deeper understanding one desires, one need not turn to the literature published by Charmaz and her colleagues. Indeed, some offer contrasting opinions which paint compelling alternative understandings of which forms “rich data” might take (Brekhus, Galliher and Gubrium, 2005). In their analysis of a seminal text exploring the experiences of homosexual men in urban environments, “Tearoom Trade” by Laud Humphrey, Brekhus et al. discuss the role which both thick and *thin* descriptions play in generating “rich data” for the achievement of the project’s analytic aims; where thin descriptions of sexual acts are juxtaposed with thick descriptions of their lives outside “the scene” (2005).

Relatively clinical data on these encounters in the earlier chapters of the book contrast sharply with the more traditionally “thick” descriptions of the participants personal and varied social contexts in the latter sections. This ensures, at least in these authors’ view, that “their deviant status, not their urban anonymity, [is

recognised as] a “fact” blown way out of proportion” (2005). The analysis of this case material leads Brekhus et al. to conclude that “there is no direct relationship between rich data and thick description”, a conclusion which the author of this thesis is amenable to. In the context of this thesis, such a contrast is seen to arise through the comparison of Agile as reported in theory and in practice.

4.4.1 Selection of Experience Reports

The above discussion serves to situate the experience report as a document and to convey to the reader the role they are seen to play in the research process. However, what is not covered in the preceding section is the logic by which experience reports were selected from the sample available through the experience report initiative coordinated by the Agile alliance. In short, the selection process for these papers was one of content-based filtering, primarily on the basis of project titles, introductions and conclusions. This process and the considerations which dictated inclusion or exclusion will be discussed in the following section.

The first important contextual element to be understood here is the primarily instrumental and processual focus of experience reports which mirrors the instrumental focus of Agile research more generally (Whitworth, 2008, p. 429). In other words, the majority of experience reports serve to detail an account of how a particular Agile practice or process was (or was not) “pulled off” in the moment (Wirfs-Brock, 2013). With this in mind, a great many experience reports on the database could be discounted readily as they simply didn’t focus on organisational dynamics. Instead, these reports will focus on technical but narrow issues, such as the impact of integrating architects on code quality (Bjerke-Gulstuen and Cruzes, 2020; Zanoni *et al.*, 2014). As such, it was important to filter through the reports available to

select those which had relevant content for understanding organisational dynamics and the associated discourses.

The experience report initiative has reports reaching back to 2014 and all papers in the database were checked for relevance. This dataset was extracted for analysis in 2018, so no subsequent additions to the initiative database were included for analysis.

Relevance, in the context of this research project was seen to hinge on any number of a few important topics emerging in the writings: reports which explicitly focused on the experience of coaching or directing Agile teams; direct talk of leaders, leadership or of self-organisation; reflection on Agile implementation with a focus on experience rather than issues of process or procedure; or reflection on the nature of Agile more generally, where that focus moved on to issues of control, command, autonomy, change management and other similar organisational topics. In this way, papers such as *“Pattern detection for conceptual schema recovery in data-intensive systems”* and *“System Integration Testing in Large Scale Agile: dealing with challenges and pitfalls”* were excluded due to their lack of relevant content, whereas papers like *“Exploring your Congenital Agility”* and *“Agile in the UK Government: An Infiltrators Secrets”* were included (Brown and Anderson, 2015; Bjerke-Gulstuen and Cruzes, 2020; Tune, 2017; Zanoni *et al.*, 2014).

There is also a small selection of experience reports, five in total, which were collected during the in-depth reviewing of Agile literature which were added at a later point than these reports from the Agile Alliance. These papers are those authored by Cottmeyer, Fry and Greene, Jochems and Rogers, McDowell and Dourambeis, and Poon (ER4; ER7; ER16; ER20; ER26). The decision to include these papers in the final analysis was made, in the spirit of Charmaz’s talk about adaption in data collection

(Charmaz, 2006, pp. 15-16), to break outside of this particular organisation's sphere of influence and ensure that the reports analysed were representative of more than Agile talk within just the context of this specific advocacy body.

Author(s)	Experience Report Title	Year	Company	Reference
Alma, N	The Power of Three: The Journey of an Agile Leadership Team	2018	ING Netherlands	ER1
Astolfi, J. and Dartt, G.	When Agile and Lean Converge - The IT Transformation at American Electric Power	2018	American Electric Power	ER2
Brown, C. and Anderson, S.	Exploring your Congenital Agility	2015	Collabnet	ER3
Cottmeyer, M.	The good and bad of Agile offshore development	2008	VersionOne	ER4
Cuva, A.	Leading an Agile Team in a Hierarchical Asian Culture with Happiness	2017	Finix Asia	ER5
Dunn, S.	Eating Your Own Dogfood: From Enterprise Agile Coach to Team Developer	2017	Anonymised	ER6
Fry, C. and Greene, S.	Large Scale Agile Transformation in an On-Demand World	2007	Salesforce.com	ER7
Grabel, D. and Dubovik, S.	Transforming an Advertising Agency: Bringing an Agile Mindset Beyond Engineering	2016	Vistaprint	ER8
Grabel, D. and Reichert, D.	A Natural Servant Leader Unlocks the Power of Employees at a Global Contact Center	2018	Vistaprint	ER9
Gratton, R. and West, D.	Scrum Reboot - This Time with the Values	2017	Intralinks	ER10
Helfand, H.	8 Years Agile - From Startup ScrumMaster to Agile Coaching Group at a Company of 500	2015	AppFolio Inc.	ER11
Hile, E.	Head On Collision: Agile QA Driving In A Waterfall World	2014	Manheim	ER12
Howey, J.	Practicing Agility in Human Resources	2016	Principal Financial Group	ER13
Hsu, T.	Agile Transformation at Nickelodeon Digital	2016	Nickelodeon	ER14
Jackson, A., Rockman, M. and Dubovik, S.	Agile & HR: Driving cultural change as one team	2018	Vistaprint	ER15
Jochems, R. and Rodgers, S.	The Rollercoaster of Required Agile Transition	2007	Progressive Insurance	ER16
Khawaja, N.	Agile for All (Agile Is Caught, Not Taught)	2018	AstraZeneca	ER17
Kilby, M.	Can you be remotely agile?	2015	Sonatype	ER18
Liu, P.	Patterns for Making Leadership Happen and Building Self-organizing Agile Team	2017	Nokia	ER19
McDowell, S. and Dourambeis, N.	British Telecom Experience Report: Agile Intervention - BT's Joining the Dots Events for Organizational Change	2007	British Telecom	ER20
Miller, C.	National Geographic: How to Implement Agile Processes in a 127-Year-Old Magazine Tradition	2015	National Geographic	ER21
Mole, D. and Mamoli, S.	Creating - How Self-Selection Lets People Excel	2016	Nomad8	ER22
Murman, C.	Things Are Broken: A case study in moving toooooo fast	2016	ThoughtWorks	ER23
Normand, K.	Joining Forces: An Agile Experiment in Merging Teams	2018	Fugro	ER24
Padula, A.	Large Scale Agile Transformations: An Insider's Guide and Toolkit	2016	Unaffiliated	ER25
Poon, D.	A self-funding agile transformation	2006	Romax Tech.	ER26
Raines, B. and Neher, J.	No Way! Agility in the Federal Government	2014	US Federal Department	ER27
Rajpal, M.	Multiple Roles: Scrum Master as a Team Member	2018	Agile Global Results Inc.	ER28
Reed, R. and Thompson, F.	Yes, You CAN Let Your Teams Self-Organize!	2018	American Electric Power	ER29
Rosenbaugh, J. and Adrian, M.	ExxonMobil IT's grassroots Agile evolution: False starts, missteps and the emergence of something great	2018	ExxonMobil	ER30
Sun, N.	Dragon Dance: Large Scale Agile Transformation in Traditional Telecommunication Company	2016	ZTE Corporation	ER31
Tune, N.	Agile in the UK Government: An Infiltrator's Secrets	2017	UK Gov. Digital Service	ER32
Vettoretti, F. and Mondini, M.	First Being, then Doing. Feeling the freedom through Agileness	2018	Datatellers S. R. I.	ER33
Wenzel, J. and Fewell, J.	Rebooting Agile @ GE Transportation	2015	Gen. Elec. Transportation	ER34
Willeke, M. and Marsee, S.	Embracing the Agile Mindset for Organisational Change	2016	Ohio Christian University	ER35

Table 8 - Table of Experience Reports Analysed

4.5 Contemporary Method

It was shown earlier that the general form of WCA is an oscillation between identifying data, de-scribing, or un-writing it in a deconstructive process, and then interpreting and re-describing it in the form of an object of comparison, where this is both the act of assembling the object and then also going on to apply the object in an act of actual and very much literal long-form re-description. This approach is tailored to fulfil the requirements of a study of leadership based upon a discursive frame, with the philosophy selected to address the previously covered concerns and issues identified by these scholars (Fairhurst, 2007; Kelly, 2008; Wodak, 2011). The preceding discussion of language games looks to clarify the focus on language as a communal achievement, and so an approach was engaged which, it was felt, would not collapse this relational dimension.

The exploration of depth grammar and forms of life helps to inform the actual focal areas of the study; the interest here is in plotting out a vague space of possibility for the use of language and subsequent action in the context of Agile project management teams, with the end goal of enabling discussion, through this overview, of the differing judgements at play (Schatzki, 1996, pp. 105, 134-136; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664). The aim of this discussion is to ultimately feed back into and inform the act of re-description which is intended to address the confusions around leadership and Agile which sparked the research in the first place. In order to do this, contemporary methods are drawn upon to synthesize an analogue to the approach taken by Wittgenstein in his own inquiries.

To facilitate such an act of synthesis, this work looks toward both discursive leadership and more generally at research in the wider discursive field for examples of

such approaches. There have been identified several which shared some resemblance or parity in terms of their aims and that of this study (Harvey, 2004; Choi and Richards, 2017; Choi and Schnurr, 2014; Wodak, Kwon and Clarke, 2011). The choice to go outside of existing discursive leadership publications exclusively was informed by calls to draw more heavily on approaches from applied linguistics and pragmatics, as well as those seeking greater methodological transparency and clarity (Wodak, 2011; Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018). There are several such approaches which serve as the basis for this study, informed by the need for a granular and somewhat critical discourse analysis at the level of de-scribing and an interpretive generation of open-ended concepts from this analysis to enable the performance of redescription.

Drawing on these needs as a way of distinguishing useful contemporary methods viable for partial transplantation, potential techniques were identified in the field of both critical discourse analysis and coding-based content analysis. Critical discourse analysis was, in time, discarded in favour of systemic functional grammar (SFG), on which much of CDA is based (Fairclough, 2001, p. 116; Fernández Martínez, 2007; Martin, Matthiessen and Painter, 2010); this shift reflects an aversion to the explicitly critical project which critical discourse studies represent (Wodak, 2011; Young and Harrison, 2004, pp. 1-5; Fernández Martínez, 2007). As will be discussed in more depth through the coming sections, the SFG analysis informed efforts to “de-scribe” the texts in question along lines of action and speech, with the contextual metafunctions specifically speaking to the “cultural and historical aspects of meaning”, which were referred to as “forms of life” (Graham, 2004, p. 63). This is achieved in this analysis by conveying the actions, utterances, judgements, allowances and norms which together constitute participants experience of Agile working practices (Schatzki, 1996, p. 105; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 14-15, PI §23).

In particular, the work in SFG is helpful as the granular segmentation of language into distinct functions helped differentiate between text which was reporting what happened and text which was offering an opinion on what should happen, how that was received and so on (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 30-34). This is made more apparent as one comes to the fuller explanation of SFG in section 4.6.2. For now, it will be stated in brief that the different functions identified by Halliday correspond to different types of linguistic and practical activity; the notion of figures, for example, speaks to the flow of action and the identification of participants in a process, the concept of messages focuses more specifically on the semantics of utterances, while the notion of tenor refers to the overall affect, tone and stance of the text in question (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 30-34). In practice, each of these elements serves to draw out particular aspects of the Agile practitioners' experiences, from the semantic and practical environment in which they operate to the system of judgements surrounding action and inaction which lead to a particular happening being seen as more or less legitimate in an Agile context.

In the latter stages, the aggregative elements of thematic and content analysis serve as the inspiration for the effort to generate comparative objects from this "unwritten" data (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 273-283). This bricolage, then, fulfils the general form laid out for Wittgensteinian comparative analysis (Figure 7); data is selected which shows evidence of the confusion at hand, this data is unpacked to assess the potentially divergent judgements which underpin the variety of acceptable modes of expression, before these findings are recombined into a new comparative theoretical object which sheds new light on the problem and resolves previously troubling contradictions. Each of the steps of WCA will now be unpacked in the following section, describing the specific methods employed to fulfil the various stages of the analysis.

4.6 Research Process Model Explored

4.6.1 Select Data

The first analytical step following broad data collection was to establish areas of the text which merited detailed attention. The reports were parsed line-by-line for notable excerpts, that which rises to the surface as “relevant text” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 23). This was a preliminary step of pre-coding, aimed at identifying sections of the text which were discussing organisational matters relevant to the thesis (Saldaña, 2021, p. 25). The reason for this was the technical focus in some experience reports; some sections of the reports don’t relate to team practices but rather programming concerns such as open-source licencing, unsurprising given the experience reports are technical documents designed for sharing practice across the full range of Agile concerns and implementations (Whitworth, 2008; Wirfs-Brock, 2013).

A willingness to review literature at an early stage of the project, in tandem with the author’s experience as noted in the introduction, acted to combat the potential pitfalls of a “naïve” approach identified in much of grounded theory, for example (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 5-6; Thornberg, 2012, pp. 244-247). In this study, the process of problem scoping was intimately married with a simultaneous effort to review literature in the field of intended contribution. Discussion of literature which links the research to a wider context also helped to locate the contribution of this thesis to a specific body of theory thus making its place in the many clustered constellations of research all the clearer. In this case, these bodies of theory were those publications in Agile already discussed, as well as the literature around leadership which was addressed in the preceding two chapters.

Note that this aforementioned move was not an analytical pass in any rigorous sense. Rather, it can best be thought of as an engaged reading of the texts in question. To borrow the terminology of Mortimer Adler from his foundational guide on “intelligent reading” (2011), the scholar engages in an analytical reading of the texts in order to “come to terms” with each text. It was through this process of “coming to terms” with each experience report that it was possible to identify particularly interesting examples worth noting and pursuing with greater analytical rigor. As previously noted, such a process was particularly important as there is a lot of experience report content devoted to less relevant aspects of organising, such as the practice of open source licencing and the impact this has on code quality (Kilby, 2015, pp. 3-4). It was, then, content which spoke to the organisation of the firm, rather than specific programming, licencing practices or IT skills development which was noted as of interest.

Archetypal of this latter category is the experience report entitled, “*The codeX Story: Challenging the Metrics that Limit Diversity in the Software Industry*”, authored by Cara Turner (2018). This report was not included in the final dataset analysed for this research and is indicative of content which was omitted from the reports here. In its entirety this paper focuses on the exploration of a social enterprise which serves to develop IT skills in under-represented groups. This work is certainly important, but it does little to speak to the intra-organisational dynamics of Agile. A similar, though more narrow, example from within the analysed dataset would be Kilby’s advocacy for open source licencing of software and the subsequent exploration around the implications of this choice for the software itself (Kilby, 2015, pp. 3-4). These discussions are interesting but not relevant to the focal point of this study, the

organisation of the team. It was, then, content which spoke to the organisation of the firm, rather than specific programming practices, which was noted as of interest.

During this act of data identification, the scholar should be engaged with the material they are gathering. As the researcher reads, or interviews, or participates, there is an initial contact with the context and practical issues one is facing. However, while this early contact is ongoing, the scholar should also be authoring initial reflective “memos” and notes (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 25-26). Drawn from other generative, interpretive coding-based analyses, these memos are an intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts, or between different “levels” of coding (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 42-47). Here the early memos instead act as the first contribution to generating an object of comparison, functioning as an early “survey of the landscape” which serves to sensitise the author to the issues which may be at play in the selected context.

The early memos help the scholar to explore, in a very open-ended way, fruitful potential structures or formats for the object which may more effectively unpack the problem as it is perceived. This process of memo writing began with the initial engagement, however there was ongoing generation of more advanced reflective memos and basic diagrams through the research as a way of organising the emic resources. The aim of these memos and diagrams was to help translate and aggregate the knowledge which was derived from the focused, largely in-vivo initial coding (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55; Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014, p. 25; Saldaña, 2021, pp. 42-43).

The ultimate aim here was to embark on a journey of rhetorical “sightseeing” with the goal of collating a rich series of “travel sketches” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 3) which help the researcher to gain an understanding, again one of many potential understandings,

of the previously discussed elements (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §132). This stage, then, was an initial round of quick but intimate forays into the unknown, serving to highlight those locales which merit further investigation. The analytical focus, as discussed previously, was directed towards a broad selection of empirical texts which have been sourced online, published by the Agile Alliance on their site under the experience report initiative (Wirfs-Brock, 2013).

4.6.2 De-scribe – SFG Coding

The next step following this process of engaged line-by-line reading and memo writing were multiple incident to incident codings of the data, where each excerpt of significance here is an “incident” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 53; Saldaña, 2021, pp. 26-27), based on a coding framework sensitised to the features of English linguistics through SFG (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Connected with this process of coding was an emphasis on continued memo writing with a specific aim of contextualising and connecting the observations put forwards in the codes themselves. This push for contextual consideration and reflection serves an important purpose in filling out the broader elements of the SFG coding framework described below, such as mode and field (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Saldaña, 2021, pp. 42-47).

The purpose of this step was to provide the resources necessary to engage in a process of synthesis and comparison aimed at establishing “family resemblances” (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 36-37, PI §67). Following on from the identification of key excerpts of interest, a finer-grained analysis was conducted which attended closely to the texts in question. As with Wittgenstein, this project seeks a description of the actual use of language although the researcher must be circumspect about the possibility of doing so without interference (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 55, PI §124); this

description is based not in superficial grammatical definition but in function (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 47-48, PI §90-92). Given the need for a fine-grained, context sensitive approach when analysing language as data, a framework was developed to further systemize the coding process by identifying specific linguistic elements to investigate in sequence. The specific “questions” asked of each incident are shown in table 10 in sub-section 4.6.2.a, where they are unpacked in greater detail.

This approach ensured that each individual text was read and analysed with some consistency in terms of the treatment of language and reading of cues. Another benefit of such an approach is the transparency which resulted. Certainly, this standardisation of focal points maximized the chance that similarities and differences in judgements were uncovered across the texts, but it also made clear to a reader the process by which the texts were initially unpacked. Such an explicable, retroductable approach satisfies calls from scholars within CDA, and indeed qualitative research more generally, for more transparent, traceable investigations (Nowell *et al.*, 2017; Wodak, 2011, p. 624).

A range of contemporary sources were investigated in the sphere of discourse analysis in order to generate a framework for addressing language, with the eventual reliance being heavily upon the work of Michael Halliday (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). The author was inspired by the granular, context sensitivity of approaches such as critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012; Wodak, Kwon and Clarke, 2011). However, the explicitly critical orientations of the various approaches did not meld well with the primarily exploratory purpose of the thesis. The pre-established focus on power would interfere with the process of emergence key to the conduct of this research. Certainly, sensitizing concepts were employed

prior to the commencement of research, but these related to the understanding of leadership itself and leadership discourse in Agile specifically (Thornberg, 2012).

It was in the pursuit of a similarly rigorous, yet less pointed, approach that alternative methods were discovered; particularly relevant to the completion of this analysis was the work on systemic functional grammar (SFG) by Michael Halliday, in conjunction with applied examples (Harvey, 2004). For Halliday, a text is “a process of making meaning in context” (2014, p. 3). The functional perspective on grammar invites the scholar to view language as a “resource” rather than a set of “rules” (Matthiessen and Halliday, 1997). Halliday’s functional perspective on language is compatible with a Wittgensteinian analysis for the focus on what is achieved with language in use. Not only that, the explicit aim to “describe grammar” in terms of its functions is directly compatible with the requirements of the process, as determined by the philosophy of Wittgenstein (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 4, 10, 48; Martin, Matthiessen and Painter, 2010, p. 20).

It is worth noting that it is only the analytical concepts of SFG analysis which were ported into this research project to aid in a comprehensive and repeatable description of what was done with and around language in this specific context. The later aggregative method employed in SFG, the system networks which characterise, in many ways, this approach to the practice of language analysis were discounted. The main issues were the excessive formalism, pre-determination and abstraction of these methods, in essence their incompatibility with the needs and aims of the project (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 56; Martin, Matthiessen and Painter, 2010, pp. 13-14).

The full analytical process of SFG described by Halliday is extremely in-depth, with specificity to the level of the tone (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. xiv). However, it is possible to narrow the focus slightly from that set out by Halliday; this project is most concerned with describing what he might term the “content system” of language, that is to say its semantic and lexico-grammatical (mechanical/grammatical) components, as well as the broader contextual landscape in which this language operated (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 24-27). Overall, Halliday’s work, when taken this way, leaves one sensitized to two separate “levels” of description across three distinct “modes of meaning” in order to comprehensively address language in context. Each of these levels, and their relation to the “metafunction”, or mode in question, is shown in the table below:

Metafunction	Semantics	Context
Textual	Message	Mode
Interpersonal	“Moves”	Tenor
Ideational	Figure	Field

Table 9 - Metafunction at the Levels of Semantics and Context

Each of these “modes” reflects a “function” of language; the ideational metafunction represents the work that language does to “construe human experience”, while language that serves the purpose of “enacting our personal and social relationships is grouped under the interpersonal metafunction” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 30). Finally, that language which serves a purpose in “facilitating function” and “creating cohesion and continuity” must be addressed. This type of language is referred to here as textual (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 30-31).

Based on the key issues to be investigated, each level of metafunction has a relevant contribution to make to the process of understanding leadership in the agile context: the ideational metafunction, by allowing one to address the construal of experience, enables the researcher to describe the flow of events and action as they are portrayed in the text; the interpersonal metafunction provides necessary analytical perspective to address the potential constitution of roles in the text, thus giving insight to the positions adopted by and crafted for organisational members; and the textual metafunction, which addresses the text itself, tracks the overall messages which are transmitted through each part of the text. This final level enables the researcher to comment upon any other information contained within the experience reports which does not fit the scheme of events or relations.

However, since each of these modes of meaning functions at each level of “stratification”, it is key one does not only investigate these three metafunctions. Rather, the method here is to investigate each metafunction on both levels of description. Thus at the level of context, for example, the textual metafunction is expressed through the notion of “mode”, while the interpersonal is understood through “tenor” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 34). Each of these metafunctions, in providing a vocabulary to dissect meaning to a high degree of specificity, enables a particular form of insight; to quote Harvey’s SFG analysis of transformational versus transactional leadership in Apple:

differences are reflected in the lexico-grammatical choices made... Of interest here is how the ideational semantics of action and symbolism collude with the interpersonal semantics of individuality/collectivism to construct organizational action, responsibility, and identity.

(Harvey, 2004, p. 251)

Here, she draws relations between the ideational elements of representation to actions and symbolism around leadership, while the interpersonal dimension shows the interplay between individual and collective modes of thinking through the positioning of relations in the text.

One commonality between these analyses is that they are conducted at the level of semantics, which is to say they address language at the level of terminology and in terms of meaning; Harvey is interested in word choice and the positioning of social identities through a combination of interpersonal and ideational elements in the text. One can contrast this with the contextual level which addresses the text in a more holistic way to discuss aspects of the text overall, such as the function it is intended to perform and the implicit assessments inherent in the treatment of its subject matter (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 33-34). This bifurcation has a utility for the study in that it encourages the scholar to address not only what is happening in the flow of the text, but also what is achieved through this overall flow; one gets a walking tour and a bird's eye view to help inform one's sketches of the landscape.

4.6.2.a Developing a Coding Approach from SFG

The analytical processes of SFG are difficult to render sequentially due to mutual interdependence in the functions (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 85-86).

However, for the aid of both reader, with respect to the notion of retroductability (Wodak, 2011, p. 624), and author, who relied upon a clear method to proceed in a systematic manner, an analysis inspired by the work in and surrounding *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar* was rendered as a series of repeatable questions (2014). These questions are best thought of as a sensitising framework in place to aid in unpacking the complex phenomenon of language with due consideration (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 12-13; Thornberg, 2012, pp. 244-247); the notions associated with SFG were not employed in the development of the code label names themselves, but rather in helping to address the language in a comprehensive fashion, maximising the chances of complimentary and contrasting excerpts being highlighted.

The questions derived from this engagement with SFG are presented on the next page (*Table 10*). At the end of this section is a discussion of key terminology used in the questions. Here, concepts which are not fully explained in the previous section, such as “nominal group”, “mode” and “polarity and modality”, will be covered in greater detail to ensure the reader is well equipped to understand the nature of the inquiry. The questions reflect two distinct levels of analysis, broadly mirroring strata identified by Halliday, those of the text and the context (2014, p. 20).

<i>Question No.</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Details</i>
1.	What are the messages of the text?	Patterning of themes and new information across the text
2.	What are the “moves” performed in the text?	What speech functions are employed, offers, commands, statements, questions? Are there polar/modal features to this expression?
3.	How are figures construed in the text?	What can be said to be happening in terms of process and participant, agency and circumstances? Are nominal groups used?
4.	What mode is employed?	What form did the text take? What rhetorical mode is employed? Is there additional semiotic material?
5.	What tenor is established?	What roles are established in the situation? Is the discussion positively or negatively loaded?
6.	How is the field portrayed?	What is the function of the text? What does the text pertain to?

Table 10 - Sensitising Questions Used in Analysis

The coding process itself was performed using NVivo to facilitate the tagging of text segments. As stated previously, three analytical passes of the texts were conducted: one pass for each textual level of analysis. Where the codes directly reflect participants speech, an effort was made to use an in-vivo approach, such as with nominal groups. Otherwise, researcher generated codes were used which were established with reference to the participants terminology. One memo was drafted for each contextual question to allow for general reflections of these elements of the texts. These memos were tagged to specific segments of text also, thus providing a link between the general comments and specific aspects of texts which validate these comments. The software was particularly helpful for these purposes given the three overlapping levels of analysis conducted on each text. These overlapping analyses resulted in much plural coding of segments, which would have been logistically difficult to track in paper form (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013, pp. 74-75).

The approach here is what can be termed “eclectic coding”, where the bricolage of approaches is rationalised through the framework of SFG (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 177-186). There are elements of process coding at play, especially through figures and tenor, but also values coding, by way of moves, mode and tenor, and descriptive coding in the form of message, mode and field (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 30-33; Saldaña, 2021, pp. 96-109). An example is provided over the next page of a coded excerpt from the text. Using the terminology commonly employed by qualitative researchers, these codes were produced through a “splitting” process, with the risks of overload associated being mitigated through the initial “lumping” engaged read (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013, pp. 71-75; Saldaña, 2021, pp. 28-29). Shown here are the overlapping codes, each level relating to a distinct function of language as identified by Halliday,

while the code labels themselves look to convey the essence of what is said by the participant:

Next, Serena wanted to show that employees matter. She created an employee engagement group (2 full time employees) whose mission was to “make work more fun.” Serena wanted to, “be able to do right by the people,” and she told her leaders that they were here to serve the employees.

There is a challenge in showing the codes themselves as attached to the specific element of the excerpt which informed it due to issues of space which drove the choice to adopt NVivo in the first place. Associated with this small section are a total of 10 codes. Of course, these codes have precedent elsewhere in the dataset, so that is not to say that this quote spawned 10 codes alone, but certainly elements could be related to each of the following: calls for servant leadership (*message*), leaders changing roles (*message*), projecting informality (*message*), reconfiguring the organisation (*message*), belief in importance of relationships (*modality*), leaders must change (*polarity*), issues of control (*circumstances*), active role in shaping perceptions (*processes*), Agile reforming roles (*processes*), focus on exceptional individual (*processes*).

To unpack this list at the level of metafunction, which was provided in brackets after the code, there are a few key elements in play here: there are the core messages about what was done, these speak to the need for servant leadership, the role of “leaders” in changing both their own approach, but also being involved in the changing of employee/organisational roles more generally, as well as the noted projection of informality; there are affirmative/assessing statements, such as the assertion that leaders “were here to serve the employees”, which represents a strong polar statement

on the nature of leadership work; there are the circumstantial issues of control alluded to, through the need to show employees matter; and there are the processes themselves described, that is to say the active shaping of perceptions and ongoing acts of reformation.

This example shows the full range of message, move and figure as described in table 10. This excerpt, so, has been coded for what was said, what was happening, who is involved and which judgements are conveyed in line with the procedure set out in the preceding paragraphs (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 30-33, 172; Schatzki, 1996, pp. 105, 134-136; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664). As a final note on procedure, it is helpful to understand that these codes were presented in a nested structure in NVivo, where each code was coded under the relevant SFG metafunction. In this way, it was easy to differentiate between codes which related to each of these during the later analysis. The overall structure of these parent codes is presented overleaf (Figure 8). Note that message as a parent code didn't have any sub-components and this is reflected in the framework presented earlier (Table 10).

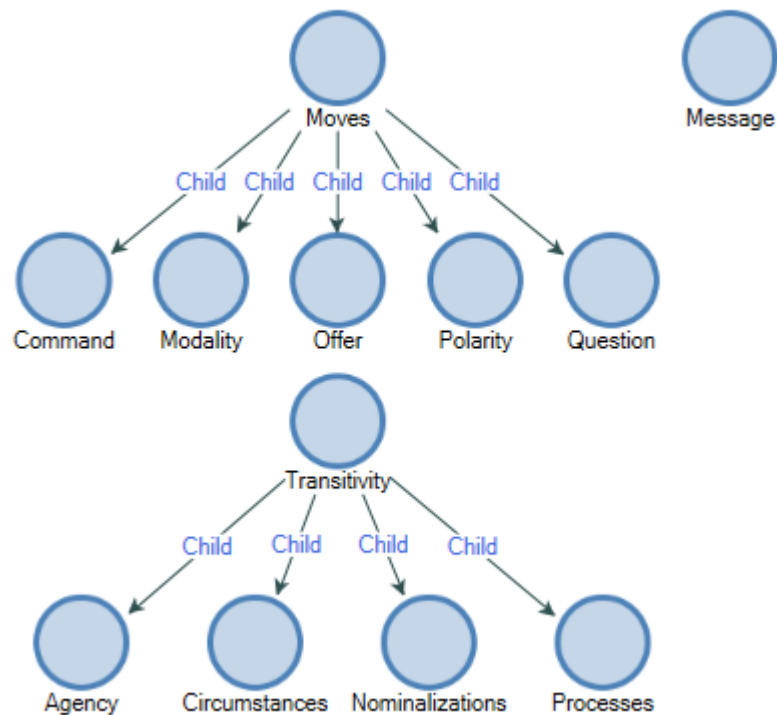


Figure 8 - SFG Parent Code Structure

4.6.2.b Key Concepts of SFG & Their Significance to Analysis of Language

Many of the important notions to understanding the questions set out previously were described under the “details” heading of the table (*Table 10*). The concept of “figures”, for example, refers to the characterisation of events and the configuration of participants to processes and so on. Similarly, “moves” refers to the interpersonal aspects of talk and writing; the presence of commands, and so some implicit subordination, or of requests and so on (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 85). These aspects were also discussed in the previous section during the initial exploration of Halliday’s work. However, some of the descriptions offered themselves rely on more complex notions which must be further discussed now for the sake of clarity.

Nominal groups are one such phenomenon, being an important aspect of how events are construed as an element of “figures”. This term refers to the linguistic

phenomenon of using an “element or group of elements” to function as a single phrase in a clause (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 94). This is useful for the purposes of this study in that it allows for the capture of “ready-made phrases” which act in place of existing nominal terms (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 1); a compound phrase such as “the servant leader” represents such a nominal group. In short, the focus on nominal groups allows for a particular kind of comment centring on frequently co-occurring terms which represent a coherent, identifiable concept when held together.

Mode, in the framework developed by Halliday, describes how the text is presented. Thus, under this banner one asks whether text is written or spoken, monologic or dialogic, how it was distributed, what approach is taken to communication and to what extent the labour of communication is divided between linguistic and other semiotic channels (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 38). Mode as a category, then, is most useful for promoting reflexivity as to the source, intentions behind and consumption environment of a particular excerpt of text. Mode is not to be confused with modality, which describes a statement which either relates or requests judgement, such as “you must/mustn’t” or “it could be/couldn’t it be”. This can be related to the notion of polarity, which deals with extremes statements of positivity or negativity. Thus, a polar statement would be formulated “It is/isn’t” or “do that/don’t do that” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 172). These types of polar and modal assessments reflect the speaker’s judgements about what should or shouldn’t be done. As such, they were also deemed incredibly important to the process of coding organisational rhetoric (Schatzki, 1996, pp. 105, 134-136; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664).

4.6.2.c Seeking Family Resemblance

The process of searching and interpretation described here can be said to happen in stages; the next stage following coding, then, is this early push towards aggregating codes into smaller-scale patterns based on “family resemblance” among the data identified (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 36-37, PI §67). In practice, such a process is expressed through the working towards the closure of SFG coding and the continued generation of advanced memos, including diagramming, which aid the scholar in reflecting on and refining the concepts arising from the data gathered (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 230-232, 235-237). The aim here was to continue the process of refinement established in the description of language use and to move towards a position where key concepts could be refined through an interpretive comparative process focused on the generation of aggregate themes through two passes of reduction. These themes, termed categories and manifestations, chart out spaces of resemblance in the generated codes.

This aggregation was completed in a comparative fashion, in technical terms being a pattern coding conducted using a code mapping approach with the aid of analytic memos (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 225-229, 253-256). Once the texts had been comprehensively parsed, the use of language in each example was compared to the aggregated others. The main focus of this stage were the SFG codes being compared and tentative relationships of family resemblance being drawn up between these codes (Urquhart, 2007, p. 352). This was already partially being done in longform through the broader context reflective memos which encourage a retrospective consideration of the codes gathered through the process of SFG coding. However, this is also an interpretive task of free-floating thematic association aimed at distilling the broad selection of in-vivo and etic codes into a more refined selection of concepts.

It is the manifestations developed through the aforementioned process that represent an early and tentative description of the practitioners' judgements, actions and utterances as they were observed through the granular and uniform analysis. This process of description was vital to a process of WCA as it represents a key step in the process of "de-scribing" or unwriting the texts in question. The initial stage serves as a rigorous "dismantling" of the texts along grammatical/semantic lines to address what specifically is being done with language in each sample (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). This step follows on from here to complete this dismantling by arranging the parts for survey and cataloguing; if the previous work was the disassembly of a well-used and now somewhat defective machine, then this stage represents the first step back from the tools to survey what it is was pulled out and now must be worked with. Essentially, the primary aim here was to bring together the research outputs of the previous analytical move, turning a disparate systematically coded output into a more coherent account of the language as it was observed, and the judgements which could be reflected in that language (Schatzki, 1996, p. 105; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 14-15, PI §23).

Looking back to the writing of Wittgenstein, this step can be related to the work he does across several remarks to develop the notion of "language games" through the aggregation of comparisons along the lines of family resemblance (2009, pp. 8, 13-16, PI §7, 21-24). Thus, he calls "language and the activities into which it is woven, a 'language-game'". Yet, he later notes "the processes of naming... stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games" (ibid., p. 8, PI §7). He expands on the notion by encouraging the reader to apply it, asking them to consider "the variety of language-games" in a wide range of examples (ibid., p. 15, PI §23). This process, of identifying and interpretively articulating similarities among

distinct processes, is considered analogous to the pursuit of family resemblance which builds towards somewhat coherent objects of comparison.

The move from exemplar to manifestation is one of reduction and connection. To get a sense of how this looks, consider the following diagram (Figure 9), which shows this progression from a series of lower-level labels to a more inclusive grouping term or phrase. This particular excerpt relates to the category “Agile Requires Organisational Change”, but the format is uniform across the various categories.

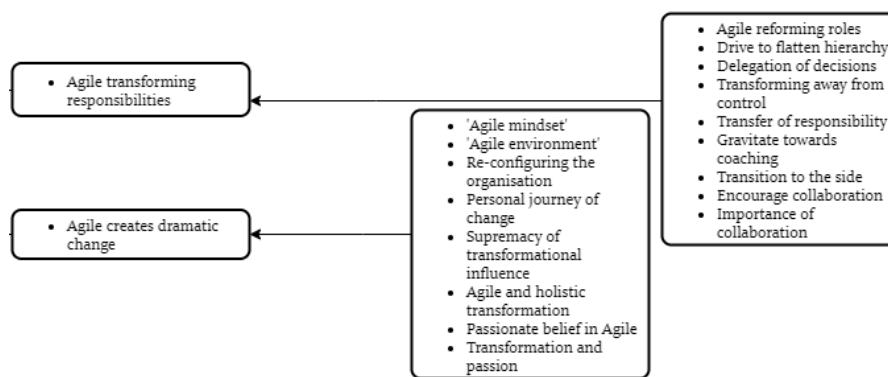


Figure 9 - Excerpt from Surveyable Representation

On the right-hand side are the codes generated from the analysis of data itself. These codes are aggregated to the left, being collated under representative headings. Here, exemplars pointing to the significance of organisational change as a focal point of Agile rhetoric are grouped under two manifestations which point to the distinct connections between each of these groupings. The logic on which these groupings were established is explored and expanded in the findings chapter.

At the final closure of this first stage of aggregation, a collection of 138 codes had been collated and a set of 16 manifestations which were labelled to reflect the underlying theme of the groupings had been generated. As was already discussed, NVivo was the primary tool employed to facilitate the SFG coding process. NVivo offered advantages in that it allowed for multiple types of coding to be easily layered (Bazeley and

Jackson, 2013, pp. 74-75). This was particularly important given that the three passes of coding, one for each metafunctional level, overlap heavily. However, while the coding was performed in this software, the subsequent sorting of these codes into resemblances was a part-analogue process; NVivo was found to be inflexible and constraining in the analytical outputs which could be generated and the number of codes was significant (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 26-29).

The use of alternative software packages for diagramming provided a greater flexibility in presentation and fluidity of form in the diagramming processes which accompanied the following stages. The process of code mapping itself was performed manually, with each code written out on paper and grouped in this fashion (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 234-235). These manually clustered code groups were digitized using the free online software draw.io and formed into diagrams which provided overview and a new space of interpretation as part of the later push for surveyable representation. These manifestations served as the basis for the next step of the analysis, which went beyond reporting only what was observed and moved towards the goal of redescription.

Pursuing Deeper Resemblance

The next level of aggregation was performed in the same fashion as that described previously, though the generation of these higher-level categories was accompanied with significant reflective analytic memoing and attempted report writing on the emerging labels (Saldaña, 2021, p. 277). The resemblances here are termed “deeper resemblances” to point to the second order nature of the aggregation, literally “deeper” in the research process, but also because of the greater generality of the categories in question which means the resemblances encapsulate more concepts,

thus being “deeper” in the sense that they are more substantial and cover more content. The purpose of this second aggregative step could be described, as per the divide established by Alvesson and Kärreman, as moving between the textual level of the data, interpretivist analysis and generation of paradigm level, larger scale concepts (2011). Saldaña talks about this as creating “categories of categories” which very succinctly captures the essential process which has been realised in this second aggregative move (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 274-276).

In some ways, this step represents a transitional phase between de-scription and re-description. Certainly, the focus is still on unpacking in some ways the texts, but increasingly there is a generative bent to the memos and to the aggregation away from the specific and towards the general (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 15-19, 235-237). The deeper resemblances derived at this stage represent key focal points of organising discourse in Agile, helping to respond in this way to the first research question. Six categories are established through the investigation. The following table shows these six categories and the manifestations which fed into their generation (Table 11).

Category	Manifestation
Agile Requires Organisational Change	Agile Transforming Responsibilities - Agile Creates Dramatic Change
Push Towards Employee Ownership	Teams as Self-Directing - Increased Personal Accountability - Degrees of Autonomy
Agile Regulates ‘Leadership’ Practice	Agile Looks for Servant Leadership - New Agile ‘Leadership’ Roles - Distributed Agency/Leadership
The Dark Art of Control	Fraught Relationship with Control - Controlled Agile Implementation

Tension in the Role of Coach	Coach-as-support - Coach-as-potent-influencer
Enforcing Politicized Orthodoxy	Agile as Political - Agile Emphasises Proselytic Orthodoxy

Table 11 - Categories and Constituent Manifestations

Each of the six categories above are unpacked in a dedicated section of the findings chapter and a key focal concept is established from each through the depth grammar. The aim in these findings is to demonstrate the descriptive utility of the manifestations, while also providing additional insight into the process by which the categories were established (Nowell *et al.*, 2017, pp. 10-11; Schreier, 2012, pp. 219-230). The relationships between the content of these categories and the more holistic understandings developed will be covered in the first discussion chapter. The findings build in layers throughout the proceeding chapter to provide a rich picture of that data which underpins the conclusions of the thesis informed by the textual, interpersonal and experiential aspects surfaced and discussed: the main topics of the reports, the interactions contained and represented within and the experiences construed through the texts in question.

4.6.3 Re-describe

Re-description is not the act of theme identification, as identified in the preceding section. Rather, re-description involves the application of such themes in an act of comparison which represents the scholar's effort to re-represent a context, concept or community of practice. In other frames this stage would represent the closing of findings into theory (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 266-283). In the framework of WCA this move stands as a generative step also, but the object generated is a comparative interpretive creation, rather than a theory (Schatzki, 1991, pp. 318-321; Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §130-132). This object of comparison is then applied to the context and is appraised in

the light of applicability through further discussion and investigation. The generation and utilisation of the object is achieved through chapter 6, “Developing and Deploying Depth Grammar”, while chapter 7 is focused on unpacking the implications of this application.

4.6.3.a Produce Surveyable Representations

This step in the analysis represents the push towards finalisation of the coding framework; crafting a surveyable representation of the full de-scription stands as the first step of redescription, bringing the findings together “at a glance” to facilitate the later analytical processes of redescription (Saldaña, 2021, p. 273). Having produced a set of distinct categories which were seen as reflecting a suitable reduction of the substantial findings established, the next stage of the method was to begin integrating, sorting and improving the various elements of the analysis. One of the main approaches employed to facilitate these various aims was the process of iterative diagramming (Clarke, 2016, pp. 211-219); the structure of codes, manifestations and categories was formed and reformed throughout the research process, with the depiction of this overall structure contributing vital oversight into the findings as they were being represented in that moment.

Not only did the diagrams provide this kind of at-a-glance summary, rather they also enabled a good degree of development of these findings. One example of this was the oscillation between a processual model approach and the final code-focused basic diagram. Though the ideas contained within these diagrams are expressed through the findings and discussions, it was determined that such processual diagrams lacked the nuance desired for final representation of the findings and that a structured discussion of the codes themselves would be a better fit. A figure illustrating this

progression of diagrams is shown on the following page (**Error! Reference source not found.**) and the draft diagrams referenced here are included in the appendix (Appendices H, I, J, K).

As is implied by the step away from higher-level summary from the processual perspective, this process of sorting necessitated some kind of cyclical analytical move; the comparison of codes would highlight redundancy, while the consideration of categories in comparison and in their place in various diagrams prompted reassessment not just of their relationships to each other, but actually of the categories as a whole. This movement back towards the initial coding of the data and forwards again through the analytical process is in line with the general form for WCA set out earlier in this chapter (Figure 7). Like the sensitising framework employed to facilitate the coding of language, this process of diagramming and graphical representation also contributes towards the stated aim of retroductability in this interpretive research project (Wodak, 2011, p. 624).

As stated previously, in addition to the surveyable representation presented in this thesis, which is the final version of the diagramming process outputs, there were many other conceptual maps created to facilitate consideration of the data. Most notable among these, aside from the prior drafts of the representation, was a processual depiction which looked to explore how issues in Agile might be related to one another in a flow. It was here that the idea of categories in tension emerged, for example, a theme which carried through into the final discussions. While this diagram did not contribute to the findings in a direct sense through presence, the attempted integration of the distinct concepts led to adjustments in the categories and facilitated later insights based around the connecting of these disparate notions (Clarke, 2016, p. 219).

Wittgenstein is clear about the importance of developing and “inventing” these links between not just basic grammar, but rather cases of use in the subject matter as a

path to understanding (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 250). It is his discussions on the notion of the “surveyable representation” which are most enlightening as the project is moved from a disparate analysis to something more cohesive and more useful:

A surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’. Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate links... It is not the business of philosophy to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to render surveyable the state... that troubles us - the state of affairs before the contradiction is resolved.

(Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 55, PI §122-125)

Thus, there is a sense of building on the prior search for family resemblance by attempting to craft an overview which will allow for a broadening of the drawn connections, and thus generating the kind of understanding which Wittgenstein himself achieves of language. That is to say, an understanding that is not necessarily true but nevertheless applicable to describing and further unpacking the problematic situation one is interested in. Such an understanding is the essence of the object of comparison and will be the focal point of the next and final step in the analytical process.

4.6.3.b Depth Grammar as an Object of Comparison

Much reference has been made, so far, to this object of comparison. The term, in this study, refers to the abductively constructed theoretical concepts which are used as a “yardstick” to drive insights during the scholar’s engagement with their topic of research (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §130). The data required for the

aforementioned process of abductive construction is generated during the primary steps of the analysis, as was described previously. There is an ongoing exchange between a range of elements commonly associated with various thematic and content analytic approaches, such as the codes and memos used in the descriptive process, but also the later diagramming and pushes for surveyable representation (Saldaña, 2021). Through these processes there is a reliance on both emic and etic resources, which is to say both the researcher and participants' concepts (Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014, p. 25).

It was the aim of this study to better understand the perceived legitimate and recognisable space of expression around organisational concepts in Agile contexts (Schatzki, 2000, p. 99; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664). Ultimately, this understanding was achieved; an understanding which “consists in ‘seeing connections’” as Wittgenstein would put it (2009, p. 54, PI §122). This representative understanding was deemed useful because of the previously highlighted lack of existing rigorous scholarly work investigating organisational concepts in the context of Agile project management teams (Gregory *et al.*, 2015; Gregory *et al.*, 2016; Mergel, Gong and Bertot, 2018). This seems especially true with respect to non-instrumental and interpretivist research that is exploratory in purpose, rather than being aimed at optimisation as a goal (Bonner, 2010; de la Barra *et al.*, 2015; Moe, Aurum and Dybå, 2012).

The comparative object was itself refined through repeated engagement in the previously outlined processes of “seeking resemblance”, providing “surveyable representation” and engaging in acts of comparison, de-scription and redescription in the attempt to write a coherent report of the work itself. This framework was then

deployed in the refined form in order to aid the scholar in addressing the issue at hand. As was discussed above, this step was similar to the crafting of an analytical narrative in the traditional sense, albeit more circuitous and cyclical (Nowell *et al.*, 2017, pp. 10-11). The purpose here was to show the development, applicability and utility of the newly generated object of comparison by way of direct action; in re-describing the troubling issues by way of the object of comparison, not only was a contribution made to the resolution of confusions which had been causing problems, but the viability of this new understanding for generating useful knowledge about the matters in question was also tested and demonstrated (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 56-57, PI §133). This is not a validity measured in coverage, what the concept can be said to encapsulate, but rather in utility, how much the comparison allows one to discuss the topic at hand in novel ways or generate novel insights to be further investigated.

The focus of the depth grammar framework is trinary; the object looks to speak to the ways activity was recognised as “legitimate” in Agile, but it also includes those aspects which were side-lined, de-emphasised or otherwise discounted and those actions and utterances which existed between these extremes in some space of recognisable and acceptable compromise (Schatzki, 2000, pp. 104-105; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 14-15, PI §23). Ultimately, this framework looks to convey the circumstances, actions, utterances and so on which, in the right context, can be recognised as belonging to a grouping of non-basic activity which is commonly recognised as being “Agile” (Schatzki, 2000, p. 99; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664). As stated previously, this interest in belonging is not binary, rather the framework looks to speak to the liminal space of distancing recognition also, that is to say hesitant acceptance or tolerance of an incident which is nevertheless recognised to be at odds in some way with the established norms and order.

In service of providing a quick and coherent summary of the depth grammar a table was employed at the beginning of the first discussion chapter (Table 13). This table reflects the output of the process of development which follows it. In other words, the depth grammar was proposed through the combination and comparison of the categories and manifestations to the data from which they arose, in addition to literature from the Agile community. This act of comparison itself is laid bare and unpacked through the findings and the first discussion chapter, showing how the framework developed from the codes, memos and diagrams which preceded (Schreier, 2012, pp. 219-230).

Of course, such an assessment of utility as outlined earlier implies an arbiter of impact and this is one area where this research project struggles due to the lack of embodied access. One easy route in this situation would be to look to member checking to assess the extent to which the participants found this framework a reflective account of their own experiences and understandings (Saldaña, 2021). However, this is not an option in this context and so alternative routes have been devised to check the object of comparison against the Agile experience. Namely, the framework has been used to explore experience reports in the light of one another and has been considered in the light of what exploratory research did exist around Agile (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). This limitation underlines the importance of subsequent employment of the framework in future research. In other words, there is still re-description which can be done moving forwards from this research with a focus on reaching a practitioner audience.

4.7 On Reflexivity

If one is to conduct such interpretive and flexible research, how is one to approach the idea of rigour or critique? Here, the concept of “reflexivity” is fruitful; in this, the thesis treads in a well-worn path, established by others who have travelled in similar directions before (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008; Hibbert *et al.*, 2014; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). This process might be understood in general terms as “qualitative researchers’ engagement of continuous examination and explanation of how they have influenced a research project” (Dowling, 2008, p. 747). However, there are different acknowledged “forms” of reflexivity which operate within the qualitative sphere.

Which of the forms of reflexivity are adopted or pursued by the researcher depends on the methodological commitments undertaken to facilitate the research process (Dowling, 2008; Mruck and Mey, 2007, pp. 516-518). Dowling describes the primary type of reflexivity which hermeneutic, interpretive scholars engage in as “epistemological reflexivity”, characterised by a reflective and questioning orientation towards method and epistemology (Dowling, 2008). Certainly, the writing of Wittgenstein inspires a willingness at least, if not necessarily an ability, to be reflective about how one generates “theory” and the role one’s concepts have to play in the research process. There are many practical guides available on how one might imbue greater reflexive potential into research. Again turning towards grounded theory literature, one finds interesting discussions on the use of prompts and introspective questioning as paths to reflexivity during research (Mruck and Mey, 2007, p. 520).

While this notion of “epistemological reflexivity” might describe the design and conduct of this research method, it does not necessarily capture the full spirit of the project. Instead, one must turn to other literature in search of guidance. The 2014 paper by Hibbert et al. summarises much existing work on reflexivity in constructionism (Hibbert *et al.*, 2014). Particularly useful for this discussion is the distinction they surface between d-reflexivity and r-reflexivity, ideas introduced by authors’ Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008). There is a surprising degree of literalness about the naming of these two approaches; the authors helpfully point out that “D stands for deconstruction, defence, declaiming, destabilizing and danger-warning”, while “R refers to reconstruction, reframing, reclaiming, re-presentation” (2008).

The frequent talk through the method of journeys, of bricolage and of multiple perspectives bears a great resemblance to the notion of “multi-perspective practices” as discussed by the aforementioned scholars; the researcher is a traveller, a bricoleur who advocates for multiple perspectives to build a diverse picture. However, in addition to this, the aim here is also to engage in “destabilizing practices”; that is to say this work looks to call into question given accounts and uncover a lack of reflexivity in others, but also looks to remain circumspect with regards to limitations and exclusions (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008).

This synthesis of multiple reflexive strategies pre-empts and addresses criticisms which the authors’ level at each of these approaches. Indeed, their primary recommendation to address the potential limitations of reflexivity is to “engage in practices that create a dialectic between D-reflexivity and R-reflexivity” (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008, p. 495). The authors are not remiss on how this can be

achieved in more practical terms and these guidelines are adopted in this thesis to help achieve a more reflective position:

Moving between tearing down – pointing at the weaknesses in the text and disarming truth claims – and then developing something new or different, where the anxieties of offering positive knowledge do not hold the researcher back... one can use D-reflexive practices to demolish the assumptions of a text, thereby creating space to engage in R-reflexivity and construct an alternative and emancipatory text

(Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008, p. 495)

It is suggested that, based on the criteria discussed above, a suitably sensitized approach to the method of Wittgensteinian inquiry provides sufficient mechanisms for reflexivity both in the context of the research findings and the conduct of the work itself. While it is certainly controversial to claim a position of reflexivity with undue justification, it can at least be said that the proposed method, in combination with informative texts such as the research discussed above, provides the tools required for the scholar to strive towards reflexivity in their research.

4.7.1 The Role of The Researcher

One element which has not been substantially discussed so far in this project is the background of the author and the influence this has on the conduct of the research project and especially on the interpretation of data and subsequent construction of findings. This is important context as the authors background in engineering and process improvement techniques provides a basis for understanding Agile at a level of depth. One can see very readily represented, with a background in this area, the

lineage which flows from approaches such as total quality management and lean manufacturing through to Agile (Conboy and Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 38; Sutherland, 2014). First-hand experience of lean implementation and of the communications surrounding this project, especially, informs a sceptical view of the executive accounts as presented or received.

Understanding the lineage of this method was very important in the initial stages of the research; differentiating between Agile manufacturing discourse and Agile project management in the moment can be challenging and it was primarily through an initial familiarity with both of these bodies that the distinct areas were disentangled. This differentiation is key, as the two bodies of work are not in current conversation with one-another, though some are looking to change that (Conboy, 2009, pp. 330-331; Conboy and Fitzgerald, 2004, pp. 37-38; Kettunen, 2009, pp. 409-415). Rather, as previous discussions have shown, it is in concepts like “Kanban” (think just-in-time provision of stock in a manufacturing context) and more generally “lean” (of which Kanbans are a constituent part) which remain influential contemporary touchstones for Agile practitioners looking to the manufacturing space for inspiration (Namioka, 2015; Wang, Conboy and Cawley, 2012; Zaitsev, Gal and Tan, 2018, p. 5).

This view of Agile as being part of a lineage of processes and practices is helpful also in seeing what it is that Agile uniquely represents for practitioners versus these other bodies of work. Firstly, there is the context specificity of Agile taking concepts from the manufacturing space and transplanting these into primarily service/IT oriented sectors; Agile is the product of a particular working environment and is aimed primarily at this environment and others like it in turn (Beck *et al.*, 2001; Sutherland, 2014). Secondly, there is the overlap with and divergence from existing solutions. To

state that Agile, for example, is novel in the form of project planning employed, or organisational model adopted, is to ignore the aforementioned lineage (Conboy, 2009, pp. 330-331). Yet, it is the synthesis of various approaches from without and within the domain of IT which has led to Agile as it is presented in the manifesto. This is an influence which continues to this day, as shown by the recent growth in rhetoric around “Lean” and “Kanban” (Namioka, 2015; Wang, Conboy and Cawley, 2012; Zaitsev, Gal and Tan, 2018, p. 5).

Of course, the background of an author can bring limitations too and things are no different in the context of this research project. A primary hurdle to be overcome is the author’s outsider status with regards to the world of information technology (IT) and software development. This is important as these areas are where the majority, though not all, of the experience report cases are located. The remedy here, in as much as there is one to be had, comes in the form of the contextual review work around the IT and development sectors. This was conducted previously in the introduction and systematic review chapters by way of discussing Agile, and these insights are subsequently integrated into the analysis also.

4.7.2 A Note on Linearity

The linear flow of this explanation has been relatively neat and tidy, implying that the practicing of this method flows smoothly and sequentially from step to step; the engagement follows the problematic, then proceeds the substantive coding and so on. The form set out in section 4.2 (Figure 7) is a very general template for the progression of this research project. This cyclical model carries with it a rejection of the view that the scholar advances ever onwards, never stopping to reconsider data or include new insights which are arrived at “too late” to be included or explored in their

relevant place. Within such a process, one must take active efforts to remain open to new information or perspectives which arise from the data gathering or the analysis as they proceed (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 15-17). As noted in the aforementioned section, the “end” of research consists in the choice to “break off” the examples as the researcher determines “problems are solved” (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 56-57, PI §133). This drive to remain open in research intersects with issues around reflexivity which will be discussed shortly, so the pursuit of this ephemeral concept is one way in which the scholar might stay receptive to novelty (Mruck and Mey, 2007).

At every step of this research journey, the researcher must be willing to explore the avenues which spring open for them; the scholar is to be a well-travelled opportunistic sketch artist, after all, and how can there be wanderlust without a sense of adventure (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 3-4, PI Preface). So it is that this author finds themselves in deepest agreement with the admonitions by Charmaz to, for example, remain flexible with one’s data gathering plan when doing research. Citing the example of research into “experiences of living with cancer”, she points out that one might gain new access through “personal journals” or other unexpected mediums. New questions might arise once you begin to collate findings which prompt a similar ground up revision of data collection (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 15-16).

No such breakthrough happened here, after the discovery of the experience reports, but it is not only data collection which should be amenable to adjustment. Rather each stage of the research process explicitly calls upon the scholar to remain willing to return to the beginning to consider the project in a fresh light. I will point to the constantly questioning and self-critical voice of Wittgenstein as the wellspring of a

drive towards the novel in my own work. Of his own *Philosophical Investigations*, the author has this to say:

The same or almost the same points were always being approached afresh from different directions, and new sketches made. Very many of these were badly drawn or lacking in character, marked by all the defects of a weak draughtsman. And when they were rejected, a number of half-way decent ones were left, which then had to be arranged and often cut down, in order to give the viewer an idea of the landscape. So this book is really just an album.

(Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 3-4, PI Preface)

This quote certainly does not evoke the image of a confident scientist assembling a series of well-defined experiments into a publication. Rather, it is this spirit of craft, of an assembled collage, and of humble reflexivity which informs the practice of this research method.

4.8 Limitations

Throughout this chapter, and the preceding introduction, there have been frequent discussions as to the limitations of this investigation, especially as they relate to the epistemological bounds of the claims being put forward and the representative nature of the data. This aspect will be addressed again here, in brief. However, the focus of this section will be on exploring those other limitations of the study that are less intended, or that arise from issues in the design or conduct of the research. There are unaddressed gaps between the categories, the problems associated with such an analysis which values plural perspectives being authored by a single scholar and the

issues with the dataset, especially as they relate to access to context and further contact with participants. This section will start with the recapping of these epistemological points, before moving quickly on to discuss the other issues which were identified here in brief.

At the risk of sounding repetitive, it is key that one grasp the epistemological positioning of the depth grammar described in the findings; to understand this is to understand the limits of the knowledge produced through this investigative process. This depth grammar, as an object of comparison, is a means to an end; it is not an end in and of itself. The following is an excerpt from Philosophical Investigations which serves to highlight the most important section of a more substantial quotation provided in the introduction:

Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language... Rather, the language-games stand there as objects of comparison which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language... not as a preconception to which reality must correspond.

(Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §130-131)

As such, the knowledge produced in such a process finds its value in application rather than in abstract construction. Put another way, there is no generalisable theory which is derived here, to be put forward as a new understanding of Agile. Instead, there is an applied therapy which comes in the form of a proposed framework of concepts around which an informed and informative discussion can take place.

One major limitation of the work is the isolation in which it was conducted. The first sense this speaks to is the loss of access and subsequent reliance on secondary data, in this way the research has been somewhat isolating and removed from warm bodies in the community of practice. However, and this almost goes without saying in the context of a thesis, fundamentally this has also been an analysis of reduction conducted by a single author, albeit one who is supervised and so provided with readily accessible mentorship (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 39-40). As such, it is only possible to claim so far as to the diversity of perspectives which have been applied towards the end of reflecting on potential additional gaps.

The “antidote” to this issue, insofar as there is one present in the conduct of this study, is in the epistemological reflexivity exercised in the design of the research and the presentation of the findings (Dowling, 2008, p. 747). In terms of isolation from the practitioners themselves, little can be done to remedy this issue in the present, though moving forward the framework derived here will gain much from subsequent application to “live” Agile contexts. This issue of later application is covered in the concluding chapter as the focus shifts to next steps following completion of the project. Nevertheless, the issue remains perhaps under-addressed and this is a theme which will be carried through in the next limitation to be explored.

Indeed, one of the issues with this study is that, regardless of the awareness shown as to the presence of boundaries which limit the impact of the research, there are steps which could plausibly be taken to address the issues noted. One example here might be the limitations of the data around context and the following-up of accounts (Charmaz, 2006, p. 37); contact could have been established with the authors of the reports in many instances as information was provided to facilitate such an act.

Reaching out to these authors may have yielded the opportunity for additional insight into at least some of the contexts examined. While this may have shifted the balance of data available on each case and brought new challenges, it is important to be circumspect about the ways in which previously existing limitations were overcome and also about the practical limits imposed by the loss of access at a midway point in the research (Charmaz, 2006, p. 142; Dowling, 2008, p. 747).

4.9 Conclusion

The overall aim of the investigation was to describe the functions and impact of organisational concepts in Agile practice, from a position of leadership agnosticism (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 379; Alvesson, 2019, p. 11; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211). Towards these ends, an analysis was conducted, as described above, which systematically addressed participants accounts in order to provide a comprehensive description of the relevant language used in the reflective entries. These reflective entries were the 35 experience reports which were discussed in the preceding section. The description offered of these accounts in the form of 138 codes, reduced to 16 manifestations and then 6 categories, provided the basis for a further exploration of the depth grammar around organizational concepts in Agile. The categories and manifestations are unpacked in the findings chapter to follow, while the depth grammar was presented and developed through the first discussion chapter, where the scope for legitimated expression within the accounts was explored.

To facilitate this exposition, the grouped manifestations were unpacked, and the constituent exemplars discussed, compared and contrasted with one-another. The aim of this comparative-discursive move is to describe the space of judgment, norms, “right” action and terminology surrounding organisation in Agile (Schatzki, 1996, pp.

105, 134-136; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664). Through this discussion, then, a sense of what is “allowable” began to emerge. Leadership, in all its forms, becomes just one more multi-faceted, but identifiable, notion which may or may not be motivated to describe Agile organization. In this case, it conspires, several forms of leadership are influential in the talk of Agile practitioners, with several more capturing the interest of scholars. However, the findings make clear the limits of leadership in Agile; the exploration of legitimacy shows the impact of certain concepts, but also suggests divergences from the literature.

Given the explicit interest in the appropriate “grammar” of Agile, the research offered significant insight into the unspeakable, that which was excluded or that which was delegitimated (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 14-15, PI §23). This is relevant to the study of leadership, in that it becomes possible here to remark upon problematic aspects of the notions which were motivated. Essentially, the focus on not just the positive content, but also what was excluded from some reports and included in others but framed as problematic, enabled interesting comments around what these notions obscure, what they “paper over” (Blom and Alvesson, 2015, pp. 480-481; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 49-53). Beyond these insights to leadership, other remarkable exclusions were also highlighted and discussed. These exclusions were articulated in the course of analysing talk about Agile organization, and were seen as worth conveying for the value they add, highlighting the contradictions between initial organisational rhetoric, practice-as-projected and practice-as-realised. These distinct areas were also referred to as Agile rhetoric, practical mediation and delegitimated aspect.

Here coding-based analyses, especially Saldaña's overview of coding techniques more broadly, was particularly helpful for operationalising the open ended and searching investigation which Wittgenstein advocates. The methods of coding, of memo writing, of diagramming and of category aggregation were all key to facilitating the conduct of the research (Saldaña, 2021). These tools, along with the linguistic framework generated from SFG, provided concrete steps which were taken in order to facilitate the type of detailed, yet open-ended, interpretive investigation which Wittgenstein suggested in his writing. This transfusion of concrete method was beneficial due to the lack of methodological clarity which characterises the work of Wittgenstein; his drive to prevent closure or the presentation of theory ultimately leaving his work open to productive interpretation, as was intended by the author (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 4, PI Preface).

Of course, such a study is not without its limitations by design, and there are other issues with the conduct of this research which impose further constraints on the scope of the claims which can be made on the basis of the work; this study provides an interpretive description aimed at being useful in its capacity for application (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §130-132). One major problem, though it is somewhat endemic to the thesis as a research object, is that the study set out in this thesis is the product of a single mind, albeit one that is well supported and mentored in the investigative process. This fundamentally limits the breadth of perspectives which could be claimed to have been brought to bear on the research data. The issue is compounded by the fact that the data gathered is secondary to the scholar, so the opportunities for substantial co-development or member checking of the findings have been limited (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 39-40).

Drawing on work pioneered by others, this project is framed as oscillating between various reflexive modes and coding focal areas; seeking to break down participants' word use from multiple perspectives but finally looking to reorder or reinterpret this into a new plausible order which is reflective in its construction and subsequent positioning. Ultimately, in this method there is the space for observation and reinterpretation of both critical and sympathetic forms; this approach is taken, then, to stand as another way to fight the "bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language" (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 52, PI §109).

The purpose of the following findings chapter will be to unpack the description of language, which was achieved through the processes of coding, seeking resemblance and producing the surveyable representation. As such, each section will address one category and build an understanding of the relevant manifestations by highlighting and exploring the excerpts from the texts which constitute these. The categories and the manifestations used to generate them are shown again below in table 12.

Following this will be a development and discussion of the depth grammar, which is argued through the first discussion chapter. Finally, the potential implications of these arguments are described through the second discussion chapter. This second chapter considers aspects of the depth grammar in the context of further literature which was seen by the scholar as fruitful in shedding new light on the issues perceived.

Category	Manifestation
Agile Requires Organisational Change	Agile Transforming Responsibilities - Agile Creates Dramatic Change
Push Towards Employee Ownership	Teams as Self-Directing - Increased Personal Accountability - Degrees of Autonomy
Agile Regulates 'Leadership' Practice	Agile Looks for Servant Leadership - New Agile 'Leadership' Roles - Distributed Agency/Leadership

The Dark Art of Control	Fraught Relationship with Control - Controlled Agile Implementation
Tension in the Role of Coach	Coach-as-support - Coach-as-potent-influencer
Enforcing Politicized Orthodoxy	Agile as Political - Agile Emphasises Proselytic Orthodoxy

Table 12 - Categories and Constituent Manifestations

Chapter 5: Analytical Write Up

5.1 Introduction

As was established in the introduction and the literature chapter, sensitive investigations from Agile scholars into how the drive toward Agile organising is resolved in practice are lacking (de la Barra *et al.*, 2015; Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 99; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 96). Indeed, there is a noted shortage of research investigating the lived experience of team members, rather than which programming practices and planning methods are most effective (Whitworth, 2008, p. 429). This chapter, then, represents one part of such a project; the findings and discussions together constitute a more sceptical description of leadership notions in Agile, what they are used to articulate and what is concealed or downplayed in that articulation. This chapter will explore the accounts of Agile practitioners in a primarily descriptive capacity, while the discussions focus on interpreting these accounts through the analytical outputs and literature which emerged as relevant. On the following page is a summative diagram which brings together the six categories derived from the analysis of experience reports, along with the manifestations aggregated under these categories (Figure 11).

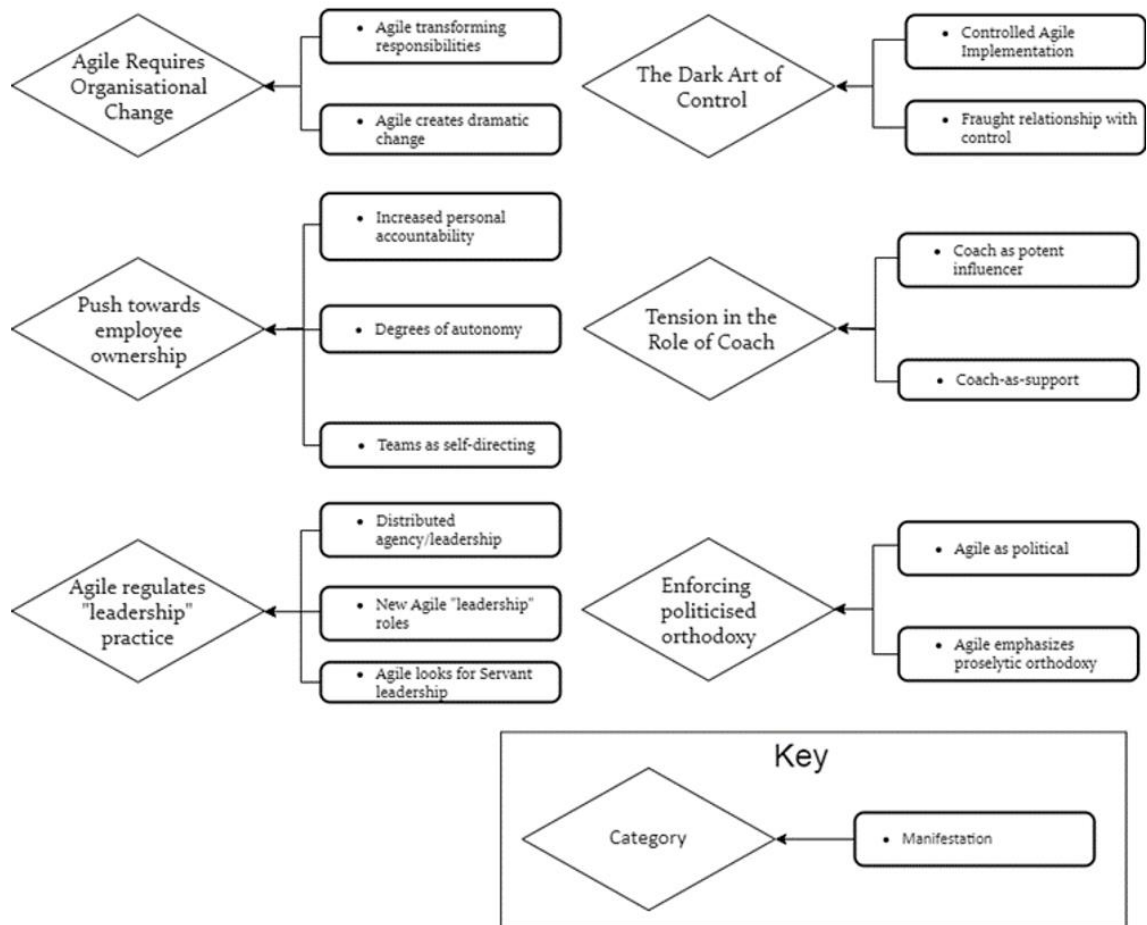


Figure 11 - Summary of Categories and Constituent Manifestations

As stated in the method chapter, the purpose of these categories is to group the aggregated exemplars and manifestations under headings which can be more readily addressed. The exploration of these categories here serves to connect, compare and contrast the relevant manifestations and exemplars in order to show the often-problematic role leadership concepts play in Agile organisation, as well as highlighting some of the issues associated with the change methodology in practice. As such, the writing of this findings section was, in fact, an extension of the analytical process.

5.2 Established Categories

5.2.1 Agile Requires Organisational Change

The category “Agile Requires Organisational Change” connects two manifestations centred around the shared theme of Agile being framed as necessitating radical shifts in the reflective accounts analysed. These shifts took the form of changes to organisational responsibilities. However, there was also the expectation of personal transformation and of a shift in mindset. The extensive nature of these changes is captured by the notion of “dramatic change”. These expected changes were sometimes articulated in terms of leadership, with notions of servant leadership being particularly influential (ER10; ER12; ER21). This talk about service and the shifts away from control are particularly notable for papering over the lived experience of Agile team members, given the ongoing, demonstrable reliance on mechanisms of control in these contexts (Whitworth, 2008, p. 433). The relevant section from the surveyable representation has been included showing the move from exemplars to manifestation and so on (Figure 12).

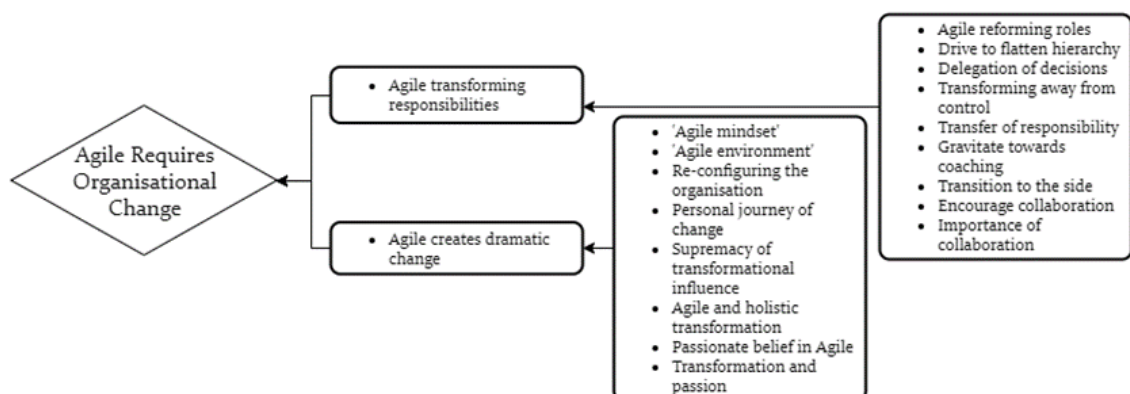


Figure 12 – Resemblance Around Change

The literature agrees that the method certainly requires significant organisational change as a part of implementation for most firms (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 29; Dybå and

Dingsøy, 2008, pp. 834-836; Taylor, 2016, pp. 670-671). There are the new roles to consider; the introduction of scrum masters, coaches and other framework specific positions means some change in the organisation is to be expected (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 40; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2013; Jovanović *et al.*, 2017, pp. 174-175). This transformation is not necessarily complete and many of the new positions and structures often coexist with existing operational features (Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017, pp. 4-8; Theobald and Diebold, 2018, pp. 1-2; van Waardenburg and van Vliet, 2013, pp. 2154-2155). Nevertheless, the responsibilities of those within the organisation are still altered. However, it is important to understand, as will be demonstrated through this analysis, that a change in just responsibilities without a corresponding dramatic shift in outlook is seen and discussed as delegitimated or “not Agile” by many (ER25, pp. 2, 7-8; ER33, pp. 3-4; ER35, pp. 4, 6).

5.2.1.a Agile Transforming Responsibilities

As was addressed earlier in the chapter, Agile literature calls on practitioners to organise differently than in traditional contexts (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 29; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008, pp. 834-836; Taylor, 2016, pp. 670-671). In the most mundane sense, Agile transforms responsibilities by introducing new roles which replace and exist alongside the prior positions available in the organisation. The various facilitative roles and the details of their responsibilities have been explored in the introduction to Agile terminology in the first chapter. The focus of this chapter is on how this change is positioned and talked about in practice; in essence, what is framed as legitimate, positive action for those involved in the work of Agile and what was marginalised in the expression of practitioners. In the broadest terms, a common idea from the Agile literature is that a change onto the methodology can be characterised as a shift away

from managerial control (Appelo, 2011, p. 28; Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 31; Hoda, 2013, p. 92). Interestingly, this shift away from control was often framed in the literature as a shift to leadership (Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016, p. 636; Hoda and Murugesan, 2016a, p. 248; Jovanović *et al.*, 2017, p. 178).

The accounts analysed here show a similar tendency towards framing the change in responsibilities in this way, often talking about management actors moving away from “command and control” and sometimes doing so with leadership as a reference point. Ni Sun discusses the maturation of Agile practice in a recently introduced team of coaches at the Chinese ZTE corporation. They state that “the Seeded Coaches were more conscious to change their management style gradually from 'Command and Control' to 'Servant leadership' and 'Coach style'” (ER31, p. 4). Similarly, Raines and Neher also talk about how scrum masters “embraced new Servant Leadership principles as part of their transformation” when Agile was introduced to a US government department (ER27, p. 3).

There are, then, clear references to leadership ideas one would expect based on the literature (Appendix C) in the reflections of these Agile practitioners. Not all of these changes are positioned in terms of leadership; Mole and Mamoli reflect on their experiences in e-commerce process improvement. In introducing self-selection, they found that “for some, it can be uncomfortable for managers to give up control and relinquish a key element of their job”, but that ultimately “their roles can change in this scenario from one of being a manager to one of being a coach” (ER22, p. 6). In this case, then, the change is seen as moving from manager to coach, rather than to leader. This suggests that leadership is not central to all expressions of this change. In

other words, authors like Mole and Mamoli show that these new roles can rely on notions of coaching, for example, to articulate their identity and purpose.

It is not only those in authority or adopting the new roles whose responsibilities are transformed. Heidi Helfand summarises the journey their company underwent as their Agile practice developed. She explains that they “grew from having a dedicated ScrumMaster into a group of internal coaches supporting self-organizing teams that choose how they work” (ER11, p. 1). Later on, she describes the state of affairs as self-organising practices at the company mature:

Whatever the team wanted to do was fine. If two people went off on a tangent together for a while I would interrupt. Otherwise I let things go and just basically went into observer mode.

ER11, p. 4

Similarly, Grabel and Reichert describe the burgeoning autonomy facilitated by a “natural servant leader” in a Jamaican Vistaprint contact centre. They talk about how “representatives no longer need permission from their managers”, emphasising that “they have the autonomy they need to make it right for the customer” (ER9, p. 1). The drive to produce, as Nienke Alma at ING puts it, “more motivated, passionate and self-starting employees” as well as to “empower and give space to individuals and teams” is a recurring motif throughout the reports analysed (ER1, p. 1). There is again, then, the notion that a shift towards an environment of empowerment and autonomy is efficient and in-line with Agile principles. In other words, that speaking control is not Agile. This concept which will be further explored throughout the chapter.

The transformations in the accounts are talked about as being influenced greatly by the orientation of the main agents of change, negotiated with the organisation which is changing. Jeff Howey was an Agile coach brought in to extend an existing Agile implementation at Principal Financial Group. Reflecting on the process of change, he explains that “it was important for [him] to align with internal initiatives to improve employee engagement and move toward decentralized, empowered decision-making” (ER13, p. 3). This quote challenges the idea that there is a single, ideal “Agile”, but his recourse to the initiatives centred on engagement and decentralisation reinforces the perception that these concepts and adjacent notions are somewhat central in the legitimated grammar of Agile organisation. The contingent nature of Agile change puts lie, in a sense, to the idea that Agile necessarily involves significant transformation of responsibilities. This aspect of political contingency will be the subject of further discussion in the following chapters.

The grammar of Agile organisation as it relates to change is reflected as Vettoretti and Mondini describe their experiences implementing Agile at an Italian software start-up called “Datatellers”. They talk about their ambitions for the company, stating that “[their] aim was and still is today to lead this transformation process by having spontaneous and enthusiastic followers that are willing to experiment, confront and discuss” (ER33, p. 7). The report by Mole and Mamoli referenced earlier also showcases these tendencies well through their discussions of team self-selection. They identify their primary challenges as “persuading the 150 people who would take part, that they were best positioned to make these choices” and “persuading managers to let go of their team selection responsibilities” (ER22, p. 3). The emphasis on self-organising teams is considered, by some scholars, reflective of a push towards shared leadership (Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016, p. 639; Kropp, Meier and Biddle,

2016, p. 427; Moe, Dingsøy and Dybå, 2009, pp. 25-26). It is certainly fair to say that these reports communicate a commonly perceived drive to increase collaboration, to transfer responsibility, to flatten hierarchy and to delegate decisions.

The theme of autonomous self-organising teams will be explored in much greater detail as the focus shifts to the push for employee ownership. For now, though, the main point to reinforce is that the roles and responsibilities of employees at all levels are potentially transformed under Agile. The reformation of employees which authors like Alma describe is an idea which will again crop up in the following discussions of the other ways in which Agile can reshape norms in an organisation. However, it is worth noting that these shifts were not articulated through shared leadership in practice, though the notions discussed bear significant resemblance to the Agile literature relying on this concept which was reviewed previously (Moe, Aurum and Dybå, 2012; Srivastava and Jain, 2017, pp. 23-24). In this way, it is possible to suggest that shared leadership itself may not be a significant aspect of the organisational grammar in Agile, though notions associated with it certainly are. These suggestions will be further explored in the sections concerned specifically with employee ownership and distributed agency. The word “potentially” is used to modify the emphasis on change in Agile because of the issues around political contingency which were highlighted earlier. As stated previously, a full exploration of this aspect to Agile change will be undertaken in the first discussion chapter.

5.2.1.b Agile Creates Dramatic Change

What is important to emphasise in the case of Agile is that the focal point of change is often not so much working practices. In fact, such a perspective would likely be seen as distinctly “missing the point”; Jackson et al. encourage the prospective coach to

“start with the basics” and consider “how does Agile change the way we think?” (ER15, p. 6). The idea of the Agile mindset and the notion of changing one’s mind as a starting point to an Agile “journey” is a common motif and a key element in the ability to legitimately “talk” Agile. The guiding notion here of an Agile mindset is taken to refer to the internalisation of Agile logic as the fundamental basis for understanding organisation; essentially, practitioners are expected to see things in terms of Agile (ER8, p. 3; ER17, p. 3; ER35, p. 4). This firm emphasis on “being” Agile is at the root of the proselytic orthodoxy which is identified in the category “Enforcing Politicized Orthodoxy”. This is something which will be returned to later as the focus shifts to tensions and issues in the Agile project, especially through the second discussion chapter.

This sense that one becomes Agile, rather than merely adopting it, is a theme that was recurring throughout the reflections analysed (ER32, pp. 4-5; ER33, p. 1; ER35, p. 4). This idea is directly relevant to the study of leadership; if one accepts that Agile theory does ask practitioners to do “leadership” differently, then this process of becoming would entail some notions of leadership. Servant leadership has already been identified as a highly legitimate way of “talking Agile” through the accounts and the literature (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 31-38). The transformational overtones in the language of the accounts are notable; Khawaja, for example, reflects on their role providing “thought leadership on the transformation journey”, though there is no explicit mention of transformational leadership in any of the accounts analysed (ER17, p.1). However, the prevalence of transformational leadership in the literature means the absence does not preclude the possibility that this concept is influential in discussions on organising in Agile (Appendix C). Shared leadership was even more influential in the literature, but again was lacking in explicit references, as stated

earlier. However, like transformational leadership, it is not possible to say that this notion was not influential in some ways, merely that it was not the expression chosen to articulate such working arrangements.

The focus on reforming employees and shifting their individual mindsets is just one facet to the Agile transformation. There is also a related emphasis on reforming the organisation; responsibilities and roles are certainly changed, but there are overt discussions directed towards overhauling company culture which also merit consideration in a similar vein:

There are enough books and articles about organizational transformation to acknowledge that it is neither easy to achieve nor straightforward. Such shifts usually encompass people, process and technology. Further still, to change an organization to one that is friendly to agile, one often must change the entire company culture. More than two years ago, British Telecom (BT) took on this challenge

ER20 p. 17

This excerpt from a report on BT transitioning to Agile shows a typical understanding of the scope to which Agile adoption extends; beyond matters of working processes or even the reformation of roles is the anticipated shift to “being” Agile. In this case the focus is on company culture. Brown and Anderson similarly talk about the “real mental and emotional challenge to help an organization undo decades of conditioning and adopt an Agile culture” (ER3, p. 1).

Reference to this cultural aspect to Agile transformation is a common and relatable notion which underlines the sweeping nature of the change; Padula, reflecting on his

work as an Agile coach in several distinct Agile transformations, talks about the cultivation of an “Agile environment” (ER25, p. 2). Fry and Greene reflect on the lessons learned in their own “large scale” Agile rollout, stating that coaches shouldn’t “be afraid to change the entire company all at one time” (ER7, p. 5). Overall, though, the language is relatable under the same broad category, where Agile becomes expressible as a value system, rather than just a method. This is to say that it becomes inappropriate to discuss Agile as something less than holistic, on both a personal and organisational level. The scale of change associated with Agile can be linked to the tensions in the role of coach which were observed as an underdiscussed aspect of the practical experiences recorded in these reports. This tension can be related back to conflict between practice and the general literature around coaching, but also the drive towards servant leadership. The competing drives to act as a support and an influencer are addressed more fully through the juxtaposition of manifestations which reflect these drives. This juxtaposition is achieved through their connection in an overall category focused on “Tension in the Role of Coach”.

Of course, the rhetoric of radical change and transformation makes it harder to articulate the corresponding reality that the scope of this change is often significantly mediated in practice by the context. This is not just in terms of which specific method is adopted, but rather in the degree to which the context can be considered and referred to as completely “Agile”. In the reports, this trend can be seen through accounts of resistance and “failure”, or in a more mediated way through talk about using “Agile methods”. Notable examples could be the dual waterfall/Agile operation at Manheim, or the “Agile methods” employed by the transportation arm of General Electric (ER12, pp. 1-2; ER33, pp. 5-6; ER34, pp. 1-3).

This notion of mediated change seems to ripple out through practitioners; many firms do not go so far as to consider themselves Agile, rather they talk about drawing upon aspects of the method (Gale, 2012, pp. 30-31; Päivärinta, Sein and Peltola, 2010, pp. 481-482). There is a notable contrast between these situations and those accounts authored by “true believers”. In these latter cases, individuals and firms have identified with Agile sufficiently and confirmed the legitimacy of their actions and mentality such that they feel comfortable to describe their organisations and practices, perhaps even themselves, as fully “Agile” (ER3, p. 1; ER5, pp. 1-3; ER32, p. 5). This, indeed, was one primary contribution of the experience reports as a form of data; they represent a collection of documents authored primarily by those who self-identify sufficiently with the methodology. Given the stringent requirements set out to legitimately do and talk Agile, getting a straightforward, confident answer here is something quite rare (ER25, p. 2; Päivärinta *et al.*, 2010, pp. 481-482; Gale, 2012, pp. 30-31).

5.2.2 Push Towards Employee Ownership

One of the observable tendencies cutting across the experience reports analysed was the shifting of agency within the organisation to operational roles; in essence, there was a push towards employee ownership and autonomy. This, as will be shown in the proceeding section, is a change in practical arrangements, but also in the language used to describe the work of organisation. Especially key here are notions of personal accountability, autonomy and self-organisation. These concepts act to articulate the types of employee and activity that are acceptably “Agile”. Reading the Manifesto, one would expect this. The text explicitly calls for firms to “build projects around motivated individuals”, to “give them the environment and support they need, and

trust them to get the job done” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp. 30-31). The prior quote represents principle 5 of the Agile manifesto, principle 11 can also be related back to this emphasis on distributed authority. The authors reflect that “the best architectures, requirements and designs emerge from self-organizing teams” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 33).

Looking back at even just the material covered up to this point, it is clear that the Agile community has certainly attempted to take these values of autonomy and self-direction to heart. However, in practice it is also demonstrable that there is not necessarily a strong common conception of what this means for employees and there are also challenges still surrounding the effective distribution of authority (ER7, p. 4). The push for employee ownership is perhaps better understood as practitioners from Vistaprint articulate it; the drive for staff autonomy is often aimed at providing team members a “bounded authority”, where the bounds are set by those more typically thought to be in control (ER9, p. 3; ER15, p. 5). The full set of relevant manifestations are depicted in the following diagram (Figure 13).

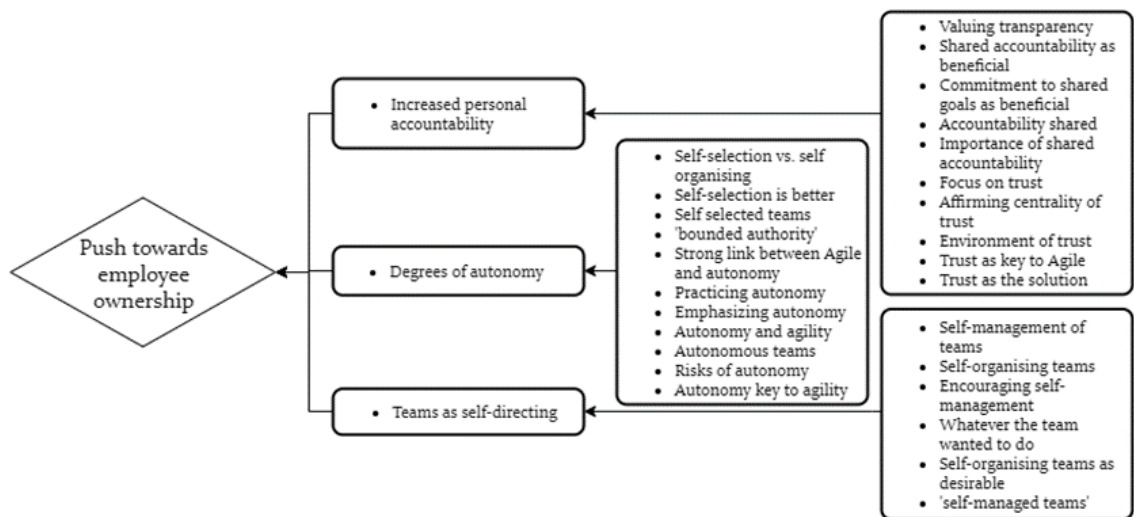


Figure 13 - Resemblance Around Employee Ownership

5.2.2.a Teams as self-directing

The drive to generate engagement and a sense of self-guidance in Agile teams was certainly present throughout the accounts of Agile practitioners which were analysed for this project. Of course, this was already made somewhat apparent by the earlier discussions around the changes in role and the anticipated shifts in employee mindset. This section, then, will serve to further develop this picture of Agile team practices. The focus here will be on the “legitimate” ways that teams are expected to manage themselves, how they articulate this process of organization and what role leadership has to play in facilitating this articulation.

The outspoken desire for team autonomy is characteristic to many of the experience reports analysed. Many of the authors of these accounts, like Reed and Thompson, are sharing their stories so that the reader “might start to envision a future reality in which your teams can be trusted with organizing themselves” (ER29, p. 1). Gratton and West describe a “reboot” of Agile at a software firm called Intralinks. They establish self-organisation as a key principal in their Agile implementation:

Fundamental to Scrum is the ability for a team to self-organize: to take on work, make a plan to complete the work, and execute that plan... For Intralinks, taking on the principle of self-organization led to a genuine sense of ownership of the work. Because the organization let the team self-organize, the team felt that it had the respect of the stakeholders.

ER10, p. 4

The emphasis on the teams' ability to determine their own work and the way that they will go about it is clear here. What is also notable, and this is patterned throughout the reflective accounts, is that the emphasis is on self-organization, ownership, respect and many other concepts, but not at all on "leadership". This account is representative of the earlier remarked trend to engage with the ideas of "shared leadership", as identified in the Agile literature review (Moe, Aurum and Dybå, 2012; Srivastava and Jain, 2017, pp. 23-24), without any explicit reliance on the theory in their talk. This is a marked contrast to the results of said review, where the notion is frequently used to describe the organizational practices of teams (Appendix C).

Examples of this emphasis abound throughout the reflections studied for this project. The account by Grabel and Reichert was highlighted in the preceding discussions around responsibilities being reshaped. While their report mainly centres on the actions of a notable "servant leader", some aspects of their reflection relate to the way the team was encouraged to manage itself. Specifically, they describe how this individual created "a bounded authority for her team to allow members the freedom to act as if they didn't have a boss" (ER9, pp. 3-4). Fry and Greene, who were addressed earlier, similarly talk about their focus "on creating self-organising teams"

in Salesforce.com but their account mainly addresses the transition rather than team practices (ER7, p. 1). However, they acknowledge in their retrospective the need to be clearer regarding the specifics of self-organisation as “self-organization can mean anything to anyone” (ER7, p. 4). This suggests that “self-organization” is, itself, a potentially problematic empty signifier (Kelly, 2014, p. 912). One argument of this thesis is that it is simply a less all-inclusive, less problematic option which leaves Agile organization easier to express than through a troubled “omni-concept” such as leadership that is to be both individual and shared, democratic and transformational (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 3-5). The variability of self-organisation in practice will be explored further in the sections on “Degrees of Autonomy”, where this discussion will be picked up again. Furthermore, the potential problems around this variability and the similarity to issues with leadership will be unpacked in both of the discussion chapters.

The aforementioned move toward self-determination is underpinned by what Daniel Poon describe as “principles of empowerment”; a “get-up-off-you-own-back-side-ethos that is central to Agile” (ER26, p. 1). Poon, in his report, is describing the “bottom-up” Agile implementation at Romax Technology Ltd., an engineering consultancy and software firm. He says relatively little in detail about the organising practices of the later team, but relates a story about his earlier success with Agile:

we had everything we needed, we were a self-contained team. There was no way that anybody from the outside could politically sabotage what we were doing

ER26, p. 4

What is key to note for now is the emphasis on self-sufficient, cross-functional teams which are capable of, and invested in, self-direction. This was seen as vital to the success of Agile implementation by many of the practitioners, in line with the rhetoric of the Agile literature (Kakar, 2017, pp. 210-211; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2013, pp. 425-427; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 6); Poon, through his reflections on the matter, reaffirms the centrality of the self-organising team as the preeminent “legitimate” form of Agile organisation. There is also a notable awareness or orientation in his text towards the “politics” of organisational change in Poon’s report. The language of transition here is almost combative at points. Discussions of politics are rarely this explicit in the accounts analysed, but nevertheless the notion was seen to play an important role in the process of establishing and maintaining Agile. This explicit discussion of politics serves to highlight the generally undiscussed or underdiscussed nature of this topic in the majority of reflections. Put simply, it is much more common that authors gloss over, or briefly allude to, the organizational manoeuvring required to “encourage” (read: enforce) Agile at the organizational level. This underexplored issue will be addressed more comprehensively as a manifestation of the politicized orthodoxy which Agile practitioners were often seen to pursue.

Astolfi and Dartt showcase a similar preference for substantial self-determination in their account of conflict between Agile and Lean consultants at American Electric Power. They emphasise the need to be diplomatic while also firmly advocating for team autonomy. This involved collaborating “with [their] lean counterparts to achieve the organizational consistency needed while maintaining the agile teams’ ability to self-organize around their work” (ER2, p. 6). Rounding out their account, they describe the ongoing “friction and discord” between these self-organising Agile teams and the wider organisation. This tension is “something [they] are still balancing, as

the organization pushes for standardization and the teams embrace self-organization” (ER2, p. 8). The key thing to note here is the strong advocacy for teams to operate with some degree of freedom within the organisation. The authors talk frequently and unambiguously about the teams’ self-organization as a reality of engagement with the method. Again, the absence of any emic reliance on “shared leadership” is notable, though the concept remains theoretically applicable as a description (Appendix C). As with the previous quote, there is more to address here than the rhetoric surrounding self-organisation; the contradictory pulls arising from Agile team practices or ambitions and the status-quo in the organisation are also something worth highlighting. This conflict with the wider organisation connects to the notions around politics which were surfaced previously.

Another example of this self-direction being practiced in Agile organisations comes from GE Transportation in a report authored by one internal agent, project manager Julie Wenzel, and a consultant, Jesse Fewell, who was brought in to help manage the transition to Agile. During the process of change, teams were reorganised. This restructuring was poorly received by the team members:

In response to the team design proposed in Figure 4, one of the engineers declared, “If we do that approach, I will quit... We have GOT to staff every team with a full stack of all the technologies we’re using, so that everything works together all the time. “Here, the team self-organized its own composition.

ER34, p. 5

It is interesting to note that this moment of potential insubordination is framed in a positive light, which is to say that the authors recognise these protests as an act of

self-organization rather than “moaning”. In this particular instance, the locus of self-organisation is team composition. It is interesting to note that other authors draw a distinction between team self-selection and self-organisation. Mole and Mamoli, for example, take pains to emphasise that their report on self-selecting teams is “not referring here to self-organising teams”. Instead, self-selection is seen as “the process you use to set up self-organising teams in the first place” (ER22, p. 1). This distinction harks back to the issues identified earlier around self-organization as a more specific, more suitable but still ultimately variously understood concept to express work typically associated with “shared leadership”.

5.2.2.b Increased Personal Accountability

The account by Gratton and West described in the previous section acts as an excellent jumping off point for a discussion about the linguistic framing and practical implications of the increase in employee ownership. To recap, they describe a “reboot” of Agile at their context firm and a shift towards a self-organising structure. This was already addressed, but what is key to this resemblance from the report is the way in which employees’ responsibilities are described:

The team owns the responsibility to improve based on empirical learning. Management may assess team performance and may be required to facilitate adaptation initiatives... but the team, by virtue of the principle of self-organization, is on the hook for coming up with improvement proposals.

ER10, p. 5

It is clear to see here that the employees are now talked about as “on the hook” for more than they were under previous methods; the team is expected to take change into their own hands and push to evolve their practices. Management still plays a role here, but it is described as playing a facilitative role rather than acting as the focal point for organisational change efforts.

Nick Tune, a consultant tasked with aiding Agile implementation in the UK government, is even more direct in his language on the subject. In the UK government digital service, Agile was built into the proposal and project assessment frameworks. Tune approvingly describes the situation as one where “teams know they have to demonstrably put users first and prove they have engineering capability to iterate frequently, they cannot take shortcuts or hide away from change” (ER32, p. 3).

It is worth noting the way that these excerpts shift responsibility on to the organizational members through the use of phrases like “on the hook”; there is an explicit expectation that, with the power of self-organisation, comes the more personal responsibility for results. This tendency is perhaps troubling in the context of research which suggests that the increased pressure on employees to perform is an ongoing problem associated with Agile methodologies (Annosi *et al.*, 2016, pp. 529-530; Boes and Kämpf, 2014, p. 90; Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, pp. 416, 425-430).

It is important to note that this increase in personal accountability is not always framed as accountability to the organisation or some hierarchical superior. Rather it is discussed in terms of a responsibility to fellow team members; in essence, there is a distribution of disciplinary duty from the position of hierarchy to one’s fellow employee. This can be seen clearly through Mark Kilby’s talk about the “law of the pack”:

For instance, it is important that team members feel they can hold each other to standards, like a Definition of Done and working agreements... These standards are often reinforced in some of the conversations that take place through GitHub pull requests.

ER18, p. 12

This quote describes the sort of concertive control which is enshrined as the ideal, either explicitly or implicitly, in many of these accounts (Barker, 1993). Mole and Mamoli, whose report was addressed earlier in the chapter, emphasise the need for employees to “support and hold each other accountable for great performance” (ER22, p. 1). Astolfi and Dartt similarly discuss “the emergence of self-organisation and accountability on the teams” in their context firm, underlining the importance of employees as a group taking on responsibility for organisational outcomes (ER2, p. 8). Kevin Normand describes the process of two Agile teams coming together from separate projects at Fugro, a large “geo-intelligence and asset integrity solutions” provider with over eight thousand employees (ER24, p. 1). Reflecting on the commonalities connecting the teams’ philosophies, Normand observed that both ensured everyone on the team was deeply involved with the running of the work and “responsible for the success of the projects” (ER24, p. 3). These statements are considered the linguistic manifestation of the continued reliance on control mechanisms in Agile, complicating the prevailing narrative that Agile is opposed to “command and control”.

This shift is not always discussed directly in terms of increased personal responsibility. It was observed that many of the reports talked in terms of trust and increasing trust when referring to any increase in personal or team accountability. In

simple terms, this trust is the expectation, or at least hope, “that people will do the right thing” for the organisation (ER11, p. 5). This enshrining of trust has its roots in the Agile manifesto, which calls for employers to “trust [their staff] to get the job done”. This statement is further unpacked in the manifesto, making it clear that Agile firms are expected to “trust their staff to make the decisions... [that] they’re paid to know about” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp. 30-31). Grabel and Reichert’s account of servant leadership at Vistaprint is revealing in this respect, further illustrating the relationship between trust and concertive control:

A trust-based culture moved the decision authority to the workers, relieving the managers of the burden of approval.

ER9, p. 2

In the above quote, it is made clear that responsibility has shifted from the managers to their reporting staff, quite literally “relieving the managers of the burden of approval”. This quote demonstrates clearly the changing relationship which can be said to underpin the rhetoric about trust; staff are “trusted” more to manage their own work and must take on more personal or communal responsibility as a result of this. Trust in this form is seen as vital to the functioning of a self-organising team; it is the necessarily assumed presumption that others will “help you toward a common goal, they will support you when you struggle with reaching that common goal, and that this help and support is reciprocal” (ER18, p. 9).

5.2.2.c Degrees of Autonomy

Earlier it was said that teams were talked about as self-organising. In truth, this was a simplification. The reality is that teams could be seen discussed in the reports as variously self-organising, self-managing or self-selecting (ER10, p. 4; ER22, p. 1; ER31, p. 4). In the accounts analysed for this research, it was clear that there was an overwhelming preference for some maintenance or enhancement of employee autonomy. That much was demonstrated by the preceding excerpts, which show that self-organisation is the preferred term to describe the “ideal” Agile arrangement. Significant care was exercised throughout the accounts to ensure that teams within these Agile organisations had some sense of empowerment to achieve their aims. At least, as will be explored later, this is true presuming the team or individual acts in accordance with the contextualised principles of Agility.

In many ways the requirement for autonomy seems reflective of this push for more self-sufficient teams. Nick Tune makes that clear in typically direct style, stating that “Modern agile organisations strive for autonomous teams who own full business outcomes” (ER32, p. 4). Returning to the account from ING by Nienke Alma, the author reflects on the lessons learned by the “Agile leadership team” responsible for implementation at the firm. One of the main aspects they emphasise is the need to “know who you work for and respect them”. They expand upon this point, explaining that as a leadership team it is key to “always ask yourself: what is the impact on the autonomy of the people when I do this?” (ER1, p. 8). However, the following section of the chapter will show that this notion of preserving or increasing autonomy is actually understood and implemented in a range of ways.

If one wishes to understand the practicalities around notions of autonomy in Agile from a single phrase, the best exemplar would be the concept of “bounded authority”. This phrase was used by Gabel and Reichert to describe the autonomy given by their servant leader for employees to “act as if they didn’t have a boss” (ER9, p. 4). As a part of the implementation process, Jackson et al. gathered feedback on the challenges facing employees in the Vistaprint HR department during their Agile transformation. The team asks, “how do we self-organize and understand our bounded authority?” (ER15, p. 5). Of course, all authority has bounds. However, what is key to emphasise in the case of Agile is that these bounds are highly variable; there is a call to autonomy which is heeded, but the interpretation varies across different contexts.

Contrast, for example, the preceding quote from Gabel and Reichert with the description offered by Chris Murman of a team that was “empowered to raise their hands if a task does not meet the DoR [definition of ready]” (ER23, p. 7). The limits here are certainly more defined and restrictive than being empowered to act as if one “didn’t have a boss” (ER9, p. 4). Perhaps also consider cases like that related by Jeff Howey:

Most teams who were part of the expedition... but not all... began to change the way the worked together and managed their work. Whether you are coaching Agile teams or little league baseball teams, there is always the chance the team will play a different game while you aren't paying attention. This was the case with 2 of the HR Business Teams... these 2 teams were wise to my busy schedule and had self-selected out of the trek toward Agility several weeks earlier. They went back to the lodge while the rest of us were out hiking through the wilderness.

ER13, p. 6

This is not the freedom to act with full autonomy but rather an obligation to follow a specific plan with a pre-designated outcome of “Agility”, replete with the theoretical baggage that this destination entails. Here, there are echoes of the coach as something more than a support, more than even an influencer. Rather, this is a manifestation of the unspeakable, the coach as a taskmaster or dictator. The preceding excerpt stands in stark contrast to Wenzel and Fewell’s account of insubordination as being a moment where the team legitimately “self-organised” (ER34, p. 5). The contrast leads one to wonder where the limits of legitimate autonomy lie in Agile. Seemingly, one limit is the capability to select out of the process.

The preceding analysis of ideas around employee ownership showed four things: Firstly, that the ideas around employee ownership can be, and largely are, expressed without reference to the ideas of leadership; secondly, that these substitutes are not necessarily less problematic than leadership, suffering from similar definitional issues and questionable implications like covering up the operation of power; thirdly, that

the autonomy of employees is, in practice, limited by superiors through the “bounding” of authority and further by the dictates of Agile as a method, though this last aspect goes unspoken; and, finally, that the move towards “self-organisation” does not imply the abandonment of control, rather it represents a partial change in the locus of this control, at best. Each of these aspects will be further explored by reference to literature in later chapters and in the second discussion chapter especially.

5.2.3 Agile Regulates ‘Leadership’ Practice

The investigation set out in these chapters has been held as much as possible to strict conditions of agnosticism; the discussion of leadership has been balanced to reflect only those instances where practitioners relied on the concept to articulate their reflections. The case of shared leadership is particularly interesting here. The abundance of references in the literature (Appendix C) suggests that this theory would be prevalent in practitioners’ expressions also. However, this investigation showed that concepts such as self-organisation and autonomy served to act in-stead through the vast majority of accounts. Even so, it is apparent that some notions remain influential; servant leadership, for example, is the primary theme of one account and is said to play a key role in Agile by several of the practitioners (ER9, ER10, pp. 3-5; ER18, p. 8).

It is also worth addressing the generic usages of the term leadership to differentiate between these employments and the more conceptually loaded usages relating to a specific theory. While they are associated with less “baggage” they are still used to define legitimate practice through the accounts (ER1, p. 3; ER18, p. 8). Some examples here represent, of course, more colloquial usages of the concept. In the context of a

transformation there may be a call for all in the organisation to “lead”, somebody could be said to be charged with “leadership of direction”. Many of these are usages which, to borrow terminology from SFG, could be framed as “unmarked”, which is to say not really remarkable or uncommon in their emphasis (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 97); leadership as a linguistic convenience rather than a specific commitment. However, where a distinction is made to emphasise leadership above other concepts, it is hard to justify such a classification. The three manifestations captured in the surveyable representation excerpt below (Figure 14) reflect the previously discussed range of Agile leadership expressions.

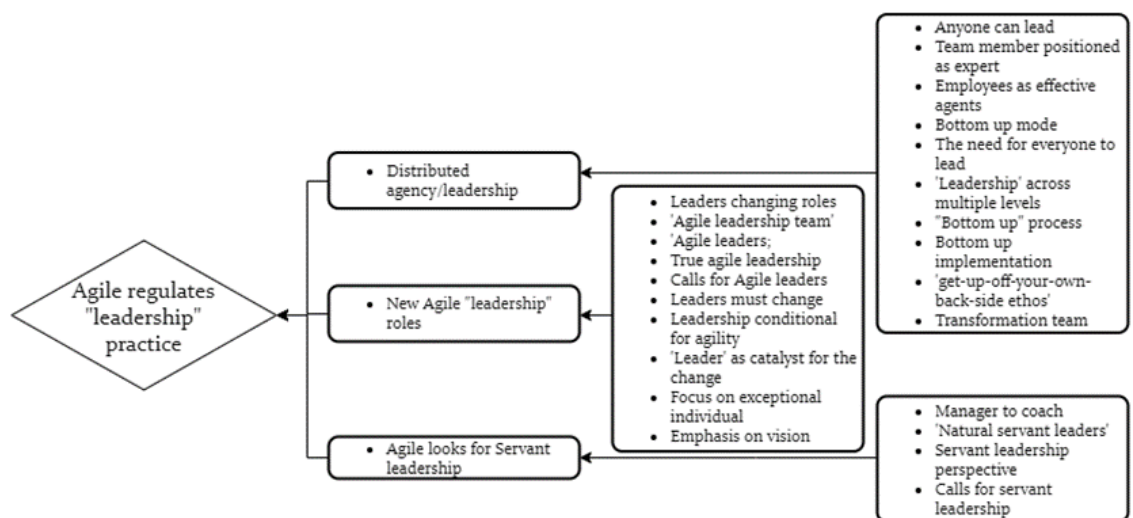


Figure 14 - Resemblance Around Leadership Practice

5.2.3.a Agile Looks for Servant Leadership

Of all the talk about leadership in the experience reports analysed for this project, the practitioners’ usage of servant leadership concepts was by far the least ambiguous. Indeed, many of the reports analysed relied on a fairly coherent notion of “servant leadership” and used this concept as something of a watchword for figures of authority within the Agile context. This aligned with the emphasis on the concept in literature, especially that relating to scrum (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 33-40; Medinilla,

2012, pp. 62-65; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7). This section of the thesis will address those excerpts which best display this. The demonstrable utilization of servant leadership theory also offers some insight into a key aspect of the research questions, in terms of the reference points employed in Agile discourse.

Oftentimes, the concept of servant leadership is introduced as a key element of legitimate Agile practice. This case is the most interesting for the purposes of this research since it suggests a mandate for pursuing this ideal. Gratton and West, for example, elaborate on the role of scrum masters in their organisation in a section of their report entitled “Scrum Master as the Servant-Leader”:

While the role of the Scrum Master as the team’s own Scrum expert and remover of impediments is self-explanatory, the less obvious principle of servant-leadership is required to be an effective Scrum Master. The Scrum Master does not manage the team or the work... Where the manager’s instinct might be to correct deviation from a goal the moment it occurs, a Scrum Master may choose to see where it goes and give the team an opportunity to self-correct.

ER10, p. 5

Note that they say the “Scrum Master” does not manage. Instead, this type of engagement is framed as undesirable, indeed there is an air of perceived illegitimacy. This description of a Scrum Master engaging in such a “hands-off” facilitative role is in line with the discursive emphasis on team autonomy highlighted earlier. The rhetoric is also coherent with the envisioned purpose of these new Agile “leadership” positions, though this will be addressed in the following section.

Gratton and West are not alone in their description of scrum masters' practices; Raines and Neher's account talks about how "the staff were very use (sic) to command and control leadership styles" but that, as part of their transition, "the IPTs [integrated project teams] and new Scrum Masters embraced new Servant Leadership principles" (ER27, p. 3). Here, again, there is evidence to suggest that the turn towards "Servant Leadership" is frequently discussed as a key step along the path to being able to legitimately identify as a Scrum Master. In attempting to paint sufficient background for his report, Mark Rajpal describes scrum master practices by way of a document called "*The Scrum Guide*". This text "indicates that the Scrum Master is a servant-leader for the Team but also serves the Product Owner as well as the Organization" (ER28, p. 2). Mark is attempting to unpack his own experiences as a scrum master and a team member, but it is clear by comparing the rhetoric that this guide is a key text informing his understanding and articulation of appropriate practice (Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, pp. 7-8).

Ni Sun also emphasises the effort expended to ingrain this notion at ZTE Corporation, though this time it is in the coaches rather than scrum masters. Through "continuous learning and practicing", they note, "the Seeded Coaches were more conscious to change their management style gradually from 'Command and Control' to 'Servant leadership' and 'Coach style'" (ER31, p. 4). Finally, Mark Kilby is unambiguous with regards to the need for servant leadership in his context:

Precondition: Servant leadership from the top - Probably one of the most critical pre-conditions for the success of such an environment is the leadership.

ER18, p. 8

This quote will be unpacked further as the focus shifts to new Agile leadership roles. However, for the sake of providing some context to this remark it is worth stating that Kilby was referring to not only the coach, but also product owners and technical leads. In his words, the purpose of these roles is to “serve the business and the team” (ER18, p. 8). It is interesting to contrast this overt messaging about “serving” the team with the nascent sense that Agile involves more command and control than is stated outright. The messaging around Servant leadership, in this sense, contributes greatly to papering over this reliance on control by portraying new leadership figures as supportive, passive agents (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 10-11; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 101-102).

One of the reports which has already been quite well discussed is that authored by Grabel and Reichert, entitled “*A Natural Servant Leader Unlocks the Power of Employees at a Global Contact Center*”. This report is, of course, a natural fit for this section but it is interesting in that it recounts the perceived benefits and changes that arose as a result of a supposed servant leader rather than prospectively extolling the virtues of the concept. The account describes the facilitative actions of a “natural servant leader” named Serena.

As the authors put it themselves, this account is “the story of how a natural servant leader reinvented the contact center experience at Vistaprint” (ER9, p. 2). They talk about the ground level changes created by Serena, but what is more interesting is the trajectory of change in the way that servant leadership is discussed and enacted; from local phenomenon to widely mandated guiding principle:

A few months later, Serena brought her world-wide management team - the leaders of the contact centers in Montego Bay, Berlin, Tunis, and Manila - to our corporate headquarters and asked the Agile coaches to help them learn self-organization, servant leadership, and self-management. She made it clear to her staff that the role of the manager as they knew it was gone. They had to become servant leaders and coaches... They followed closely as we, the coaches, taught them about the attributes of servant leaders (from Robert Greenleaf [Greenleaf])

ER9, p. 4

Here, again, are the discursive patterns suggesting that some notion of “Servant leadership” can become a key arbiter of organisational legitimacy. Interestingly, there is a direct reference to work by Robert Greenleaf here. A source is included in a references section which reveals this text to be “*The Servant as Leader*” (1970). This strengthens the sense that there are underlying affinities or existing ties in the Agile community to the academically understood notions of leadership which influenced the reflections of the research subjects; they are unlikely to be ignored or downplayed as part of a commitment to agnosticism without undue revisionism.

Beyond concerns with revisionism, there is a critical opportunity to be seized in investigating the ways in which the Servant leadership concept pre-empts other, less charitable interpretations of management actors’ actions. In other words, it was noted that there is significant space for interesting comment on the role which this notion has to play in constructing the legitimated rhetorical image of Agile; a rhetorical image which can be said to exist atop and cover over or mediate the grey area of practice, while fully obscuring “unspeakable” or delegitimated actions.

Of course, it would be disingenuous to imply that Servant leadership as a notion is fully pervasive, or that all of the accounts which did invoke it were universally positive. Constance Miller, who was working at National Geographic's digital department, recounts her experiences attempting to implement change in the venerable institution. She emphasises a conversational, yet pervasive form of influencing, consistently "talking to the Web Producers about servant leadership and respect" (ER21, p. 2). However, in her closing reflections she comments that "what [she] noticed, is that some folks continue to cling to "command and control" management and that the concept of servant leadership is not yet internalized" (ER21, p. 3). The way that Miller problematises the lack of emphasis on Servant leadership again suggests that there was an expectation for the concept to be adopted in practice and in conversation. This implies that the notion is an important part of the depth grammar around organisation in these contexts, especially as it is employed to describe the practices and conduct of Agile "leadership" figures.

The framing of Servant leadership as the legitimate replacement for traditional management, though, means that this principle is discussed as being in conflict with traditional management practices. However, the accounts show that the practical impact of Servant leadership is more ambiguous; the account focused on Serena, for example, shows the control she exercises in the pursuit of organisation-wide adoption of the notion. This sense, that Servant leadership de-emphasises or even "covers-up" the ongoing controlling aspects of managerial action, will be a primary focus of the second discussion chapter.

5.2.3.b New Agile “Leadership” Roles

It was established in the introduction to this section that “leadership” as a concept was brought in to help articulate the organisational practices of Agile teams throughout these reports. The authors often talked in terms of servant leadership, as in the previous examples. However, there were also those reflections where the author talked “leadership” in less specific ways. One area where there was identifiable reliance on notions of leadership to discuss practice was in the expression of the duties or nature of new organisational roles, such as coaches, scrum masters and so on. Expanding the quote from Kilby that was highlighted in the previous section demonstrates this well:

There is no middle management within engineering. However, there are multiple leaders within the organization: Product Owner, Agile Coach, and technical leads. None of these positions have staff reporting to them. These roles serve the business and the team and can stand up for what they feel is right based on business needs and sustainable pace of the team

ER18, p.8

Kilby talks about these new roles as leadership positions, distinguished by him from middle managers in several ways; emphasising the lack of hierarchical power, yet a concurrent ability to “stand up” for “what they feel is right” and talking about the need to “serve”. Kilby defines leadership, firstly, by its contrast to management and the absence of hierarchical power. Kilby’s discussion of the need to serve is a clear reference to servant leadership. This particular notion has been quite thoroughly explored in the preceding section. However, it is worth highlighting again the

excerpts from the likes of Gratton and West, as well as Mark Rajpal. In these accounts, the notion of servant leadership is used to proscribe the practices required of legitimate Scrum Masters (ER10, pp. 3-5; ER28, p. 2). If coaches, scrum masters and so on are widely expected to act as servant leaders, as was indicated in the talk of many research participants, it is fair to say that they are currently discussed as “leadership roles”.

Nienke Alma, at ING Netherlands, focuses on the story of a group of these reconceptualised Agile actors and talks about how “in the new organization, the Product Owner, Chapter Lead and Agile Coach form a virtual leadership team supporting squads” (ER1, p. 1). She discusses this “group of Agile leaders” and the challenges they faced in attempting to show “true leadership” (ER1, p. 5). There may not be a specific theory apparent from her approach to concept. However, Alma talks about these new roles in unambiguous terms; the practitioner says that these new roles have come together to form a facilitative “leadership team” which replaces the traditional manager:

In the Agile Way of Working the responsibility for the... [squads] was explicitly split between three new roles: the Product Owner (PO), Chapter Lead (CL) and Agile Coach (AC). These three roles replaced the traditional manager as a new leadership team facilitating the needs of the squads

ER1, p. 3

Again, it is possible to relate the call for facilitation back to principles of servant leadership. However, there is no explicit reference to a particular theory in her talk. It isn't possible, given the nature of this investigation, to pursue a further engagement

with Alma to clarify whether or not this resemblance is due to a meaningful reliance on the conceptual baggage of the notion. This is one key limitation of the study; it is not possible to properly pursue ambiguity, rather it can only be highlighted. This process of highlighting still has value, especially vis-à-vis signposting fruitful avenues for future exploratory projects. However, it is important to acknowledge the way that the data chosen limits the scope of plausible further investigation.

The way that Alma phrases the intent of her reflections is based, unambiguously, around the aforementioned notions of leadership; the report looks to answer the question of “what is needed for the leadership to connect with the needs of the squads?” (ER₁, p. 1). Her account, then, represents a continuation in the observed trend in Agile practitioners using the term to describe the new roles which emerge. The report authored by Alan Padula similarly relies on some notions of leadership in order to articulate the work undertaken as a part of Agile. What is interesting is that Alan talks about “agile leaders and managers”. In relating his experiences, he talks of how he “asked the hiring VP if they had any agile leader and manager training”, something he felt was important to establish “before accepting an agile leader job” (ER₂₅, p. 3). These reports are far more ambiguous in their utilization of leadership. Is Padula invoking a distinct concept or employing a linguistically convenient way to refer to the team of people charged with directing the situation in question? Again, there are uncertainties which cannot be resolved here, but are potentially an interesting starting point for future research into such borderline cases.

As alluded to earlier, it is also worthwhile to consider the ways in which leadership is invoked when discussing the reshaping of existing roles. Peng Liu talks about her work as a team leader in her experience report entitled “*Patterns for Making*

Leadership Happen and Building Self-organizing Agile Team". She uses the term manager once (ER19, p. 2) and talks in two places about management style (ER19, pp. 1, 6), but overall the language in the reflections is the language of leadership. The report is aimed at establishing "patterns can be used to capture successful solutions in Agile leadership area" (ER19, p. 6). The prior situation of potentially unmarked usage is a fascinating one and is worth further investigation, but in cases like this it is hard to definitively adopt such a position; Liu clearly has a distinct understanding of leadership as shows in the following excerpt:

As claimed in the Emerging Leadership Theory, leadership is both science and art. When we say that leadership is science, then leadership patterns try to establish the connection between those observable behaviors and evidence and the associated consequences. Leadership, in this regard, is a process not ideology.

ER19, p. 2

Liu expands on the specific nature of the concept in question here. Given the specific nature of their talk around the subject, it would be difficult to argue that this author does not rely on, or at least develop, a distinctive model of leadership. Leadership for Liu Peng, then, may simply be a process which managers engage in (ER19, p. 2).

However, this concept supersedes the managerial identity in her talk; in essence, they may be managers by position, but they are called leaders and they are said to engage in leadership (ER19, p. 6).

In the previous report particularly, management actually seems to be an occasionally acceptable synonym for leader, rather than the other way around. More broadly, it is apparent that the concept of management in Agile is, at best, somewhat discouraged

(ER1, p. 3; ER5, p. 8; ER18, p. 6). Indeed, this previous section suggests that the language of leadership is alive and well with regards to the new Agile roles, with conceptual baggage largely drawn from the influential body of “Servant leadership”. However, to what extent this change in rhetoric translates to a change in practice is an open question in the literature. This study has suggested that there are aspects of this shift which serve to obscure practical contradictions; the continuation of more traditional managerial control in some instances (ER6, p. 5; ER16, p. 4), and the encouraged implementation of concertive control to replace it in others (ER9, p. 2; ER32, pp. 5-6). These aspects of the findings will be explored much further in the second discussion chapter.

5.2.3.c Distributed Agency/Leadership

One of the recurring themes in the literature around Agile is the emphasis on shared leadership (Appendix C). In these cases, the notion is generally employed as a shorthand for the distribution of decision-making power which was highlighted earlier (Hoda and Murugesan, 2016b, p. 245; Moe, Dingsøyr and Dybå, 2008, p. 76). One surprising insight derived in this investigation is that little in the talk around organisation was actually expressed by reference to shared leadership. This much was already made clear in the preceding exploration of employee ownership. As that section showed, this is not to say that there is little distribution of authority or decision-making power. However, to what extent these changes were facilitated through, or are articulated as, shared leadership is more questionable. The fact that there are no examples through these reflections of practitioners using the term “shared leadership” does not exclude the possibility that they rely on the concept to inform their understanding of legitimate Agile practice.

Indeed, the fact is there remains some distinct linguistic work done here by the leadership concept, framed as distributed (ER5, p. 8; ER28, p. 5; ER32, pp. 5-6). This is the reason why the code represented here is distributed agency/leadership; omitting leadership entirely in this case may be inappropriate, but so it would be to apply it without qualification, as will be shown. To what extent these less specific employments of “distributed leadership” correspond to an emphasis on “shared leadership” is another question, which is outside the scope of this study due to the previously discussed limitations of the data.

As stated previously, there are no neat, verbatim reliance on a specific expression of “shared leadership” to begin with here. Instead, the focus will be on situations where the notion of leadership is “shared” in the sense that it is distributed among multiple actors. There are a few ways that this was seen to be done in practice. Consider, for example, the report by Alexandre Cuva entitled “*Leading an Agile Team in a Hierarchical Asian Culture with Happiness*”. He describes the ad-hoc arrangements which characterised project work in his offshore software development team:

One of the main problems in today's organizations is we assign managers and titles where there is no need. We don't trust our employees to be adult enough to choose among themselves who is their leader and who's not. A leader can be a temporary role during a project

ER5, p. 8

This excerpt shows Cuva employing a fairly straightforward, roles-based perspective on leadership in his talk; a leader is somebody who “leads” the work, directs it and is

responsible for it and this position can be conferred on whoever is best suited to perform it in context.

This use of language is comparable to Mark Rajpal's when he talks about rotating the position of scrum master among different team members. In that situation the rotation was a failure, and Mark "continued to perform the role", despite the title changing from person to person; he states that team members were "particularly uneasy when it came to corresponding with the client directly", suggesting that there was an effort to distribute these responsibilities (ER28, p. 5). The preceding exploration of new Agile roles showed that it was common to see multiple actors described as being involved in the carrying out of "leadership" duties, with no particular emphasis placed on any one role (ER1, p. 3; ER19, p. 2). Chris Murman, whose report was discussed earlier, talks about how the teams at ThoughtWorks "were mostly autonomous, functioning with tech leads and QA as the day-to-day leadership of direction". This interaction was followed up by "a product manager", whose purpose was "providing high level stories for teams to break down on their own later" (ER23, p. 1). Stories, in the context of Agile, are a planning tool; predefined and distinct targets which need to be met in order to fill the customer's requirements (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 52-57). The arrangement which Murman describes, where teams are talked about as "autonomous", with key figures providing "leadership", is fairly representative of the legitimate, "grammatically sound" understanding of Agile organisational practices.

Another way that "leadership" can be seen to be distributed in the context of Agile is when it is discussed in a processual form, where "leadership" is not something that one is, but rather something that one is engaged with or involved in. This is the case

in the report on UK government Agile by Tune, which has already been addressed earlier in this chapter:

My mission to help drive digital transformation in the UK government ended in failure. But the experiences have taught me vital lessons - notably, the need for agile leadership at all levels

ER32, p. 6

Nick Tune treats leadership as a fairly complex phenomenon; he talks about several distinct “categories” of the concept, with a “focus on three key types of leadership: organisation-level, business-level, and individual-level” (ER32, p. 1). The level of individual leadership seems to be much in line with the preceding rhetoric about shared authority; Tune opines that “no matter our job title”, anyone can contribute to improvement “by being purposeful and patient leaders” (ER32, p. 5). He also includes a dedicated section in his conclusions to reflect on “the need for everyone to lead no matter their level” (ER32, p. 6). Alma pursued ideas in a similar vein when she discussed the “leadership team” comprised of coaches, product owners and chapter leads which replaced the traditional management roles at ING Netherlands (ER1, p. 3). Finally, this can also be related directly to Peng Liu’s explicit framing of leadership as a concept which is processual in nature (ER19, p. 2).

However, this only addresses what Tune calls the “individual level”. Looking instead at the organisational level, he talks about the organisation of GDS (government digital service) and their role in providing leadership within the change effort:

For GDS, guidance is not sufficient to lead a successful agile transformation. GDS enforce service standards... GDS can prevent government departments launching a new service or spending more money until the new service satisfies all of the assessment criteria... Government are so deeply locked into their current ways of working with little motivation to change. There is no pressure to turn a profit or out iterate competitors by developing software faster. In fact, I saw a government agency completely crippled by fear. Fear of changing anything to avoid negative publicity, resulting in little effort to change. If GDS did not strictly enforce standards, I am certain there would be no meaningful progress in government IT.

ER32, p. 2

This talk positions GDS as one monolithic leadership entity and an agent in its own right; there is not a leader of the change effort, per-se. Rather, the responsibility for driving and designing the transformation undertaken by the UK government falls to this collective, an Agile sub-institution. It is the collective who are discussed as agential in these accounts, setting standards and performing actions as a coherent whole (ER32, p. 3). This observation is strengthened by the linguistic habits demonstrated through the reports, giving the team agency as actors within phrases as above; it is not members of GDS who enforce standards, but GDS as a group which is seen to provide organisational leadership for the change effort throughout the reflective account.

This type of shared leadership, a limited communal responsibility for guiding the organisation towards Agile, is a concept which resurfaces in several practitioner's talk. This is the case with the "rollout team" described by Fry and Greene. They frame this

group of employees as “empowered to make decisions”. Explaining further, they say that the purpose of this team was to provide “accessibility, transparency and shared ownership of the transition” (ER7, p. 3). Depictions of similar roles, portrayed in similar ways, are a recurring motif in these aforementioned other reports. Generally, they are referred to through the nominal group “transformation team” (ER15, pp. 1-2, 5-7; ER25, pp. 1, 5-6; ER27, p. 2). These transformation teams are groupings of Agile “evangelists”. Their role will be further explored as the discussion shifts towards the grey areas of Agile practice; the accounts analysed here relay more than the “legitimate” surface rhetoric and many go on to articulate the ambiguities, the exclusions and the compromise which this rhetoric overlooks.

5.2.4 The Dark Art of Control

Throughout many of the accounts analysed, and especially if one compares between them, there is an apparent contradiction between the explicit messaging of Agile practitioners around control and what these reflections say about how much control was retained in practice. This matter was alluded to during the section on “Degrees of Autonomy” when discussing an excerpt from Jeff Howey’s reflections (ER13, p. 6). Considering the events that took place in his account, the question arises: how does one create momentum towards Agile in the face of hesitance or outright resistance without using some “command and control”? Given the previously highlighted contextual adaptability of Agile in practice, the answers here turn out to be manifold and diverse. However, what the analysis of these accounts shows in this regard, first and foremost, is that the relationship between Agile and control is far more complex than the surface rhetoric around self-organisation and servant leadership implies.

In practice there were some who talked in terms of negotiation and articulated democratic solutions in the drive to change (ER10, p. 4; ER34, p. 5), while others relied on more traditional methods to achieve reform and talked about using control to encourage “Agility” (ER16, pp. 1, 4; ER32, p. 2). Some notably reflective authors describe their struggle to achieve the former and their delegitimated dalliance with the latter (ER11, pp. 2, 4-6). This issue will be explored primarily through a discussion of the contradictions between accepted rhetoric and the way that practices are described in the accounts. This discussion will then continue on through the next section. This next section will carry the theme forwards, exploring the contrast between the coach as presented through Agile rhetoric against the rhetoric of the coaches who act through the reflections. The relevant codes are shown below in the excerpt from the surveyable representation (Figure 15).

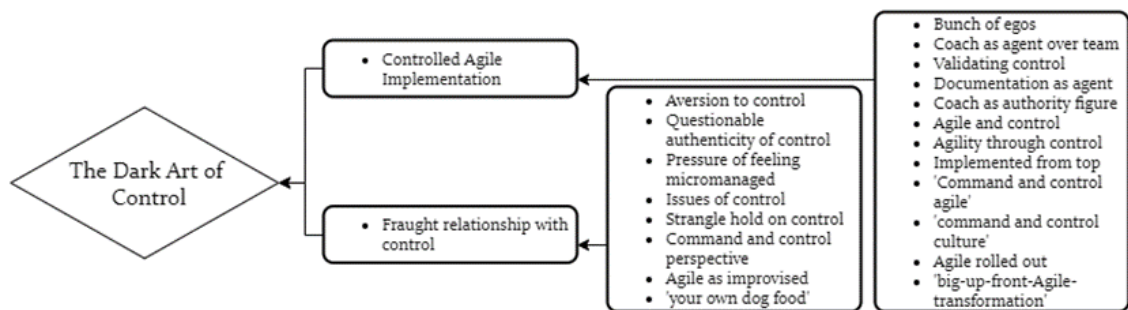


Figure 15 - Resemblance Around Control

Returning to the issue at hand, the reliance on some notion of control to create a mandate for Agile change is at odds with the explicit messaging about the use of command in managing Agile teams. This tension is something which practitioners are seemingly keenly aware of as it is discussed in several of the reports analysed here; Astolfi and Dartt remark on “the danger... that we could create the perception of command and controlling our move towards less command and control behaviour”

(ER₂, p. 8). Here, the authors are showing an awareness of the potential contradiction inherent in the relationship Agile maintains with “command and control”. The risk here is not just illegitimacy in the eyes of other Agile practitioners (ER₃₂, p. 2). Rather, such a contradiction risks the legitimacy of the broader project in the eyes of employees, as in the case related by Jochems and Rodgers at Progressive (ER₁₆, p. 4).

5.2.4.a Fraught Relationship with Control

To expand on what is meant when it is suggested that legitimate Agile rhetoric entails aversion to notions of control, it is important to return again to the reports and the experiences within. There are many examples of authors highlighting the questionable authenticity of Agile which is achieved through “command and control” methods (ER₁₇, p. 7; ER₂₁, p. 3; ER₃₀, p. 5-6). Pointing back to what has already been covered through the preceding discussions it is unsurprising that control is a contentious subject within Agile; the emphasis on self-organisation, reduced management, servant leadership and employee autonomy is considered somewhat at-odds with an autocratic, commanding approach (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 122-123; Medinilla, 2012, p. 60). Consider, for example, some of the work discussed previously: Mark Kilby talks very positively about the absence of hierarchical control and managerial positions in his quote regarding the new leadership roles in Agile (ER₁₈, p. 8); Grabel and Reichert, as well as Gratton and West, similarly are very amenable in their talk to the dissolution of middle management and the reduction in centralised control within their respective contexts (ER₁₀, p. 5; ER₉, p. 5); and Raines and Neher emphasise the shift in the conceptualisation of managerial practices from “Command and Control’ to ‘Servant leadership’ and ‘Coach style’” (ER₂₇, p. 4).

Returning to the account by Nick Tune about GDS and their efforts to transform UK government digital practice, it is interesting to note that they would be considered exceptional for their openly admitted reliance on a firm, controlling hand. Tune is aware of this, though he personally feels that GDS is capable of achieving its aims despite, or even because of, the reliance on control. He states that “many would argue GDS themselves are in-fact not agile by dictating in a command-and-control fashion” (ER32, p. 2). This recurring theme of legitimacy, that Agile is not “done right” if it is not instituted and managed without autocratic overtones, is not an isolated notion restricted to this report (Appelo, 2011, pp. 156-158; Medinilla, 2012, p. 64). On the contrary, Tune is highlighting a very much pervasive aversion to employing concepts of command. Alan Padula, for example, notes that many complaints arise from those who have experienced a sort of “false” Agile. He claims that firms are “not truly Agile” if they engage in “big upfront design thinking [and have a] command and control culture” (ER25, p. 2). Again, then, there is the sense that being labelled as a “commanding” Agile coach or institution is a mark against one’s implementation of the method.

Often, the aforementioned aversion comes to light through the way that authors talk about their personal or organisational journey: David Grabel, in a paper co-authored with Staci Dubovic from Vistaprint North America, talks about how he was a “recovering command and control-aholic” before “the coach that was emerging from within [him]” forced him to recognise this and change (ER8, p. 4); and Mole and Mamoli talk about how “most agile transformations”, in their experience, “are challenged by those who want to maintain... their strangle hold on control” (ER22, p. 2). Echoing this sentiment of an over-reliance on this approach is Miller’s observation about the continued challenges facing her team. She notes that, despite many

changes, “some folks continue to cling to “command and control” management” (ER21, p. 3).

Raines and Neher also point out the transition expected with regards to how “leadership” figures approach the issue of directing teams in the excerpt highlighted earlier; they talk about how these figures are to move from “command and control leadership styles” to the servant style (ER27, p. 3). Ni Sun expresses these notions in very similar language, talking about how the coaches in their organisation “were more conscious to change their management style gradually from 'Command and Control' to 'Servant leadership' and 'Coach style’” (31, p. 4). These quotes from practitioners point to the role that notions of leadership play in this supposed process of rejecting command and control; the concept acts here in the way that Learmonth and Morrell suggest, to repackage, or more cynically “camouflage”, the behaviours of managers (2019, pp. 40-41).

This expectation to move away from more autocratic practices is not just manifest in the way the intra-team dynamic is discussed. Another place where this sense of aversion to control comes through is in the language used to describe non-Agile parts of the organisation, especially if these parts are still ultimately in charge of the Agile team. Astolfi and Dartt note the challenges of changing managerial culture when the whole organisation is not overhauled:

Unfortunately, the front line management’s leadership was asking them for the same things they always had in the same format. And this legacy management style was very hierarchical, utilizing a traditional command and control mindset.

ER2, p. 7

The preceding quote conveys a sense of frustration at the management who “just don’t get it”. This sense of straining against an unreceptive management is not limited to discussions of control, as will be shown later when the focus shifts to Agile and politics. It is worth noting that these problems with collaboration are noted in the literature already; there are a good number of papers where authors identify problems with integration into the wider organisation when it is not Agile (Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017, pp. 4-10; Theobald and Diebold, 2018, pp. 123-124).

Aside from intra-firm political issues, the desire to avoid any perceived command and control also extends to the way that Agile teams may relate to external organisations and partners. Take the example given by Mike Cottmeyer in his story about an Agile offshore development team:

Creating a safe environment often meant being aware of the command and control nature of the Indian management hierarchy. Escalating a performance issue would sometimes be dealt with very harshly so we were careful to keep certain issues within the team and only escalate when absolutely necessary

ER4, p. 365

Mike talks about the need to create a “safe environment” and to insulate contractors from practices which the team think of as undesirable. Extra care is taken to account for cultural differences and steps are taken to ensure that Indian staff members are not subject to disproportionate punishments. The emphasis placed on safety and the adjustment for a culture of control serves to demonstrate the drive Agile practitioners adopt to negate this notion, even if it pushes to the boundaries of their “jurisdiction”. This firm reformist drive is something which seems, however, also at the heart of

Agile practitioners' sometimes paradoxical reliance on control to achieve the necessary changes. This is what leads to the application of the phrase "The Dark Art of Control"; while shunned, the continued need for control, either concertive or more conventional, is readily apparent through a close reading of these reports (Barker, 1993, pp. 426-427; Whitworth, 2008, pp. 433-435).

The fact of the matter is that not everybody is as hungry for change as those implementing the method might hope. Gratton and West summarise the challenges faced by the Agile coach, or prospective Agile organisation, quite succinctly, when they say, "the values part of Scrum is hard" (ER10, p. 4). Indeed, one of the main aspects established throughout this thesis chapter is the magnitude of the shift for both operational and administrative staff. They expand this point slightly, providing helpful insight into their meaning:

It's not obvious how to get people to behave according to a set of values. The more you push values on someone the more likely they are to reject them

ER10, p. 4

The authors talk about the challenge of changing how people behave within the organisation. It is important to note that they feel you can't simply use Agile tools and expect that the team will become Agile. Instead, the team must embrace Agile values. This is easy to relate back to the discussions about the importance of the Agile mindset previously discussed, but it also relates very directly to the way that Barker describes the normative controlling culture that developed in his context (Barker, 1993, pp. 420-428). Essentially, Agile is a bold proposition because the rhetoric requires that teams not only change the way they go about the work, but also the way

they think about that work and their role in the organisation. McDowell and Dourambeis at BT share similar observations about their decision to attempt a large-scale transformation to Agile methods. They note that “agile is not tool-based technique that can be easily rolled out across an organization”. Rather, it is “values based” and it requires “buy-in from teams in order for it to succeed”. They conclude that “it can be a highly vulnerable way to work and team members have to want to do it” (ER20, p. 18).

5.2.4.b Controlled Agile Implementation

That then begs the question, what if team members don’t want to do it? The short answer to this question is that shouldn’t and can’t are two distinct and quite separate concepts. Regardless of what they are “supposed” to do, there are a great many of the reports which talk about either their current or past practice of “command and control Agile” (ER3, p. 1; ER7, p. 5; ER14, pp. 2-3). Indeed, it is entirely possible to force Agile methods on teams who have no interest in participating in any sort of transformation. The openly command-and-control approach to change is why GDS were referred to as “dictators” and a “bunch of egos in London” by the UK government operational staff (ER32, p. 5). Tune states that the reason for this approach is GDS’s belief that “guidance is not sufficient to lead a successful agile transformation” (ER32, p. 2). Essentially, the group feels that influence alone will not be enough to create the changes necessary within the organisation and it relies on disciplinary mechanisms to enforce new practices.

One aspect which could be linked to the fraught relationship with control was the large number of change efforts which were discussed and presumably implemented as “top down” initiatives. These applications of the method, aimed at satisfying upper

management requirements for productivity improvement or behavioural change, are problematised by some of the report authors (ER6, p. 4). This is said to be the case in the account of change at BT by McDowell and Dourambeis. The authors note that “BT has a “top-down” driver for teams to use agile”. The reasoning behind the change is that “executives believe that using agile will help the company become more competitive” (ER20, p. 22). Teresa Hsu describes a similar situation at media firm Nickelodeon, where “the impetus for [their] Agile journey” arose from a “collective desire across Product Management Engineering, and Project Management to have a more efficient way of working” (ER14, p. 2).

These are not isolated cases, there are many situations in this small selection of reports where Agile is seemingly foisted upon unwilling teams, despite the apparent contradiction with the rhetoric around legitimacy in Agile. The focus of Chris Murman’s report is the experience of moving, quoting the title, “toooooooooo fast” and forcing agile implementation prematurely (ER23, p. 1). Jochems and Rodgers also specifically address a controlled Agile implementation in their experience report. They note that it “focuses on the transition of a project team being forced by management to use Agile” (ER16, p. 1). This forced approach “eventually led to the departure of several senior developers” and “friction between management and the project team remained even after their departure” (ER16, p. 4). Rosenbaugh and Adrian talk about how this top-down mandate created problems for the team in the longer term as it spread to the wider organisation:

A number of folks heard or read the meeting minutes from the leadership team discussion, and very quickly decided that they needed to run toward stamping the aligned framework on their organizations.

ER30, p. 5

Essentially, this quote describes the over-execution of orders to implement Agile. Yet at the same time it also showcases something of an issue with Agile transformations; the drive to create alignment and strong momentum for change can result in a potent form of groupthink which pushes practitioners to overly-differentiate from the rest of the organisation and develop an unassailable and politically influential consensus (McAvoy and Butler, 2009b, p. 382; Whitworth, 2008, p. 434).

The strong belief in Agile which many practitioners' language indicated they maintain can also lead to some perceived issues when encountering resistance to change; it is fairly common for these practitioners to speak under the assumption that Agile is simply "common sense" (ER3, p. 1; ER32, p. 5), which contributes to this resistance and alienates those who question the new status-quo. Heidi Helfand observes this problem at the start-up she works at, where they "felt so strongly about XP and Scrum that [they] implemented them from a rather command and control perspective" (ER11, p. 1). Daniel Poon's reflections showcase the confidence of Agile practitioners that this is definitely the best way of working:

There is nothing more difficult than tackling an anti-agile software team. Why? Because they are professional programmers – people who are paid to know how best to program. And you are saying to them “I know of a better way of programming”

ER26, p. 5

The language used by Poon here is unambiguous; it isn't a question about maybe having a better way, instead the author states that he knows a better way. This immediately seems to contradict what the manifesto says about trusting teams to manage work in the way that they see fit; a lack of belief in Agile is not seen as a valid point of departure, but rather an obstacle that can and will be overcome. This sense of firm influence will be pivotal as the discussions move on to the sometimes-contradictory role of coach.

For now, though, the focus must return to the matter at hand. It would be unfair to suggest that all of the accounts analysed paint a picture of autonomy and control. The reality seems to be more complex and contextually negotiated. One way to illustrate this is to return to the account focused on outsourcing which was authored by Mike Cottmeyer. He notes that the Indian employees required a different approach to management than their western counterparts. Cottmeyer claims that “certain leadership philosophies of agile will have to be adapted to the unique attributes of your particular team”. In practice, this means that one “may have to moderate how empowering you can be vs. how prescriptive you are”. The reason given for this is as follows:

Not every team member may be culturally ready to accept responsibility, decide what is best, be proactive, and be empowered and self-organizing. Initially, you may find that you may need to be more prescriptive.

ER4, p. 367

Thus, it is clear to see that Cottmeyer recognises a need to be context sensitive and attentive in the effort to move to alternative management methods. However, underlying this recognition is the sense that this is a temporary state of affairs and that the end goal is still a transition towards the more legitimate and “Agile” approach of employee ownership.

The difficult relationship which Agile maintains with control is exacerbated by the vocal disavowal of the notion; employees are told they are free often and that democratic management is core to legitimate Agile, yet they do not seem to have the freedom to choose to reject the method. An excerpt from Jeff Howey illustrates this perfectly:

As my attention turned toward other teams... it [became] apparent that these 2 teams were wise to my busy schedule and had self-selected out of the trek toward Agility several weeks earlier. They went back to the lodge while the rest of us were out hiking through the wilderness.

ER13, p. 6

Jeff problematises the teams’ decisions to not participate in the Agile transformation here. The way that he talks gives the sense that these teams have abandoned

everybody else. Acting as a coach, he not only educates the organisation; Howey and many other coaches like him act as firm advocates for Agile, evangelists even, with the aim of winning over hearts or at least minds in the organisation. This is another way that Agile firms seemed to mitigate the contradictions induced in requiring a consensual change in mindset; bringing coaches on board to run events intended to provide discursive justification, shift perceptions and generate momentum for change was a common theme across the reports. The role of coach and the tensions that arise in their experiences as a result of this push for quasi-controlled implementation will be the focus of the next section.

5.2.5 Tension in the Role of Coach

The stated purpose of these coaches in the literature is to help organisations or teams achieve and maintain some form of Agility (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 37; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2011, p. 74; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7). However, as the following excerpts will show, that is not always how it happens in practice. In addition to being supports for the team they are often the gatekeepers of legitimacy and a strong force in advocating for change in themselves. Coaches in these reports often shape the particular “flavour” of Agile adopted so it is important that their role is further explored. The first part of the section will unpack those excerpts which point to the coaches functioning in their primary intended role as a supporting figure within the organisation. The next will address those aspects of the report which point to the coaches acting to exert control over the direction of the organisation, while highlighting the ways that notions of servant leadership serve to camouflage this process (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 39-41). The control itself is exercised through both overt and more covert means, as will be discussed. What is important to

emphasise for now is that these purposes are somewhat at odds with one another; the drive to create an Agile organisation is not necessarily incompatible with a supporting role, rather it is the implications of how these coaches discuss having to act which undermines their overt messaging at times.

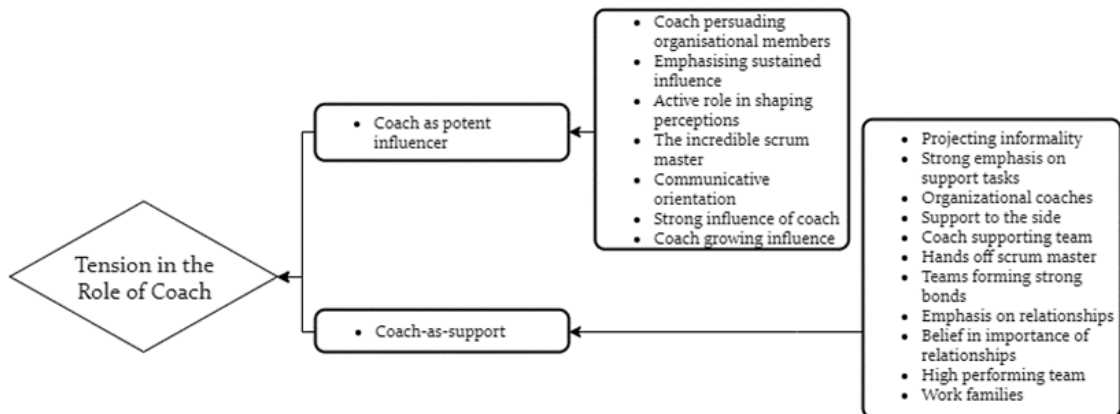


Figure 16 - Resemblance Around Tensions in Coaching

Above in figure 16 is the section of the surveyable representation which pertains to the role of the coach within Agile contexts. The focus for the proceeding section will be on what is discussed as legitimate action for these “leadership” figures and the contrasts here with how they talked about their role in practice and when things did not go according to plan. The discussions will begin by addressing the intended role of the coach as a support for those in the business who are undertaking a transformation to Agile. The focus will then shift to the ways in which coaches were seen to act as strong proponents of change and even enforcers, revealing a practice which is more complex than the discourse of service and support, informed by obfuscatory notions of leadership, would suggest.

5.2.5.a Coach-as-Support

The aforementioned “party line” about Agile coaches is that they are intended to be supporting figures, there to aid the team in their journey towards agility (Appelo, 2011, pp. 156-158; Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 40-41; Medinilla, 2012, p. 64). Aid is a key notion

to emphasise here; coaches are supposed to allow the team to take the transformation in the directions that they see fit, providing educational support and training when requested (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 37; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2011, p. 74; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7).

Wenzel and Fewell describe this state of affairs at Exxon. They draw an explicit division of identity in their talk, noting that “the agile coach is a guide, not a guru”. They add to this characterisation, explaining that “the initial change plan can and should be evolved by the team for the better” (ER₃₄, p. 7). Heidi Helfand similarly talks about her role as coach at the start-up which was covered earlier. She notes that, after a rocky start with command-based Agile, she “became a “hands off” ScrumMaster”, whose main priorities were “teambuilding activities and being a “support on the side” to teams” (ER₁₁, p. 5). The nominal group “support to the side” perhaps best encapsulates this optimistic view of coaches as a benevolent force in the institution. Jeff Howey talks about how, while coaching, he “found [himself] in an interesting position”; he was watching his team “take the things they had learned, apply them to their own situations, and personalize the initial application of those concepts” (ER₁₃, p. 5). The way this occurrence is described reflects a kind of idealised outcome for such a coach, where the ideas presented are carried forwards and contextualised by the employees subjected to the change.

These reports are frequently authored, or at least co-authored, by coaches themselves. Some offer insight into the way that these figures think about and rationalise their actions in the context of the requirements for legitimacy implicit within a commitment to Agile. This gives some insight also into the ways that coaches feel they may go about creating momentum towards Agile without using control or

trampling employees' autonomy. Rosenbaugh and Adrian at Exxon Mobil relate their story of coaching an Agile transformation:

We wanted to spend time working across the organization and focusing on big changes, but we realized our focus was best kept on helping individual teams find success on their journey. When that success became apparent, others started to believe in this new way of working.

ER30, p. 2

Here, the authors explain that they chose not to rely on a big rollout of Agile, instead supporting a smaller number of teams through a transformation and letting the merits of the method speak for themselves. This “hands-off” influence-based approach is seen as important or even central to the success of Agile in many of the selected reports, and in the literature (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 31; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2013, pp. 426-427). Gratton and West point out that “a coach shouting at the team... is not likely to obtain good results” (ER10, p. 4). These practitioners recognise the challenges of “forcing” employees into supposedly more autonomous working arrangements (Bossavit and Gaillot, 2004).

The drive towards “softer” approaches can be seen as linked to the earlier points about autonomy and self-organisation. However, none of this is to say that the coach does not have an active role in shaping the organisational transformation. Naveed Khawaja at AstraZeneca describes his role as an Agile coach within the organisation:

As a coach, I have always focused on guiding others (as opposed to dictating to them)...

Agile requires flexibility... for Agile to really take hold, a team must be comfortable with the principles and tailor the program for themselves

ER17, p. 7

Khawaja talks comfortably about his role in “guiding” the organisational members who he consults with to a personally tailored interpretation of Agile. Throughout the other accounts which share this benign characterisation there is frequently this heavy emphasis on enabling the employees within the organisation to shape the principles of Agile to their particular context. This emphasis could be said to relate back to the preference for self-organisation and team ownership. Coaches still have a role to play in supporting these teams, but this vision of their role is in tension with the drive to push teams towards greater agility. In such contexts, it may become necessary for such a “supportive” coach to direct, somewhat, the thinking of the teams in question.

This more influential impulse is apparent through Sean Dunn’s description of his time as an Agile coach. He sets the context by explaining that he had “acquired a positive reputation for [his] non-prescriptive approach to agile” (ER6, p. 2). This characterisation of his “legitimate” character as a coach is in line with the preceding examples in regard to the talk about tailoring Agile. He notes that he was also known for his “emphasis on explaining agility in... economic terms that resonated with executives” (ER6, p. 2), something that points to the underdiscussed political aspect of Agile implementation addressed in the next section. However, what is most notable about this excerpt for the purposes of this discussion is how he closes his historical recap:

I was proud of my ability to nudge and influence the organization, slowly but surely, I felt in the right direction.

ER6, p. 2

Dunn talks about his role candidly, noting that he was slowly but surely nudging the organisation in what he perceived to be the right direction. The notion of “right direction” being used here points again to the consensus among Agile practitioners that the method is “common sense”. Similarly, look at Howey; while he may have found the team in this particular case to be receptive and engaged, generally he works by “barking out orders and directions as to how the team should behave and operate in order to be “Agile”” (ER13, p. 5). The ways that these authors talk about their work hints at that which will be addressed more fully in the next part of this section; Agile coaches may well serve to support teams and enable them towards “agility”, but they also wield significant power and influence. Often, this power is exerted on both an operational and executive level in order to lobby for increased Agility. What Agility means in this context can be determined in part by the team members involved. Yet, it is also fair to say that the coach can have an outside impact upon this process.

5.2.5.b Coach-as-Potent-Influencer

To illustrate this through the practitioners’ own talk and reflections it is best to start with an excerpt from Ni Sun’s account of Agile transformation. They are a consultant but are acting in the role of coach in a substantial Chinese telecommunications firm, as was already discussed. Speaking metaphorically, they describe their role as “the backstage person”; responsible for “designing the transformation scripts, setting up the show stage, guiding the acting, and letting all stakeholders bring themselves into

the full play” (ER31, p. 6). It is interesting that, in this metaphor, Sun is writer, set designer and director. Between these roles they exercise significant influence on the initial direction and ongoing emergence of the context specific normative rules of Agile (Barker, 1993, pp. 425-429). The employees, then, are cast as agential actors in Sun’s Agile “production”. This picture of coaches as an influential background architect is fairly in line with the supportive ideals set out above, albeit it perhaps implies a more prescriptive point of origin. Again, the employees are discussed as somewhat autonomous in this context; note that the stakeholders “bring themselves into the full play”, implying a degree of individual and knowing engagement.

To hear about the view of coaching from the perspective of a regular organisational member, look at the experience report by Grabel and Dubovic. They include a section which relays the team’s story. The team describes how their coaches guided them so that they “adopted a mindset shift to be more in line with the Agile principles” (ER8, p. 3). This talk about a change in outlook, in line with a new regulatory value system (Barker, 1993, pp. 420-425), is a recurring motif throughout the accounts analysed; a significant proportion of coaches’ work deals with shaping perceptions within the organisation to create a more fertile environment for their particular vision of Agile, or the vision that is mandated from the top, as will be shown (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 122-123; Medinilla, 2012, p. 64).

Fry and Greene describe such a situation in their report. They talk about the “big-bang agile rollout” at Salesforce.com, which involved “changing every team at the same time” (ER7, p. 1). The team is not framed as having agency here. Rather, the task of Fry and Greene is to “change” them all at once. The story of how they decided to perform the switch this way is relatively well fleshed out and the authors note that

“the key factor” was a desire “to avoid organizational dissonance”, as well as “a desire for decisive action” on the part of the company founders (ER7, p. 2). It is worth attempting to unpack the practical implications of these turns of phrase. What Fry and Greene are saying is that, there was a push for change from top-down and a drive to create and maintain a particular discourse within the firm, building towards the kind of binding value-based consensus which Barker describes (1993, pp. 420-425). This act of framing can become, perhaps inherently is, a politically fraught process where power, both soft and more traditional, dictates what is seen as legitimate within the system.

Grabel and Dubovic were the Agile coaches behind the adoption drive at Vistaprint North America. What is interesting about their report is the way that they talk about growing their influence within the organisation, culminating in a moment where they “had established trust among influential managers and colleagues”. The author goes on to describe the position of power which they managed to secure using this interpersonal influence:

I worked with the VP of the Agency to create a new role for myself as Agile Coach, reporting directly to her. As a member of the Agency Leadership Team, I had the ability (and responsibility) to impact all groups and channels at all levels. This was a strong signal to the rest of the organization.

ER8, p. 6

Note that the phrases used here suggest that the author has created this work for themselves, using influence and access to key stakeholders to reshape the organisation and secure a position with more formal responsibility. There is an

awareness of the political significance of such an appointment also in the language here; the author talks about how their new position sent a “strong signal” to their colleagues.

The change discussed above was said to be further sustained by a growing community of “true believers”. It is these “Agile champions” who “convinced [the] VP of the Agency to double down on Agile” (ER8, p. 5). Many of the reports describe what was coded as a “cascading transformation”, which is to say a shift towards Agile methods which begins in one area and then spreads to other parts of the business. Vistaprint is a textbook example here: There is the report by Grabel and Dubovic, describing how the marketing arm of the business moved on to Agile to “match [the] pace” of their software development teams (ER8, p. 1); another authored by Grabel and Reichert which talks about a transformation at Vistaprint’s Jamaican “contact centre” (ER9, p. 1); and a third by another set of employees, including Dubovic again, addressing the effort undertaken to get human resources using an Agile framework also (ER15, p. 1).

Another example here would be the rationalisation of the shift towards Agile in the HR department of Principal Financial Group that is described by Jeff Howey. There is an ongoing transformation being undertaken by the IT department and HR must change their operating methods in order to keep up (ER13, p. 1). Again, it is the “business leadership team” who notice the opportunity for improved efficiency and opt to increase the scope of the Agile transformation. Indeed, this shift is discussed entirely as a move to retain alignment and increase productivity (ER13, p. 2). While for the most part this aspect of Agile is better addressed in the following section, it is important to emphasise the pivotal role which Agile coaches have to play in facilitating such ongoing transformations in many of these accounts. This is done

both directly, by obtaining positions of authority, and indirectly, by influencing key stakeholders to become “evangelists” (ER7, p. 2; ER13, p. 7; ER35, pp. 6-7).

The account authored by Dunn is a fascinating contribution to discussions on the complexities associated with coaching in practice; Sean is a former Agile coach who went to work on a development team who used Agile (ER6, p. 1). He uses colourful language throughout the report, which is entitled “*Eating Your Own Dogfood: From Enterprise Agile Coach to Team Developer*”, to describe the work of coaches. This change in perspective led Dunn to reflect on his entire career in a new light and the report contains fascinating reflections on the potential issues surrounding coaches. As the next section of this chapter will make clearer, it is often the ends to which the coach in question is directed that shape the ultimate impact of their work:

On more than one occasion did I hear that the developers needed to be “whipped into shape” – and the agile coach was expected to be the one to do it. Frequently, “coaching” was sought by management who believed something was “wrong” with the team... Unfortunately, to many leaders, “doing something different,” meant simply “hire agile coach and inflect them on your teams.”

ER6, p. 4

The prevalence of top-down drivers for Agile have already been addressed, so it is already clear that this is not an unusual circumstance. Dunn provides a compelling depiction of the issues that can arise in a top-down approach adopted in bad faith, where Agile is seen as the radical solution to perceived dysfunctional teams.

This notion, of a coach being imposed upon an unwilling team, is reflected in several of the accounts previously discussed if one takes a critical stance; Tune’s “dictatorial” GDS (ER32, p. 2-3), perhaps, or the “required Agile transition” described by Jochems and Rodgers (ER16, p. 1). It is easy to see that in such a context the role of coach is less likely to be seen as a supportive figure than the Agile “police” of Helfand’s “command and control Agile” (ER11, p. 1). The political aspects of Agile will soon be explored. However, it is important to emphasise the coach’s role here as something of an enforcer or at least strong influence in favour of Agile as this is something which resurfaces in other accounts.

Like Helfand in her story, many Agile coaches can be seen as overly proscriptive by the team members who report to them. Indeed, they can be seen as overly proscriptive by other coaches; she eventually reflects that it is important that efforts at transformation are “guided by a needs analysis and not just passionate Agile or XP ideals” (ER11, p. 4). This was not the case in the experiences offered up by Khawaja, who describes the issues caused by overzealous coaches with a mandate from the top of the organisation. He mentions that “the coaching itself was sometimes a setback” and goes on to describe his experiences at the firm:

when it came to actually applying Agile concepts to some of the more specific problems a team faced, the coaches tended to be rigid. They wanted to stick to Agile like it was a set of concrete rules. More often than not, I would be called to undo certain aspects of another coach’s training

ER17, p. 7

It is not possible to tell if this strong drive to apply Agile is the result of illegitimate coaching, that is to say a poorly articulated view of Agile, or if these coaches were simply too enthusiastic about the rollout of the method. However, it is regardless interesting to note that the practical implications are that the coach becomes not just a support, or even a potent influencer, but rather a taskmaster or enforcer; once again, the “agile police”.

If it is not the result of a top-down mandate, there can still be an overly passionate drive to implement Agile simply because the people implementing it believe. This was the case with Helfand earlier and another prime example is Caleb Brown, co-author of the experience report titled “*Exploring your Congenital Agility*” (ER3, p. 1). His description of those troubled by Agile is particularly telling. He wrote this report as a result of his “dismay at watching people quit as their organization is attempting to transition to Agile”. His conclusion? “*They can’t be helped*” [emphasis transcribed from source]. He describes the challenge of advocating for the method as “[helping] an organization undo decades of conditioning and adopt an Agile culture” (ER3, p. 1). This language largely robs those who are sceptical about Agile of their agency; they need to be “helped” and de-conditioned, so they are prepared to understand and accept the necessity of an “Agile culture”.

Caleb is not alone in feeling that Agile is simply the logical better option. Ultimately, it is a potent combination of top-down mandates and the widespread notion that Agile is simply “common sense” that feeds into the tensions highlighted above; the message of autonomy feels contradictory in light of the overall sense one gets that Agile is not really an option in these reports. Thus, the façade that the role of coach is predicated entirely upon said coach engaging in “servant leadership” of the teams in

question is revealed as such. The situations where this narrative was least sustainable were those where teams were hesitant to engage or resisted after the fact (ER13, p. 5-6; ER16, p. 1; ER32, p. 2). In these contexts, the coach morphs from being primarily characterised as a supportive figure with influence to being an empowered enforcer of Agile, in other words the “Agile police”. This willingness to break with this aspect of legitimated Agile practice was justified either because the coach believed it was absolutely a better way to work or because it was mandated by executives at the context firm (ER3, p. 1; ER6, p. 2; ER11, p. 2). This will be explored in the next and final section of the findings as the topic transitions on to Agile and political orthodoxy.

5.2.6 Enforcing Politicized Orthodoxy

The issues identified above are complex and must be disentangled in order to make clearer the effect these have on the Agile project and how these relate to the original interest in leadership and organisational work. The following section is split into two parts, each of which effectively addresses one of the perceived drivers for tension in Agile that were identified above; a powerful pro-agile consensus and the implications of a contextually defined value system grounded in top-down mandates for change or improvement. The first aspect to be addressed will be the political nature of Agile, which is largely relatable to the flexibility in legitimacy and how it can be impacted by the strong top-down drive motivating many of the efforts to transition. After this, the

discussion will shift to focus on to this legitimacy itself and the ways that Agile and Agile practitioners often emphasise or encourage varying degrees of orthodoxy.

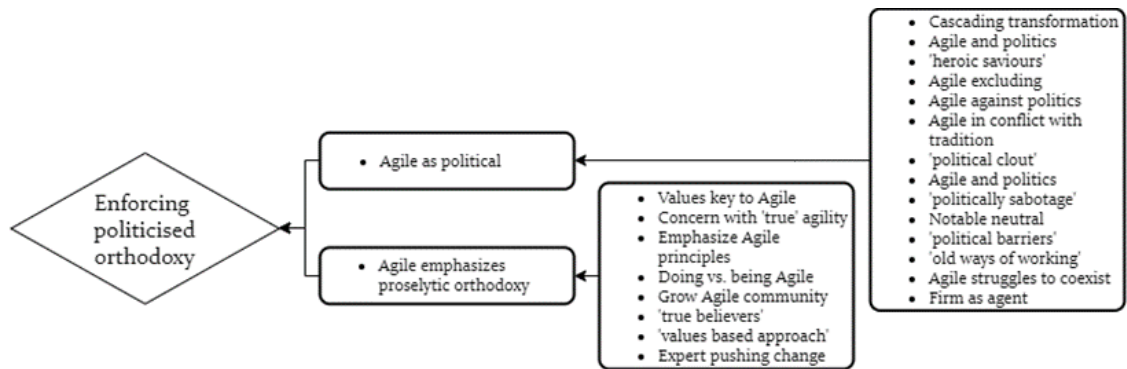


Figure 17 - Resemblance Around Politicised Orthodoxy

Above is the relevant part of the surveyable representation which shows the codes that fed into the manifestations finally established (Figure 17). The often-intertwined nature of the issues led to their connection in a category once the manifestations themselves were more solidified; the precise configuration of “legitimate” Agile might vary between contexts, but there is the almost universal acknowledgement that employees must internalise this “Agile mindset” as a value system for all work. However, there is also a noted drive among Agile believers to valorise the method and frame it as being, in general, patently better in a “common-sense” sort of way (ER3, p. 1; ER11, p. 1; ER26, p. 4). This means that what is established as the contextually legitimate vision of Agile will often become a potent value system which practitioners enthusiastically proselytise.

Thus, politics and a preference for orthodoxy often combine. This can result in a particularly firm and often far reaching push for broader control, even amidst the overt pushes for autonomy. Note that in Barker’s work the process of establishing an effective framework of concertive control was the agreement of a communal values system which all employees were held to (Barker, 1993, pp. 420-425). Thus, in tandem

with the literature and key concepts around Agile already discussed, this process of negotiation has important implications for which organisational practices are ultimately seen as legitimate, or at least permissible in practice. This idea is also important to the study of leadership; the emphasis on orthodoxy particularly would imply that any “canon” on leadership is more likely to be pursued in practice. Such dynamics, however, remain largely unspoken within the accounts; it is mostly through the work of reading between the accounts, and with the contributions of some more candid authors, that it is possible to address these obscured facets of Agile.

5.2.6.a Agile as Political

One thing that has hopefully been well established by this point is the radical and sweeping nature of the change which Agile entails. This shift effects not just operational staff, but also the roles of executives. Indeed, the very nature of legitimate discourse and action within the institution is at stake when engagement with Agile is suggested. As was briefly addressed in the preceding section there even seems to be a tendency for Agile implementations to expand; these efforts move beyond the original scope as other departments are influenced towards the method (ER13, p. 1; ER15, p. 1). This is not just driven by a bottom-up, the-grass-is-greener push on the part of employees:

As teams began to see real measurable success – e.g. 300 percent increase in throughput and 50 percent reduction in incident tickets – select leadership began to ask what an Agile transformation would look like on an organizational level rather than a team level.

ER30, p. 3

This excerpt is from the account authored by Rosenbaugh and Adrian which focused on the grassroots evolution of Agile. However, this evolution is accelerated by the organisation for reasons of efficiency. This shows that even a bottom-up drive towards Agility can take on a character of top-down implementation when it comes to rolling out across a wider institutional context.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with an increase in productivity. However, the perception that Agile will deliver these sorts of massive improvements in productivity is certainly a contributing factor to problems the like of which Sean Dunn highlighted in his more critical account (ER6, p. 2-5); the top-down pressure to force adoption of Agile for reasons of productivity can be tied directly to the expectation that coaches will push their students vigorously towards the established communal value system. This drive is also what Dunn describes when he talks about the “organizational tendency for managers to seek out coaching not for themselves, but... to “fix” what they perceive as unproductive teams” (ER6, p. 6). BT, too, “[have] a “top-down” driver for teams to use agile” in the sense that “executives believe that using agile will help the company become more competitive” (ER20, p. 23). None of this is to say that a top-down driver will necessarily result in an environment of autocratic, politicised agility, or that a bottom-up implementation couldn’t suffer these same problems. Rather, it merely shows that the nature of what is legitimate “Agile” activity can be influenced heavily by such drives, and that the focus on efficiency means that there is some more concrete expectation of outcome. These expectations often serve to further politicise Agility by placing significant pressure on those implementing the method to ensure adoption.

Dunn's report is, as ever, revealing here. In his eyes, the root issue here is that the managers in question had missed the point entirely; they were merely going through the motions of Agility. This is a theme which will become important as this exploration moves on to the orthodoxy which is central to "true agility", but for now the focus must return to politics and Dunn's writing:

My experience with the standups was my first and most painful reminder of how easily going through the Scrum motion can miss achieving their intended purpose. I came to believe that the standups were not being done for the benefit of the team members, but they were done because there was some unstated expectation from above that they should be done

ER6, p. 4

It is interesting that Dunn explicitly problematises these practices by stating that they are not "done for the benefit of the team members". Looking back, it is hard to draw the line between a genuine interest in helping team members and a patronising assumption that team members would benefit if they could overcome their own mental blocks, especially when one regards the dismissive language of Brown or Poon (ER3, p. 1; ER26, p. 4). Dunn is unambiguously critical of this "unstated expectation" from executives that certain practices "should be done". This is an example of the top-down pressure described earlier, but what is interesting is that not all reports treat this pressure in the same way. The situation that Nick Tune described in the UK government is not dissimilar to that in the preceding quote, save that the expectation from above was clearly stated by the "dictatorial" GDS (ER32, p. 2).

Some of the reports paint a somewhat ambiguous picture if one is uncomfortable with the idea of a “cloak and dagger” approach to influencing towards this more productive state. Chris Murman talks about how he was “hired as a project manager” in his context firm as a cover for the boss “secretly... bringing [him] in to serve as [their] internal Agile transformation consultant” (ER23, p. 1). The use of words like “secretly” in the act of describing this process of implementation implies quite directly that, based on organisational members’ own experiences, this change might not have seemed so above board and could appear somewhat political from the outset. From this point, Murman was “elevated to a lead position” at the end of his first year (ER23, p. 1). This kind of establishment and entrenchment of power through hierarchy, especially when the position is attained through an influential stakeholder being brought on-board to the Agile mindset, is a recurring theme in other reports also.

On this note it is worth returning to the excerpt from Gabel and Dubovic which was addressed earlier; they talk about how one of them was elevated to a position of organisation-wide influence through developed connections with such important stakeholders (ER8, p. 6). Dunn also notes the political negotiation that any “final form” of Agile represents. He points out that “If agile represents values and principles, local economics within the organization (incentives, pressures, rewards, punishments) had to be aligned”. He continues that managers generally control these economics and thus it is vital to change not just the way these figures think, but also the way that they endeavour to treat others (ER6, p. 5).

The preceding samples of discussion show that many Agile practitioners are well aware of the role that politics can play and are not necessarily always victims of politics. However, there are certainly some who seemed concerned with the potential

for outside interference to prevent the spread or even adoption of Agile. Daniel Poon is one example of this concern in action. His report was covered earlier in the context of self-organising teams and it is interesting to note that he connects this foundational Agile element back partially to political expediency. He says that “there are many excuses for not acting, many of them political”, but notes that “there was a lot we could do by ourselves before we started to hit political barriers” (ER26, p.1). This is because the team was “self-contained” and “had everything [they] needed”. Ultimately this meant that “[nobody] from the outside could politically sabotage what we were doing” (ER26, p. 4). Poon, in this instance, shows a distinct concern with interference from those who are not supportive of the Agile experiment. The use of the phrase “politically sabotage” rather than a less dramatic expression, such as “interfere with” or “derail”, is notable here and it serves to set an almost combative and certainly defensive tone. Poon is one of the few authors who opts to talk in such direct terms about organisational dynamics surrounding adoption. In doing this he puts explicit voice to this unspoken political dimension of Agile.

The previous quote also reflects part of the difficulty that Agile has in “playing nice” with other elements within conventional organisations; there seems to be an antagonistic undertone to the interactions between Agile practitioners and advocates for more traditional approaches to organisation and project planning. Consider the way that Poon is concerned with political interference from “the outside”. This casting of one’s fellow employees, indeed even fellow Agile practitioners, as an intra-organisational “other” on the basis of method is not isolated to this report alone, as the sections on orthodoxy will explore further. However, briefly consider in this context the talk of how “*they*” can’t be helped (ER3, p. 1), or how there is a “Kool-Aid-drinking” Agile side to the business (ER12, p. 4) or how a certain implementation is

not “truly Agile” (ER25, p. 2; ER32, pp. 4-5). Overall, this begs the question as to whether one could consider Agile as political even outside an existing top-down mandate based around efficiency; where the drive is to secure influence within the organisation by convincing key stakeholders of Agile’s efficacy outside the bounds of one’s department or scope of operation, could this not be thought of as its own form of political meddling? The preceding discussions suggest that Agile practitioners have their own complicated relationship with control and their own fairly overt agenda.

5.2.6.b Agile Emphasises Proselytic Orthodoxy

Rather than discussing the strong push for Agile adoption as an issue that was assumed to be solely or mainly political, this notion was addressed through a specific tailored concept. Understanding the basic concepts behind the idea of a proselytic orthodoxy is vital to understanding Agile and matters adjacent to Agile as they were seen through the research. Proselytism is best explained as the act of seeking religious conversions as an already active member of a faith. Thus, missionary work aimed at bringing new members “into the fold” falls under this label:

What is proselytism?... We define proselytism as actively promoting conversion to a particular ideology or religion or otherwise pressuring potential converts to accord with specific norms and practices

Lynch and Schwarz, 2016, p. 636

The term is “almost always negative” and implies the use of “inappropriate methods”, or perhaps a threat or “insult [to] the freedom of the hearer” (2016, p. 637). The sense that Agile establishes and seeks to maintain a specific orthodoxy has already been

hinted at through the preceding explorations of discussions about the Agile mindset and the importance of achieving alignment. Similarly, this chapter has already explored the ways in which this orthodoxy is seen as “common-sense”, stripping opponents of their agency in objection. The aforementioned alignment is not just local, between the teams, but also quasi-global in that it generally points back to the foundational canon of agile in some way; alignment between members, but also to the principles and mindset necessitated or mandated by Agile. In this way, Agile can be seen not just as a method, or even methodology, but also as an ideology to which members are converted.

Though it is said in jest, the remark that Eric Hile makes when describing the Agile parts of the car auctioneers Manheim is also revealing. He jokes that “the Agile landscape... is one where we are all drinking the Kool-Aid!” (ER12, p. 4). Interestingly, this joke is actually used in another report to describe the eventual embracing of Agile which went on, at least for some, at Jochems and Rodgers context firm. They state triumphantly that “team members have “drank the Kool Aid” and have become advocates for agile methods” (ER16, p. 5). This reference to the Jonestown massacre could certainly be taken as a self-aware nod to the fact that some outside of the Agile community have described it’s more dogmatic members as “cult-like” (Mäki-Runsas, Wistrand and Karlsson, 2019, pp. 44-48). There is, in fact, a fair representation of religious language used by the practitioners themselves to discuss their work. The notion of Agile evangelists, particularly, is a strong influence in the choice to refer to the push for broad adoption of principle-driven Agile methods as a “proselytic orthodoxy” (ER7, p. 2; ER13, p. 7; ER21, p. 1). Grabel and Dubovic’s quote about how “true believers became Agile champions”, already dissected in service of different aims, is also certainly relevant here (ER8, p. 5).

This orthodoxy is the “dog food” which Dunn earlier referred to when reflecting on his experiences in moving from coaching to operations (ER6, p. 1). It is fascinating to contrast the views of Dunn with somebody who is more optimistic about the nature of Agile but also works with teams that use traditional methods. Returning to Manheim and Eric Hile, there is evidenced some of the trouble which this perception creates for Agile teams looking to collaborate outside of the method:

The challenges also spread in from the culture of the Waterfall side. There was a strong sense of old guard. They viewed us as the young new kids on the block driving their shiny Agile car down a street in their neighborhood. Manheim has been around for almost 60 years so I couldn't really blame them.

ER12, p. 6

This seems like fairly typical intra-firm conflict. In many ways it is. However, it is driven in this case by the reaction to these Agile methods. What is interesting to note is the way in which potential concerns about the Agile team could be thought of as validated through the events described in the report. Hile talks about how he wanted to bring members of the “waterfall” team onto his with the aim of “making this person an Agile sympathizer”. Explaining further, he states “I wanted them to latch onto our transparency [and] open flow of communication”. It is worth noting that this was partially to shake off the perception that his team was “some shoot from the hip reckless organization”. However, it is clear that Hile believes some in the organisation were uncomfortable with this possibility and that “the waterfall powers that be nixed that for some reason” (ER12, p. 7).

To make a stronger case for the prevalence of a firm orthodoxy within Agile, it is perhaps best to look at the intra-factional conflicts among Agile teams, rather than the actions of any one team in isolation. Perhaps the best report for this is the account of Agile in the UK government. This report is so useful because the event which ended the tenure of Tune as a coach was, in part, a competing Agile initiative which was discursively positioned as “false” or pantomime, in that the participants were accused of emphasising only the “rituals” of Agile (ER32, p. 5). This quote is particularly revealing and gives an insight into the mindset of the author:

On a sunny summer afternoon, during an enterprise IT show-and-tell session, all my ambitions of affecting change in government instantly crashed and burned. My mission was inexorably going to fail. It began when an enterprise IT project manager announced she should now be referred to as the scrum master.

ER32, p. 4

The Agile transformation “crashed and burned” the minute a team practicing Agile in a way that was seen to be delegitimated by Tune gained a politically influential foothold. The orthodoxy of which this section speaks is what fuels, from the side of Agile practitioners, the tense relationship with notions of control. This control becomes necessary in situations where people “just don’t get it”; the gloves come off and teams are reminded that they are still supposed to be moving towards Agility (ER13, pp. 6-7; ER32, p. 2). There is a book written by Stephen King entitled “The Long Walk”. In it, a group of young boys including the narrator are sent on a non-stop trek across America in an endurance race to the death. They need not run or jostle for position, but they must nevertheless proceed forwards at a minimum speed and in a

particular direction. It is possible to relate the drive towards Agility to this long walk; there is the illusion of free choice, you can walk any direction you choose, so long as you keep pace and keep moving forwards. To invoke a tired yet relevant aphorism, as Ford once said, “you can have any colour, as long as it’s black”.

It is important to note that this agenda of proselytic orthodoxy is not a vestige of some dark master plan to overtake the world of software and then the rest. Rather, it could be best related back to the perception that Agile is simply “common sense” and self-evident in its superiority. That many of these practitioners believe this is evidenced through the way that they talk about outreach and also the way that rejection of Agile principles is framed, as has been addressed several times through this chapter. The report by Brown and Anderson which was explored briefly could be considered emblematic of this “common-sense” perspective. Indeed, the very notion of “congenital agility” suggests that Agile is something more than even common-sense, but some kind of innate ability locked away behind the “decades of conditioning” which Brown aims to tackle (ER3, p. 1).

Brown positions those who are not on board with Agile as being under or mis-informed, perhaps even as “other”; the quote about how “*they*”, with the emphasis lifted from the text, are beyond help and that they “just don’t get it” has already been addressed in this context (ER3, p. 1). He claims that “common sense” is lacking in software and that if more possessed it then they would not resist the push towards Agile methods (ER3, p. 2). He concludes his paper with the following reflections:

I learned that when someone “just doesn’t get it” that it’s not that they are intentionally being obtuse or obstinate, it’s likely that their life experience didn’t prepare them for the

move to Agility like mine did. Worse yet their life experience may have indeed prepared them, but decades in our industry conditioned them to dismiss what they deep down know they should embrace.

ER3, p. 4

Bringing the reflection here back to the previously offered definition of proselytism, this marginalisation of legitimate resistance could be thought of as a threat towards the intellectual freedom of these objectors (Lynch and Schwarz, 2016, p. 637).

This firm and unyielding valorisation of Agile could be related to other accounts analysed here. For example, the way Brown discusses Agile is not unlike Tune's own reflections on the widespread resistance faced by his "heroic saviours" GDS. Tune ascribes the friction around GDS to the fact that not everybody was "passionate about improvement", calling those who did not engage "apathetic" (ER32, p. 5). Some practitioners showed a degree of self-awareness around this tendency to become almost dogmatic about Agile; Helfand is one such example and there has been substantial discussion already about her reflections on "passionate Agile ideals" and their relationship to a commanding approach to implementation (ER11, p. 1). Many authors, however, fail to exercise such introspective capacity. Poon, for example, frames the challenge of "an anti-agile software team" around the fact that "you are saying to them 'I know a better way of programming'" (ER26, p. 4). Even in Dunn's more critical account of Agile as experienced from another perspective, there is a notable reliance on rationalisation for why it is surely managers and coaches, not Agile in tandem with these figures, which is to blame here; the "Agile cynicism" (ER6, p. 3) is morphed into a more acceptable "coaching cynicism" in the concluding remarks (ER6, pp. 5-6).

Howey is certainly disapproving when he talks about those teams who showed a “lack of enthusiasm” and “self-selected out of the trek toward Agility”. Ultimately, though, he concludes that “the entire organization is on that [Agile] journey, even if at different paces on different routes” (ER13, p. 6). These kinds of marginalising reactions illustrate what is meant when it is said that there is an overwhelming and potentially harmful consensus that Agile is more than common sense or business sense; Agile adoption becomes the “right” thing for organisational members to do and a frame in which all actions are interpreted for organisational legitimacy. The preceding presentations of Agile erase the plausible critiques which some would potentially make about the method. Overall, these reports paint a picture of a community which is happy to reflect on how best to achieve its aims but is less interested in how those aims are actually seen by those not “in the know”.

5.3 Reflections, Limitations and Conclusions

The following section will serve as a sort of breather and a recap before the focus moves on to exploring, in greater depth, the largely unspoken aspects of Agile in practice; those divergences from legitimacy which are rarely addressed due to the orthodox rhetoric and tentatively acknowledged grey areas. The result of these aforementioned factors is that these “unspeakable” aspects of Agile are positioned as “other” to the method; a reflection of “false agility”. However, this thesis posits that these factors are, in fact, the shadow of Agile. In other words, these issues are the dark implications cast in the hard light of practice. First, however, there is call for a measure of discussion on the limitations of these findings and on some interesting aspects which felt relevant but fell outside of the coding analysis.

5.3.1 Reflections

One notable trend which continues from the literature around Agile which was reviewed is the instrumental, primarily programming-practice-oriented nature of research conducted in this field. Whitworth, for example, talks about the lack of emphasis on the lived experience of Agile team members (2008, p. 429). Similarly, a large proportion of the papers explored in the Agile leadership review had a primarily instrumental focus (Appendix E). However, this is not what is surprising, and it has already been addressed. What was seen as more notable is that this tendency extended to the practitioners own reflective work; even in experience reports, this trend towards focusing on the practical details of team configuration and programming practices is somewhat mirrored. The degree to which different reports reflect this tendency is, of course, highly variable. The reflective accounts of Brown or Dunn, for example, have a much more generally scoped approach to their reports than those authored with a more operational focus, such as Teresa Hsu.

The sections on notions of Agile itself as politically contingent, yet ultimately important markers of legitimacy suggests that there is significant space for an investigation of the role which power has to play in determining which interpretations of this concept are held up as acceptable within different organisations. Ultimately, this can be linked to the same sort of critical outlook which informs the project of leadership agnosticism; that words matter and that the terms we use, and how we come to understand them, are an arena for the exercise of power and politics (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 73-74). This road, as it relates to concepts outside leadership, has been left largely unexplored here to avoid a kind of critical unravelling where all contentious concepts are simultaneously brought into

question. However, the investigation has suggested that a further study into this process of realisation may shed significant additional light on the role of power dynamics in Agile, especially as they relate to the semantics of practice.

5.3.2 Limitations

There is a space for additional research to be conducted not only because of the findings produced in this research, but also because of the limitations which necessarily bound the impact of this particular investigation. These limitations and bounds are explored here with the benefit of hindsight. These boundaries arose from several sources, ultimately mostly relating to the experience reports utilised in the analysis: the lack of any personal connection with the authors of the reflective accounts, making it extremely challenging to clarify ambiguities or pursue a line of further investigation; the implicitly limited coverage of the reports authorship in each institution, which results in a greater reliance on the truthful narration of these authors; the struggle to follow up on said dataset to obtain a longitudinal perspective on the evolution of implementation, beyond the historical details provided by authors; and the limitations on the knowledge derived in this project, as per the research philosophy adopted.

Working through these issues in a little more detail, first there is the limited capacity to follow up to deepen one's perspective on context. This is a sure issue with the approach taken here; while there is a breadth of accounts to compare between, it is extremely challenging to follow up on any of the narratives provided for analysis to obtain further insight. There are some accounts where sufficient detail is provided and the context is public enough that substantial further background is available, such as the account by Nick Tune about the GDS (Andrews *et al.*, 2016; GDS, 2016;

Manel, 2013; Neal, 2015). However, this account is the exception that proves the rule and this material was not included to avoid placing undue emphasis on a particular account at the expense of a genuinely broad consideration.

Connected to these issues of distance are the problems with obtaining a multifaceted insight into the organisations in question. Only one, perhaps two perspectives were ultimately solicited per-context. Even considering the efforts that some authors go to in order to include the voices of their own evangelists and converts, ultimately it must be considered that these accounts have a limited number of authors and these authors have the ability to include and exclude whatever they so choose. Of course, some aspects of this exclusion are notable through the contrast with the accounts of others, giving rise to the category of concepts which were largely found to be unarticulated or high-inarticulable given the overt rhetoric and practical compromises recognised as “legitimate Agile”. However, it is important to recognise that other aspects of this exclusion may have resulted in an under-representation of dissenting voices which were simply not present through the reflective accounts. The implications here are perhaps significant. Resistance within a framework of Agile, for example, remains an underexplored theme which may be more prevalent than this study indicates.

The final implication of the lack of direct access is the inability to generate any truly longitudinal insight; it is not possible to understand how these authors’ perspectives may have changed with the passage of time, how the context might have shifted or how the concepts at play may have evolved. There is some element of this historical perspective captured in the experience reports analysed, simply by merit of the fact that some accounts do take a longitudinal perspective, detailing the evolution of Agile

in their particular context. The report authored by Heidi Helfand is a good example here; she talks not only about the journey her organisation takes towards Agile, but also the way that her own personal perspective changes over this time. Sean Dunn similarly provides an account that covers a period of time and charts a shift in his thinking on the efficacy of Agile coaching. Nevertheless, these historical reflections are provided through a retrospective process conducted at a particular moment, rather than through a series of connected snapshots that might show these evolutions as they emerge (Fachin and Langley, 2018, pp. 311-314).

There are also the limitations that are inherent within the interpretivist epistemology adopted to facilitate the open-ended approach to concepts and knowledge generation in this context. It has been highlighted repeatedly throughout this thesis that the philosophy of Wittgenstein encourages one to establish *an* understanding (2009, p. 56, PI §132). This understanding can well serve to resolve particular problems which are identified in the investigation, where resolve here is taken to mean provide an operable answer as an object of comparison (2009, p. 56, PI §130). However, it is important to emphasise that these findings are necessarily restricted to this status of “an answer”. As such, the findings should only act as the basis for a further investigation, or a conversation with an informed party. In short, these findings are intended for subsequent application in a process of engagement, the seeking of similarity and dissimilarity, rather than answers as to the universal nature of Agile in and of themselves.

5.3.3 Conclusions

The preceding chapter has served to recount that which was perceived and noted through codes during the process of analysis. One key contribution of this chapter

was to give a clear account of what is being interpreted and how, in line with the push towards a retroductable research project (Wodak, 2011, p. 624). In fulfilment of this purpose, each category was unpacked to the level of manifestation by way of chapter headings. This allowed for a detailed discussion of the reports that were analysed, as well as the codes which were developed through a close reading of these accounts. Through these sections, a sense of what was legitimated in Agile and what was allowed as a practical compromise or grey area was established. However, in addition to this focus on what was said, there was a building up of intertextual and critical insights which suggested a shadow to this space of allowable expression. A deeper exploration of these delegitimated, yet present, aspects and their connection to Agile will be conducted in the discussions chapter, expanding on the use of literature like the work of Barker and the research of leadership agnostic scholars to unpack the less benign implications of Agile rhetoric in practice (Whitworth, 2008, pp. 429, 434-435).

To briefly recap the findings covered in the preceding chapter, it was shown that the language around Agile positions the method as a holistic shift, far beyond any simple commitment to planning or organisational approach. Indeed, in actual fact there is a process of radical, yet mediated change. In principle, this mediation should come in the form of employee input, as per the emphasis on self-organisation. However, in practice it was found that the mediation was a far more politically contingent process than was suggested. On a related note, this self-organisation was found to be more complicated in practice than the term suggests. In practice, there was a sense of “bounded authority” which showed the teams in question as having autonomy with specific limitations. However, beyond this, it was found that there is actually Agile self-organisation; the adoption of Agility as a value system is rarely framed as an option for employees.

This continued control under a discourse of self-determination is significant from the perspective of leadership agnosticism; the role which notions of servant leadership especially play in obscuring the exercise of power in these contexts is predicted by Learmonth and Morell in their critical text on power and the language of leadership (2019, p. 49). It is hard to say that shared leadership acts in a similar way, but this is only because of the absolute scarcity of references to the notion in the accounts selected. One interesting notion, which will be explored further in the discussions, is the idea that perhaps the notion of self-organisation acts in a similar capacity. Indeed, both of these aspects of the Agile project bear a striking resemblance to the description of “Santa’s workshop” or the “ offered by the agnostic scholars previously reviewed (Alvesson, 2019, p. 11; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 46). The research conducted by Barker into concertive control in contexts of self-organisation helps, indeed already has helped, to inform this process of challenging the democratic, control-lite image of Agile by showing how the development of value systems and normative rule structures can be just as binding as any systemic bureaucratic regulation (1993).

Some of what this leadership discourse serves to camouflage is the way in which coaches and other Agile “leadership” figures are made to overstep the legitimate bounds of their role by the more important or pressing expectation that teams achieve some notion of “Agility”. In short, these figures are sanctioned to act in the capacity of supports and influencers. However, in practice they can become taskmasters and enforcers. This was said to relate primarily to top-down drivers for Agile adoption which place pressure on coaches and other Agile “leaders” to push teams towards the sanctioned organisational values. However, it was found that there was also a role which overzealous Agile practitioners played in perpetuating such

issues. These issues were addressed through a category around enforced politicised orthodoxy, which encapsulated both of these issues. However, there is room for further exploration into these political contingencies and the proselytism of Agile “true believers”.

Chapter 6: Developing and Deploying Depth Grammar

6.1 Introduction

This following discussion chapters serve two primary purposes: the first, chapter 5, serves as a review of the findings with a view to developing and deploying a “depth grammar” (Table 13) from the categories set out in the preceding chapter around organisational language and leadership in Agile (Table 11); and the second, chapter 6, develops key critical insights derived in the analysis, by way of the depth grammar, with the aid of supporting literature. The understanding established in this chapter is of the space of legitimated expression and action, the depth grammar, of Agile organisation. It is helpful, at this stage, to return to the research questions which were established in the introduction as this helps to re-emphasise the connections between these initial aims and the development which takes place in this chapter and the proceeding discussion chapter also:

1. How was organisational work discussed in the context of Agile and what were the focal points of this discussion?
2. Were “leadership” concepts discussed or seen as important to Agile practice?
 - a. Which touchstones in literature (if any) were drawn upon in accounts for discursive resources?
3. Were there pressures that arose in these Agile contexts around the highlighted focal points of organisation?

To respond to these questions, an understanding of the experiences analysed is established through this chapter as an object of comparison (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 56-57, §130-133). In response to the first two research questions, the depth grammar is presented and developed through this chapter. While this research was undertaken from an agnostic perspective, it was clear from the prevalence of the language of leadership in both the literature and the reports that the concept was worth critically unpacking through the analysis (Appendix C). The findings established the categories “Agile Regulates “Leadership” Practice” and also “Tension in the Role of Coach”. The two main avenues for the impact of these categories were Servant leadership as a marker of legitimacy; and, leadership notions more generally acting to obscure the continued operation of power and control in these ostensibly “self-organising” contexts. This latter avenue is termed “leadership as camouflage” moving forwards. These notions will be further explored through the arguments presented in the sixth chapter of the thesis.

The aforementioned depth grammar is shown in table 13 and addressed in the primary part of this chapter, section 5.2. This section serves to check the sense of the findings previously discussed, developing them by relating these interpretive descriptions to Agile literature and other organisational research. There is a constant thematic connection back to the research question set around the characterisation of organisational focal points in the context of Agile. This interest is pursued beyond the space of what was viewed as proper expression for key organisational ideas, as the focus extends towards the delegitimated aspects of these accounts. As with this thesis, the organisational research drawn upon throughout this chapter also looks to speak to the space of illegitimacy surrounding these efforts to control employee behaviour;

there is a shared recognition around the significance of “what one is considered not to be, as much as what one is” (Musson and Duberley, 2007, p. 162).

6.2 Applying Depth Grammar of Agile Concepts

Concept	Surveyable Representation		Depth Grammar		
	Category	Manifestation	Agile Rhetoric	Practical mediation	Delegitimated Aspect
Change	Agile Requires Organisational Change	Agile Transforming Responsibilities Agile Creates Dramatic Change	Radical change	Contextually mediated change	Politically contingent change
Self-organisation	Push Towards Employee Ownership	Teams as Self-Directing Increased Personal Accountability Degrees of Autonomy	Self-organisation as central	Bounded authority as reality	Agile self-organisation
Leadership Concepts	Agile Regulates ‘Leadership’ Practice	Agile Looks for Servant Leadership New Agile ‘Leadership’ Roles Distributed Agency/Leadership	(Servant) Leadership as key	(Servant) Leadership as questionable	(Servant) Leadership as camouflage
Command and control	The Dark Art of Control	Fraught Relationship with Control Controlled Agile Implementation	Agile against command and control	Agile redistributing control	Agile requires concertive control
Purpose of Agile Roles	Tension in the Role of Coach	Coach-as-support Coach-as-potent-influencer	Agile “leader” as support	Agile “leader” as influencer	Agile “leader” as enforcer
Drivers of Agile	Enforcing Politicized Orthodoxy	Agile as Political Agile Emphasises Proselytic Orthodoxy	Agile as business sense	Agile as common sense	Agile as “right”

Table 13 – Representation of Established Depth Grammar

The table above summarises the output of the findings chapter and serves to facilitate exploration of the first research question, “how was organisational work discussed in the context of Agile and what were the focal points of this discussion?”. The heading

of “Concept” shows those six key focal points. The headings of Agile rhetoric and practical mediation refer to those notions which were broadly integrated into the flow of legitimated discourse on the topic as a recognizable aspect of Agile under each of these focal points. Those aspects discussed as delegitimated are, instead, those which were remarked upon in the findings for their supposed departure from the accepted organisational “norms” of Agile methodologies. In the following sub-sections this textual analysis is related to the relevant Agile literature, such that a sense of connection is established between the legitimated perspectives enshrined in this literature and that which is advocated for through the experience reports. In engaging in this process of comparison and connection, the following sub-sections serve to sense-check the established depth grammar against existing research. As such, each will start with an introductory discussion of the relevant category, before moving to an exploration of relevant literature.

6.2.1.a A Brief Note on Terminology

To avoid confusion, I will explain a few key terms employed in this chapter. The terms “manifestation”, “category” and also “exemplar” refer to elements of the findings which serve to group the codes, and thus the data, into manageable sets. The findings were coded in line with the framework developed from the work of Halliday. The exemplars are the output of this process, the codes which were developed in the first pass of analysis. Aggregated from these exemplars were manifestations, which represented higher level groupings of these codes in relatable sets. Finally, these manifestations were again drawn into relation to develop the more abstracted categories which formed the basis for the discussion of depth grammar. The term nominal group is also used throughout this chapter. This is a term drawn from the

work of Halliday which describes a set of terms used to expand a simple and singular one (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 94). It was noted in the method chapter that the term “servant leader” is an example of such a linguistic feature, a grouping of the individual terms “servant” and “leader” which forms a more complex whole. The term “depth grammar” refers to the depicted interpretive framework which serves to articulate a space of legitimation and delegitimation around identified key concepts; the observed tendencies around what was seen as acceptably Agile by practitioners and what was downplayed or delegitimated.

6.2.1 Change

Concept	Surveyable Representation		Depth Grammar		
	Category	Manifestation	Agile Rhetoric	Practical mediation	Delegitimated Aspect
Change	Agile Requires Organisational Change	Agile Transforming Responsibilities Agile Creates Dramatic Change	Radical change	Contextually mediated change	Politically contingent change

Table 14 - Representation of Depth Grammar for Change

The authors of the Agile manifesto, self-described “organisational anarchists”, state that the movement codified in this document is aimed at “uncovering better ways” of managing software development (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp. 28-29). They specifically emphasise that they used the word “uncovering” because “the Alliance members don't have all the answers and don't subscribe to the silver-bullet theory” (ibid., p. 29). The manifesto itself encapsulates the Agile rhetoric of “Radical change” and the practical mediation “contextually mediated change”. However, it is also explicitly a collection of interpretable statements, including both values (Appendix A) and principles (Appendix B), which are partially clarified by the authors. They write the following when reflecting on the future for Agile:

While the group believes that a set of common purposes and principles will benefit the users of agile methodologies, we are equally adamant that variety and diversity of practices are necessary. When it comes to methodologies, each project is different and each project team is different—there's no one-size-fits-all solution.

Beck et al., 2001, p. 33

The rhetoric in the manifesto, aligning with the depth grammar, is that of “radical change”, but there is an acknowledgment that the requirements of practice mean that this change will most often be contextually mediated. This points back to an aspect of Agile in the broader world which was discussed previously; the stringent requirements perceived around claiming to “be” Agile means that many firms commit only to saying that they draw on aspects of Agile methods as part of a mix (ER25, p. 2; Päivärinta *et al.*, 2010, pp. 481-482; Gale, 2012, pp. 30-31). Such a mix is taken to be indicative of the practical mediation identified in the depth grammar, that of contextual mediation of Agile implementation.

As the category “Agile Requires Organisational Change” established, ‘change’ was a focal point of the language in the experience reports. This category included the manifestations “Agile Transforming Responsibilities” and “Agile Creates Dramatic Change”. This first manifestation grouped those exemplars which pointed to the practical implications of the change for staff, whereas the second speaks to the characterisation of this change as a radical shift. Such a divide can be illustrated by contrasting excerpts from the reports. Think first of the manifestation “Agile Transforming Responsibilities”. This label pointed toward the tendency to discuss Agile in terms of practical changes different members of staff can expect to encounter.

Alan Padula, for example, notes that authority figures must “learn how to provide value as managers in an organization with self-managed teams” (ER25, p. 2).

To illustrate the difference between the previous manifestation and “Agile Creates Dramatic Change” his statement can be compared with an excerpt from one of the Vistaprint reports. Here, the authors state that “agile is a journey; it takes time to shift your mindset and break all your thinking habits” (ER8, p. 3). While the former represents something akin to practical advice for a particular set of staff engaged in Agile transformation, the latter reads as a vague and broad characterisation of such a change as a radical break from established organisational thinking. Such purportedly tectonic shifts in the organisation and its employees were reflected in the depth grammar developed through the Agile rhetoric “radical change”. Such a radical change is perhaps best characterised by the talk of creating and managing an Agile “mindset” in employees and in the firm. Examples of such talk are common to many of the experience reports, such as those accounts offered by Khawaja or Willeke and Marsee (ER17, p. 3; ER35, p. 4).

This type of sweeping organisational change, which looks to achieve regulation of action through regulation of the self, is a large part of what gives rise to the specific word choice used to describe the change as “dramatic” in the manifestation “Agile Creates Dramatic Change”. Khawaja, for example, emphasised the importance of executives being vocal about “how adopting an Agile mindset had helped his team” (ER17, p. 5). Indeed, the talk of “being” agile can also be related here. As with the idea of an “Agile mindset”, the concept of “being Agile” points forwards to the discussions yet to come around proselytic orthodoxy. The work of Musson and Duberley, building on the research of Alvesson and Willmott (2002), looks at the ways in which firms

seek to change the “production and regulation of identity” (Musson and Duberley, 2007, p. 150). There are strong links identifiable between their insights around the management of supervisory identity and the way in which “employees are enjoined to develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives” (Musson and Duberley, 2007, p. 157) in Agile contexts also. In this way, the management of identity becomes an important element in the overall project to control and delimit the space of practice in the organisation.

The sense that emerged from the accounts on this matter was that Agile rhetoric suggests this change will be profound and far-reaching, but that the practical mediation acknowledged by participants was one of significant contextual adaption. This contingent adjustment, identified in the depth grammar through “contextually mediated change”, was demonstrated clearly in the manifestations “degrees of autonomy” and “Agile as political”. In addition, the category “The Dark Art of Control” served to group many exemplars which contributed to this sense of situational compromise. Exemplary of the excerpts coded under these headings are the reflections of Eric Hile at Manheim. The focal point of his report was the “collision” between the traditional and Agile parts of the business (ER12, p.1).

The Agile implementation in the UK government was also openly discussed as being modified to fit with the organisational environment there. This included a substantial reliance on what were acknowledged to be delegitimated, “dictatorial” practices (ER32, p. 2-3). This mediation is broadly in line with the rhetoric of the manifesto and the other Agile literature discussed previously (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 32). Some authors do lean further towards orthodoxy; Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland, who created scrum and both contributed to the manifesto, state that their “rules are

immutable” and that an implementation which does not follow these is simply “not scrum” (Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 19).

Top down implementations of the methodology are increasingly common (Denning, 2016; Papatheocharous and Andreou, 2014, pp. 856-857). These contexts in the accounts presented the most compelling examples of politically contingent mediation. This mediation was demonstrated in the findings to be a delegitimised, yet still relevant, aspect of the Agile discourse around change, primarily through the manifestation “Agile as political”. The emphasis in the Agile literature and the manifesto is on managers trusting staff to know how best to do their work (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp. 30-31), so where does this leave those situations where Agile was forced on staff from the top-down, where the implementation was controlled by these managers, rather than the staff they are supposed to be trusting? Such occurrences are those identified in the delegitimated aspect of the depth grammar for the concept of change, “politically contingent change”. This situation, observed through the findings in several accounts, encapsulates the politically contingent change which was a recurring theme throughout the reports, in opposition to the Agile rhetoric of “Radical change”. The answer provided to bridge the gap between rhetoric and experiences of change in the broader Agile literature is that the relevant manager will apply “servant leadership” to ensure that their actions empower the team (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 32-33; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7). These ideas and the pitfalls associated, however, are to be explored later in the chapter as the focus shifts to the aforementioned figures and the drivers of Agile.

6.2.2 Self-Organisation

Concept	Surveyable Representation		Depth Grammar		
	Category	Manifestation	Agile Rhetoric	Practical mediation	Delegitimated Aspect
Self-organisation	Push Towards Employee Ownership	Teams as Self-Directing Increased Personal Accountability Degrees of Autonomy	Self-organisation as central	Bounded authority as reality	Agile self-organisation

Table 15 - Representation of Depth Grammar for Self-Organisation

One of the key principles of the Agile manifesto, as discussed in the introduction, is the emphasis on self-organising teams and increased employee autonomy (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp. 29-32). These principles are evident in other key texts (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 38-44; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7) and are recognised in the literature as some of the defining common aspects of Agile methodologies (Hoda and Murugesan, 2016b, p. 245; Moe, Dingsøyrr and Dybå, 2008, p. 76). However, there is an explicit recognition that the scope of this self-organisation is practically limited. The manifesto may call for a context in which “interactions are high and the process rules are few” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 32), but there is certainly a recognition among Agile scholars that this ability to organise is multi-dimensional and bounded in practice (Hoda and Murugesan, 2016b, pp. 249-253; Moe, Dingsøyrr and Dybå, 2008, pp. 77-78). This aligns with the understanding that was sketched out in the process of analysing the experience reports; consider the nominal group “bounded authority” which highlighted the practitioners understanding of their limited version of “self-organisation”.

With regards to self-organisation in the reports, this was discussed primarily through the category “Push Towards Employee Ownership”. Included in this category were the manifestations “Teams as Self-Directing”, “Increased Personal Accountability” and

“Degrees of Autonomy”. Each of these manifestations speaks to an aspect of self-organisation: the manifestation “teams as self-directing” serves to collect those excerpts which saw practitioners speak of self-organisation in the context of changing team dynamics; the second manifestation listed, “increased personal accountability”, refracts the corresponding changes to the levels of personal responsibility which was identified by practitioners in these contexts; and the third aspect of this category, “degrees of autonomy”, focuses on the mediated nature of this change and the wide space of plausibly “autonomous” arrangements.

The practical mediation “bounded authority as reality” points to those suggestions that this bounding is substantial in practice and can be tied to the negotiation of meaning which goes on around the establishment and enactment of a change initiative (Thomas, Sargent and Hardy, 2011, p. 33). Even in contexts where the discourse of participation and self-direction is strong, there are still pressures to “tailor” the change to the organisation, promoting engagement in a particular way which gels with the organisations stated initiatives and priorities, existing or new (Hardy and Thomas, 2014, p. 331; Musson and Duberley, 2007, pp. 148-150). One notable contribution to the manifestation “Degrees of autonomy” is the account Jeff Howey gives of an autonomous Agile team self-selecting out of the “trek toward Agility”, where he invokes the image of a disobedient little league team to describe dissenters (ER13, p. 6).

Self-organisation is not simply bounded in the preceding context, it is also explicitly “Agile” self-organisation. This can be considered analogous to the development of a “monophonic and monologic organisation” (Diefenbach, 2007, p. 138). Diefenbach reflects on such a situation occurring at a large university in the context of a

managerial change initiative in his research and there is a distinct parallel between his findings and the conclusions of this thesis:

The advocates of change say that the necessity for change is the reality... opponents are being portrayed as apathetic... Many proponents of managerialistic change, then, seem to be surprised and puzzled by the fact that there is resistance

Ibid., p. 139

As with this thesis, reflected primarily through the delegitimated aspects described, Diefenbach concludes that the primary beneficiary of this process of change management is often not the organisation at large. Rather, “it is about gaining power and control” and enhancing “the position and influence of those who present [the initiative]” (ibid., p. 139).

Similar sentiments to those discussed above can be identified in other accounts which contributed significantly to the delegitimated aspect “Agile self-organisation”. Many relevant exemplars were grouped under the manifestation “Degrees of autonomy”, with accounts such as Nick Tune’s (ER32, p. 4) providing much material here. This aspect of organisational practice can be easily related to the strong orthodoxy which was also reflected in the analysis through the manifestation “Agile emphasises proselytic orthodoxy”. One insight of this thesis, then, is that recourse to Agile as the locus of bounding in the context of the above political contingency means that Agile self-organisation may mirror leadership as an adaptive camouflage for the ongoing interests of power. More certainly, one can relate this view of self-organisation as ultimately an extension of managerial power back to Knights and McCabe’s study of

total quality management at a bank, or even the work of Barker (Knights and McCabe, 2000a; Musson and Duberley, 2007, pp. 143-144).

This thesis, through the findings presented in table 13 and the surveyable representation (Appendix H), points to the similar role which Agile plays in managing sanctioned models of participation and employee self-identification, via concepts like the “Agile mindset”. The key thing to understand through this analysis is the idea that the democratic presentation of self-organisation is at odds with the practicalities encountered in organisations. This much was directly implied through the transition between Agile rhetoric and delegitimated aspect from “self-organisation as central” to specifically “Agile self-organisation”; the latter suggesting that it is not enough to manage oneself, rather this management must be in reference to the contextually variable Agile principles enshrined within the firm. The literature referenced previously, in concert with a discussion of those excerpts informing the “delegitimated aspect” of the depth grammar, has shown that such practices can also serve as a way to obscure the ongoing and perhaps even enhanced power exercised by managers.

6.2.3 Leadership Concepts

Concept	Surveyable Representation		Depth Grammar		
	Category	Manifestation	Agile Rhetoric	Practical mediation	Delegitimated Aspect
Leadership Concepts	Agile Regulates ‘Leadership’ Practice	Agile Looks for Servant Leadership New Agile ‘Leadership’ Roles Distributed Agency/Leadership	(Servant) Leadership as key	(Servant) Leadership as questionable	(Servant) Leadership as camouflage

Table 16 - Representation of Depth Grammar for Leadership Concepts

It is interesting to note that the manifesto doesn't contain the word "leadership" in any of its forms; certainly, this document emphasises the need for managers to change their practices and to trust their staff but there is no specific recourse to any notion of leadership (Beck *et al.*, 2001). However, the surface level rhetoric in the Agile literature (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 33-41; Medinilla, 2012, pp. 62, 65), as well as in the experience reports, certainly emphasises the importance of managers and managerial figures acting as, or engaging in, "leadership". This is indicated through the category "Agile regulates 'leadership' practice" and also to a lesser extent in "Tension in the role of coach". The focus in this section is on the regulation of practice. This is particularly true with respect to notions of "servant leadership", which were used in the guides discussed to articulate the roles of scrum master, project manager and other "facilitative" positions (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 33-41; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7).

Servant leadership, though, is related to only one of the three manifestations which constitute this category and the other two are "New Agile 'leadership' roles" and "Distributed agency/leadership". The former of these speaks to the characterisation in experience reports of scrum masters and the like as being leaders outside of the servant discourse, while the latter describes rhetoric which called for the sharing of agency outside of a rationale of self-organisation. In the accounts this was rarely framed in terms of the sharing of leadership, contributing to the practical mediation "(Servant) Leadership as Questionable", though the Agile literature is more inclined to refer to these arrangements as such (Appendix C).

The linguistic practices highlighted previously in the literature, those relatable to the manifestations grouped under "Agile Regulates 'Leadership' Practice", were paralleled

in the practitioners' reflective accounts. This was demonstrated throughout the findings, especially in those instances where "servant leadership" was taken to be synonymous with proper practices (ER9; ER10, pp. 3-5; ER18, p. 8), or during the exploration of new roles and their purposes. In such instances the concept was used to help rationalise the Agile rhetoric that these actors' new task was to be "supportive" primarily. The reliance on servant leadership to articulate these facilitative roles is an extension of their general characterisation in the Agile manifesto.

It is, rather, more recent publications which have begun to connect the concept of servant leadership to Agile. Some of these are written by original authors of the manifesto (Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7; Sutherland, 2014). While this may be limited to scrum and its founders, the abundance of sympathetic literature outside of this particular incarnation of Agile indicates that the notion of servant leadership is not isolated to these contexts and seems to be more broadly prevalent (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 33-41; Medinilla, 2012, pp. 62, 65). However, some of the research exploring the experiences of Agile practitioners found that the impact of these notions in practice was questionable (Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, p. 427).

Such examples were notable by their absence, especially in the categories "Agile Regulates 'Leadership' Practice" and "Tension in the Role of Coach" where the servant discourse was a powerful and recurrent touchstone for Agile practitioners seeking the "right" way to manage Agile teams. However, in an exemplar grouped under "Agile as Political", Dunn notes his struggles and subsequent disillusionment with Agile. This was a disillusionment bred through exposure to managers who looked to Agile as a way to reform and reshape their teams, without doing any of the work necessary to change themselves (ER6, p. 5-6). This excerpt is exemplary of the questionable impact

which is identified as the practical mediation of “leadership concepts” in “(Servant) Leadership as questionable”. His experiences point to other cases related through the manifestations “Agile as Political”, “Agile Emphasises Proselytic Orthodoxy” and “Coach-as-potent-influencer”. In such instances there is a strong top-down pressure to implement Agile, and principles of “servant leadership” are notably downplayed or entirely absent; certainly, there is no air of service around an account which “focuses on the transition of a project team being forced by management to use Agile” (ER16, p. 1). Indeed, the practical mediation is highlighted here. However, the implications of this questionable impact in the context of continued significance afforded to the concept gives rise to the delegitimated aspect “(Servant) Leadership as camouflage”.

A wider point of notable absence which was felt across the reports analysed, pointing again to the practical mediation “(Servant) Leadership as questionable”, were the nominal groups “shared leadership” or “distributed leadership”. This is not a total omission and that fact is reflected in the construction of the manifestation “Distributed agency/leadership”. As was shown through the findings, there were certainly examples of practitioners talking about leadership and then going on to discuss the distribution of this role or process (ER5, p. 8; ER28, p. 5; ER32, pp. 5-6). However, as a discrete concept the notion of “shared leadership” was never discussed in any of the experience reports analysed for this thesis. This finding was in stark contrast with the literature and the concepts used by scholars to interpret Agile organisational work, where shared and distributed leadership play an important role in addressing aspects such as self-organisation (Appendix C).

Returning to the research questions set out in the introduction, these noted omissions are significant in that they point to the ways in which specific ideas of what

leadership is both do and do not play a significant role in the organisation of Agile work, depending on the specific context. Looking at the wording of the Agile manifesto, there is no mention of “shared leadership”. Rather, as was previously discussed there is an emphasis on trusting individuals, self-organising teams and collaboration (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 34). Similarly, Jeff Sutherland’s influential book on scrum only references servant leadership as a distinct and notable perspective on the notion (2014, p. 133). This suggests that perhaps “shared leadership” as a discrete concept is etic in the field and that the emphasis on the concept is mainly scholarly, rather than being based around the concepts and language of practitioners.

The final area where this ambiguity of impact with regards to leadership was apparent was in “New Agile ‘Leadership’ Roles”. This manifestation grouped talk around new facilitative roles which were sometimes discussed in both the literature and the experience reports as being “leadership” positions, either through reference to servant leadership or via direct identification as such (ER10, pp. 3-5; ER28, p. 2). The impact of these roles will be explored more fully in section 5.2.5, for now the focus is primarily on their characterisation as being “leaders”. In this sense, there is ample evidence to support the idea that the Agile rhetoric frames “(Servant) Leadership as Key”.

Demonstrating this rhetorical emphasis on the centrality of leadership is a quote from the experience report authored by Mark Kilby which was unpacked in the findings chapter in relation to the manifestation “new Agile “leadership” roles”. In it, Kilby talks about the fact that “there is no middle management”, but there are instead “multiple leaders” such as the “Product Owner, Agile Coach, and technical leads” (ER18, p. 8). Similarly, Nienke Alma talked about the “virtual leadership team” of “Product Owner, Chapter Lead and Agile Coach” (ER1, p. 1). She, like Kilby, also

frames this change as a “new leadership team” having “replaced the traditional manager” (ER₁, p. 3).

However, as is suggested by the delegitimated aspect “(Servant) Leadership as camouflage”, the reality of the tasks facing the aforementioned “leaders” and the nature of their relationship with staff is left underexplored. The findings from other accounts, though, would suggest that the impact of these higher ideals is at best questionable in relation to the new facilitative roles set out. This much was identified in the practical mediation “(Servant) Leadership as questionable” and was demonstrated clearly in the category “Tension in the Role of Coach”. These elements of the findings speak to the balance scrum masters and the like must attain between managerial priorities and Agile principles. Dunn talks most frankly about this balancing act, identifying his experience on the other side of Agile initiatives as a primary catalyst for his speaking out (ER 6, p. 1). The implications of this questionable proposition being adopted as a central rhetorical justification for the ongoing contribution of managers are that the notions of service, democratic practice and change are rendered a cover-up.

All of the preceding findings point to further insight into how organisational work was discussed in the context of Agile, as well as how “leadership” concepts were employed or were seen as important to Agile practice. This thesis has found that leadership quite often acts in a key capacity to provide a way of explaining and rationalising changes at the top of the food chain, so to speak, in Agile contexts. This was demonstrated in the literature (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 37; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2011, p. 74; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7), as previously identified, and it was also demonstrated through many of the exemplars pulled from the

participant accounts which ultimately contributed to the Agile rhetoric. In that way, it is fair to say that leadership concepts do often play a role in language around organising in Agile, as is suggested by the Agile rhetoric “(Servant) Leadership as key”. However, it is interesting to note the exclusions and absences here which were reflected in the practical mediation and the delegitimated aspect. Namely, there is a remarkable scarcity of talk around any coherent idea of “shared leadership” and the notion of Servant leadership is put to question by the power that these individuals continue to wield; power which is consistently downplayed and concealed through benign sounding rhetoric.

In summary, there are the examples highlighted above, and more, of Agile practitioners framing the change in authority figures as being a shift “from management to leadership”. What the findings of the depth grammar suggest remains more of an open question, to be further explored in chapter 6, is how the practical impact and purpose of this rhetorical shift might be described to counter the halo which surrounds these seemingly benign notions (Knights and McCabe, 2000b, p. 1487). There it is further argued that these concepts play a central role in obscuring the ongoing impact of power in Agile and undoing the ostensibly democratic aims of the methodology (Appelo, 2011, pp. 124-125; Hoda, 2013, p. 91; Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 318-319).

6.2.4 Command and Control

Concept	Surveyable Representation		Depth Grammar		
	Category	Manifestation	Agile Rhetoric	Practical mediation	Delegitimated Aspect
Command and control	The Dark Art of Control	Fraught Relationship with Control Controlled Agile Implementation	Agile against command and control	Agile redistributing control	Agile requires concertive control

Table 17 - Representation of Depth Grammar for Command and Control

As with the concept of leadership, the phrase “command and control” is never used within the Agile manifesto. In fact, the document contains neither the word command, nor control, even in a different capacity (Beck *et al.*, 2001). Nevertheless, the idea invoked by the Agile rhetoric that the method entails a shift away from, or is “against command and control”, is a pervasive, recurring notion within the Agile literature (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 38; Medinilla, 2012, pp. 57-58; Sutherland, 2014) and the accounts analysed, as suggested by the Agile rhetoric of “Agile against command and control”. Most often in these instances there is some recourse to other features of Agile rhetoric, such as self-organisation or some variety of leadership, to offer a practicable vision of the greener grass towards which the organisation moves. This shift is reflected in the practical mediation “Agile redistributing control”. However, this thesis argues that part of what is obscured by the vague allusions to self-organisation and leadership, especially servant leadership, is the ongoing role of managerial power and the exercise of control in Agile. Hodgson and Briand, among others, have identified this “persistence of power hierarchies within and around the project team” (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 321-322; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017, pp. 8-9), but this work goes further by investigating the ways in which these hierarchies are explained away and sustained at a discursive level.

This continuation of hierarchy is in defiance of the rhetoric of more optimistic practitioners who look to frame Agile as being a shift from “command and control” to a more palatable model of “servant leadership”, where direction is provided in “coach style” (ER17, p. 7; ER27, p. 4; ER30, p. 5-6). Such contradictory experiences are reflected in the findings through the category “The Dark Art of Control”. The title of this category speaks to the uncomfortable relationship which is established with notions of control through the experience reports. This is further reflected in the manifestations grouped under this category, “fraught relationship with control” and also “controlled Agile implementation”. The former speaks to the ambiguous characterisation of control as legitimated or delegitimated in the accounts analysed, while the latter grouped those instances where the Agile implementation was framed by participants as being “controlled” in some manner or another (ER3, p. 1; ER7, p. 5; ER14, pp. 2-3).

The Agile rhetoric of “Agile against command and control” is demonstrated clearly by authors like Alan Padula who feel that a context is “not truly Agile” if there is “command and control culture” in operation (ER25, p. 2). However, there is complexity here as always; in contrast, the practical mediation of “Agile redistributing control” points to the recognition among participants that this move may be a shift in locus, rather than an outright rejection. Other accounts analysed, and indeed some Agile literature, paint a more ambiguous picture; the shift is often rather one in method of control and intensity of command at best (Appelo, 2011, pp. 152-158; Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 318-322). Notable examples here are the “dictatorial” Agile rollout in the UK government (ER32, p. 5), but also consider similarly the account provided by Chris Murman of a top-down implementation of the method

(ER23, p. 1) or Jochems and Rodgers and their narrative around a context where staff were “forced by management to use Agile” (ER16, p. 1).

There is a growing body of Agile literature which establishes a more developed and reflective view of organisational practices associated with the method. This research shows a recognition that such “forced” Agile contexts can become places where the pitfalls and potentially binding nature of normative systems go undiscussed (Whitworth, 2008, p. 435), while “leadership” figures can act as enforcers of the chosen orthodoxy, as much as facilitators (Medinilla, 2012, p. 60; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017, pp. 4-8). The former aspect will be the focus of the remainder of this section, while the latter will be explored more fully in the following section focused on the purpose of new Agile roles.

It would be fallacious to suggest that practitioners do not see the ongoing role of managerial control in their contexts (ER2, p. 7; ER4, p. 365); many authors in the literature also mirror as unproblematic the idea from the experience reports that this push against control is a bounded phenomenon, akin to and a component of the previously discussed “bounded authority” ascribed to organisational members in some of the accounts (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 122-123; Medinilla, 2012, p. 60). However, the findings support more reflective and critical literature in suggesting that this acknowledgment sits atop a deeper and underexplored reliance on normative pressures akin to concertive control (Annosi *et al.*, 2016; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2013, p. 425; Whitworth, 2008, p. 435). This argument, codified through the delegitimated aspect “Agile requires concertive control”, is demonstrated in the findings through a range of manifestations. This includes “controlled Agile

implementation” and “coach-as-potent-influencer”, as well as the category “push towards employee ownership”.

Within the manifestations and categories discussed previously, it is those excerpts which point towards the normative control of employees very nature, through managerially defined notions of “Agile mindset” (ER8, p. 3; ER17, p. 3; ER35, p. 4), or which suggest a substantial and concealed process of social influence conducted towards organisational ends (ER8, p. 6; ER13, pp. 1-2), that give rise to this position. Pursuing one participants metaphor, this concern reflects the idea that the coaches and such act in the role of writer, director and designer of the change production, leaving the staff as agential actors at best, whose task is to fit into this context and “bring themselves into the full play” (ER31, p. 6). In other words, staff who are subjected to Agile are pressured to fit into a new organisational order which presents no viable alternative, as the excerpts from the likes of Jeff Howey, Caleb Brown or Nick Tune, with their scathing criticisms of disobedient “apathetic” teams, suggests (ER3, p. 1; ER13, pp. 6-7; ER32, p. 2).

To summarise, this study has provided additional insight into the way that command and control are discussed by Agile practitioners. It speaks to the pressure and tension that was seen to emerge through the accounts analysed between the ostensible rejection of managerial power and the continued influence of managerial actors and thought. This tension is embodied in the contradiction between the Agile rhetoric and the delegitimated aspect presented in the depth grammar for the concept “command and control”; consider together the notion that talk positions “Agile against command and control” and that the accounts showed “Agile requires concertive control”. All of this is central to the argument presented in this thesis; the

controlled nature of Agile contexts is achievable through the continued power of managerial actors. As several other sub-sections establish, the retention of this power is rationalised primarily through concepts like leadership. The following sub-section continues this discussion of managerial actors in Agile.

6.2.5 Purpose of Agile Roles

Concept	Surveyable Representation		Depth Grammar		
	Category	Manifestation	Agile Rhetoric	Practical mediation	Delegitimated Aspect
Purpose of Agile Roles	Tension in the Role of Coach	Coach-as-support Coach-as-potent-influencer	Agile “leader” as support	Agile “leader” as influencer	Agile “leader” as enforcer

Table 18 - Representation of Depth Grammar for Purpose of Agile Roles

The manifesto authors may have described themselves as “organizational anarchists”, but they still recognise the authority of managers and merely ask that they “trust their staff” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp. 28, 31). Managerial roles, as discussed above, are intended to persist through the implementation of Agile methodologies (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 31; Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 40-41). However, they emerge reconceptualised; these facilitators, the new Agile “leadership” figures like scrum master, coach or servant project managers, are positioned as supports in the Agile literature (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 37; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2011, p. 74; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7). This Agile rhetoric of “Agile ‘leader’ as support” was in evidence throughout the experience reports. However, there was also a widespread acceptance shown in the findings that the purpose of these actors is to “support” organisational members towards a managerially sanctioned value system, thus the practical mediation in the grammar of “Agile ‘leader’ as influencer”.

The delegitimated aspect of this concept, “Agile ‘leader’ as enforcer”, points to the underdiscussed shadow of the strong influence identified above; the reliance that the practitioner-authors, many of them coaches, demonstrate on power to control a space of legitimacy and sustain Agile in their various contexts. Such issues are identified elsewhere in Agile literature, albeit this awareness could be described as nascent given the lack of mainstream research discussing them (Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017; Whitworth, 2008). This split role as a support and as a powerful advocate for Agile was refracted from the accounts through the category “tension in the role of coach”. In this instance, the coach represents a stand-in for all of the new Agile roles identified above, who were each held to similar principles of leadership and support in the experience reports and the Agile literature.

Within the aforementioned category there are two manifestations through which the split in the purpose of these new roles was reflected. The label “coach-as-support” saw the collation of those excerpts where the coaches were working to help a team towards their own goals, for example Heidi Helfand after she established herself as a “support on the side” when acting as scrum master (ER11, p. 5). Another example of this behaviour which was noted in the analysis was when Wenzel and Fewell responded to resistance and non-participation within General Electric by framing it as legitimate self-organisation (ER34, p. 5). The opposing manifestation, “coach-as-potent-influencer”, grouped those moments where these actors served to shape the organisation quite dramatically, as with Ni Sun and their metaphor of “the backstage person” who acts as writer, designer and director (ER31, p. 6). Here, one might also think of Fry and Greene, with their talk of “changing every team at the same time” in a process of “decisive action” (ER7, pp. 1-2). It is these excerpts especially which were influential in the formation of the delegitimated aspect “Agile ‘leader’ as enforcer”.

What is less discussed, though not totally unacknowledged, is the way that the work of these new figures can morph from being a process of influence to one of more outright policing (Appelo, 2011, p. 198; Medinilla, 2012, p. 60). The use of the term “policing” here is influenced by the Agile literature, but the term does appear in a nominal group employed by Heidi Helfand to describe her over-strong enforcement of Agile practices as a scrum master (ER11, p. 1). A more comprehensive admission of such an arrangement comes from Nick Tune, who talks in positive language about the control which the “dictatorial” Government Digital Service exercised to mandate Agility in state IT projects (ER32, p. 2). Sean Dunn noted the pressures on coaches that emanate from the executive level to “fix” teams and this is seen less in terms of supporting them through their problems, but rather bringing the team in line with managerial expectations (ER6, p. 4).

The influence which these new “leadership” actors have on the process of normative governance (ER7, p. 1-2; ER8, p. 5-6; ER13, p. 6) and on the formation of their colleagues work “mindset” (ER8, p. 3; ER12, pp. 4-5; ER35, p. 4) is argued to be central to the establishment and maintenance of control in these contexts (Barker, 1993, pp. 425-434; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017, pp. 4-8; Thomson and Vidgen, 2013, pp. 159-161). This contrasts with the rhetoric, where these actors are positioned as supportive figures, embodying values of servant leadership, who are dedicated to helping the team. This characterisation holds strong in the Agile literature, both foundational texts and peer-reviewed papers (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 37; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2011, p. 74; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7), and also the experience reports analysed (ER13, p. 5; ER17, p. 7; ER30, p. 2).

There is a point to be made here about the contrast between the characterisation and actions required of figures such as Agile coaches. In essence, this is the contrast between the Agile rhetoric presented, “Agile ‘leader’ as support”, and the delegitimated aspect, “Agile ‘leader’ as enforcer”. This argument around discontinuity connects back to the earlier discussions of leadership and the claim that aspects of this model act as a camouflage for the ongoing impact of power in these context (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 49-53; Macfarlane, 2014; Reed, 2016). These new “leadership” figures are not exempt from such a role, and their impact as enforcers and shapers of the normative value system key to Agile goes underexamined in the literature (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 318-322).

Instead, problematic aspects of the role are othered as being “managerial” or “dictatorial” (ER8, p. 4; ER10, p. 5; ER22, p. 6), while the idealised “Coach-as-support” is framed as the legitimated “leadership” figure (Appelo, 2011, pp. 156-158; Blom and Alvesson, 2015, pp. 480-481; Medinilla, 2012, p. 64). Such positioning work was noted through many exemplars such as “manager to coach”, “calls for servant leadership”, “leadership conditional for Agility” and “strong emphasis on support tasks”. This tendency was also in ample evidence through section 5.2.3, where leadership was shown to be framed as the ideal for these practitioners in the experience reports. It is also reflected in the formation of the depth grammar, where “coach as enforcer” is presented as the delegitimated aspect of the concept “purpose of Agile roles”.

Considering the research questions again, the preceding discussions have served to further chart out a space of recognisably “Agile” ways of speaking about organisational matters. In particular, the focus here was on unpicking the role of new Agile actors, such as Scrum Masters and Agile coaches. It has been argued that these figures have

two faces within the organisation. On the one hand, these actors are positioned as, and can often play the role of, supportive aid to the teams in question. Yet one must not underemphasise the impact that these actors are intended to have as potent advocates for executive goals, especially in terms of their role in the shaping of employees through the deployment of concepts like the “Agile mindset”. The concealment or downplaying of this role, and the impact that this has, will be further explored through supporting literature in the following chapter.

6.2.6 Drivers of Agile

Concept	Surveyable Representation		Depth Grammar		
	Category	Manifestation	Agile Rhetoric	Practical mediation	Delegitimated Aspect
Drivers of Agile	Enforcing Politicized Orthodoxy	Agile as Political Agile Emphasises Proselytic Orthodoxy	Agile as business sense	Agile as common sense	Agile as “right”

Table 19 - Representation of Depth Grammar for Drivers of Agile

A growing executive enthusiasm for Agile is noted by Denning, an academic and Agile practitioner, who remarks on the warming attitudes towards Agile in the “C-suite” as a somewhat recent phenomenon (2016, p. 10). This executive enthusiasm, notable in the experience reports also, is reflected in the depth grammar through the Agile rhetoric “Agile as business sense”. This driver of Agile is a clear motivator of the Agile manifesto also, though this document strays towards the practical mediation “Agile as common sense” in the casual tone of universal benefit the document adopts. That the authors talk about “uncovering better ways” of doing work certainly suggests that they see Agile methodologies as both “business sense” and “common sense” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 29). However, they take pains to emphasise that they use the word “uncovering” to explicitly imply “the Alliance members don’t have all the answers”,

thus edging away from the extreme of framing “Agile as ‘right’” (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 29).

The drive many Agile practitioners demonstrate in advocating for the method gave rise to the manifestation “Agile Emphasises Proselytic Orthodoxy”. The notion of proselytic orthodoxy points to those aspects of Agile rhetoric which call for firm belief in the method and encourage practitioners to vigorously advocate for its adoption, becoming outspoken “evangelists” (ER13, p. 7; ER16, p. 5; ER32, pp. 2-4). Brown, whose experience report will be discussed shortly in this sub-section, is exemplary of the Agile true believer; he struggles to grasp why anybody would not want to use Agile and goes as far as to describe the methodology as “congenital” (ER3, p. 1).

However, as the category “Enforcing Politicized Orthodoxy” suggests, the strong drive identified above is easily co-opted by managerial actors through a political process which shapes the form of “Agile” that is to be proselytized. The discussion of politics serves to primarily highlight the intra-organisational impact of Agile and the way that these concepts are employed to shape a new space of legitimacy within the organisation which benefits the firm (ER6, p. 6; ER20, p. 23; ER30, p. 3). The increasing executive appetite for Agile was a key frustration identified by the former coach, Sean Dunn, who felt that this change was central to the increasingly politicised role of coaches as enforcers of a managerially determined, normative system (ER6, pp. 1-2). The delegitimated aspect “Agile as ‘right’” serves to highlight the potent combination of these two trends, which results in the vigorous drive for an expanding orthodoxy of practice becoming politicised and enshrined as the “right way” by powerful interests in the organisation (ER6, pp. 3-6; ER23, p. 1; ER32, p. 5).

Interference and influence on behalf of the organisation was evident through the reports analysed, as was reflected primarily through the manifestation “Agile as political”, as well as some of the coded excerpts grouped under “coach as potent influencer”. Think here of cases like those highlighted above, or that of Chris Murman who was brought on as an undercover Agile transformation agent at the behest of management (ER23, p. 1). These criticisms are not isolated to the experience reports, with some authors in the academic Agile literature also problematising the interference of managerial figures in the emergence of Agile practices along these lines (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 309, 318-322).

Denning notes that such “top-down” implementations of Agile are seen as problematic because “change that is imposed is inherently contrary to the culture of agility” (2016, p. 13). However, they nevertheless persist. Such a position aligns with the rhetoric of practitioners in the reports; this aspect of the reports was already discussed as being reflected in the manifestation “Fraught Relationship with Control”. This political contingency on the basis of powerful actors’ interests, in contradiction with Agile rhetoric, is a core aspect of this thesis’s argument around the camouflaging role of leadership concepts. The political process is connected to managerial actors in manifestations such as “Coach-as-potent-influencer” and “Degrees of Autonomy”, but this connection is also reflected in the depth grammar for the concepts “Change”, “Leadership Concepts” and “Purpose of Agile Roles”.

There is diversity in the modes of expression employed through the experience reports with regards to the way that Agile was seen as the “common sense” solution; there is the clear message that Agile makes business sense and will deliver improved outcomes (ER14, p. 2; ER20, p. 22), but there is also an underlying assertion that Agile

is common-sense and thus almost self-evident (ER3, p. 1; ER11, p. 1; ER26, p. 4). This latter element of Agile rhetoric is mainly captured under the manifestation “Agile emphasises proselytic orthodoxy”, while the former is seen as being a contributing factor in the aforementioned political pressures. Such a spread of perspectives was represented through the depth grammar presented above through the rhetoric/mediation/delegitimated aspect labels of “Agile as business sense”, “Agile as common sense” and “Agile as ‘right’”.

This spread was observed also in the literature, with most of the academic authors and core texts staying mainly towards the legitimated end, expressing Agile as being something which is either contextually sensible for firms (Abrahamsson, Conboy and Wang, 2009, pp. 281-284), or something which is common-sense to some extent and self-evident in its superiority (Denning, 2016, pp. 10-12; Sutherland, 2014). At one end of this spectrum is the rhetoric of the manifesto, where the authors frame their contribution as “uncovering better ways of developing software”, suggesting this level of business or perhaps common sense (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 29). However, it has already been noted that these authors were circumspect about the universal superiority of any particular approach (*ibid.*, p. 29).

Beyond the manifesto, a similar tendency prevails and tales of astounding improvements in performance form a key part of the rhetoric in advocating for change (Denning, 2016, p. 10). Indeed, the full title of Jeff Sutherland’s book on Scrum is “*Scrum: The art of doing twice the work in half the time*” (Sutherland, 2014). Laurie Williams, when describing the principles of the manifesto, calls these statements “underlying truths that do not change over time or space” and this characterisation can be thought of as moving further towards the notion that Agile is not just

common-sense, it is naturally “right” (Williams, 2010, p. 6). Returning to the argumentation from findings, this parallel is seen as relevant as it suggests the rhetoric of practitioners in these accounts around these issues was more a consistent representation of the norm than a notable outlier.

There are a few other peer reviewed scholars, outside of those already highlighted in the analysis of the experience reports, who come to frame aspects of Agile as natural or are perceived as extreme in their position even by other Agile researchers.

Consider, for example, the way that Appelo discusses self-organisation as “the default behavior of dynamic systems”, in which he includes both biological phenomena and also software development (2011, p. 100). Hoda, Noble and Marshall also highlight this tendency towards dogmatism among Agile practitioners, which was noted by their study participants as being a barrier to their own attempts at self-organisation (2013, p. 439).

As has been stated several times, dogmatism such as that discussed above is not isolated to the literature, but rather a part of many of the reports also. One need only consider the words of Brown, for example, when discussing those who “can’t be helped” and must be “de-conditioned” to accept their “congenital Agility” (ER3, p. 1). These kinds of appeal to nature characterise the extreme end of the depth grammar around justifications for Agile, where the focus is not on how productive or sensible it is, but rather how it is the norm or “right” in some other, deeper way. This belief, in the literature as well as in the reports, gives rise to a widespread encouragement of a form of demi-religious proselytism, where Agile practitioners are encouraged to be evangelists who convert unbelievers (Harding and Read, 2017, p. 10; Martin *et al.*, 2006, p. 221; Medinilla, 2012, p. v). This tendency was reflected in the reports and

subsequently gave rise to the manifestation “agile emphasises proselytic orthodoxy”, which was seen as a suitable label to refract this strong emphasis on converting others to practices perceived as more proper (ER3, p. 4; ER26, p. 4; ER32, p. 5).

Rationalisation of the methodology was not grounded, in either the reports analysed or the literature, purely in the drive which practitioners and “true believers” display in their evangelical efforts. Rather, the influence of management desire for the outstanding improvements discussed above means that many implementations of the method are now driven from the top down. The report from Rosenbaugh and Adrian is one demonstration of this, where Agile was pushed to the organisational level by an executive team who were taken by the efficiency gains of the team in the account (ER30, p. 1). Consider also the similar story behind Agile at BT (ER20, p. 23), or the spread of Agile through Vistaprint in response to the feeling that certain departments can’t “keep up” (ER13, p. 1; ER15, p. 1). In other words, there was balance between the impact of proselytism and of executive enthusiasm for Agile. Ultimately, though, each aspect contributes significantly to the positioning of a contingently variable notion of Agility as a measuring stick employed to mark out a space of legitimacy within the firm. In this way, the delegitimated aspect of the depth grammar comes to the fore and Agile ceases to be merely “common sense” or even “business sense”, rather it is simply “right”.

This section has argued for the perceived drivers for Agile as being relatable to both political and proselytic purposes. This has relevance to the research questions in rounding out the framework developed around the employment of organisational concepts and legitimated language in Agile contexts. Agile is frequently seen in the accounts being driven from the top down, for reasons of efficiency and improved

performance (ER14, p. 2; ER20, p. 23; ER30, p. 1) and this is identified as a growing trend by Agile scholars also (Denning, 2016; Papatheocharous and Andreou, 2014, pp. 856-857). Certainly, there is still a strong emphasis on the sort of bottom-up implementation which stems from strong belief among staff in the method. However, this emphasis now exists in tandem with, indeed sometimes intertwined with, a specifically managerial desire for particular kinds of change outputs; that is to say a more efficient and more controlled business environment (Papatheocharous and Andreou, 2014, pp. 863-865). The preceding sub-section has served to unpack this phenomenon further and to frame this political process as leveraging the orthodoxy of Agile practitioners, as was intended by the fusion of these two in the category “enforcing politicised orthodoxy”.

6.3 Implications for Further Discussion

Looking back again to the research questions, these sections have served to complete the development of a framework which charts out, through an interpretivist logic, a way of representing the organisational talk of Agile practitioners. This has served to satisfy the first two questions set. Once more, the aims here were as follows: to describe how organisational work was discussed in the context of Agile, including an exploration of the perceived key focal points; to discuss how these research findings corresponded to the Agile literature; as well as to establish whether “leadership” concepts are discussed or seen as important to Agile practice; and, if so, which intertextual touchstones were drawn upon for discursive resources. A framework was developed which answers these questions (Table 13) and the preceding sub-sections serve in large part to argue for this framework.

However, this act of description has also suggested various underexplored, yet problematic, blind spots in the Agile community. These can be said to be induced partially by the valorising rhetoric of the community itself, especially in the work of those “bewitched” by the method (Knights and McCabe, 2000b, p. 1495). The issues being discussed here are those already highlighted in the preceding sections. To articulate them plainly here, the issues which require further exploration are the role which leadership concepts play in obscuring the ongoing impact of power, the moves to sustain control of employees very selves through concepts like the Agile mindset and self-organisation, and the troubling combination of politics and strong orthodoxy in the Agile community which can empower or constitute a firmly pro-organisational normative system.

Put bluntly, the implications of the above issues taken together are that a politically contingent, identifiably leaderist system of “Agile” can be enshrined as “right” and evangelized throughout the organisation aggressively to the exclusion of alternatives. The actors who engage in such a process are justified and empowered by the system they propagate, while their influence is downplayed, and their role valorised by the rhetoric of the methodology. This was reflected in the arguments laid out previously around the impact of new leadership roles, the potentially political nature of Agile implementation and the concealment of power through discourses of leadership and self-organisation. The powerful, through the discourses of leadership and even self-organisation become “heroic saviours”, at least in the eyes of those who believe or invest in the change (ER32, p. 5). The following second discussion chapter serves to further argue the significance of the preceding points, relying on a range of supporting literature based around ideology (Diefenbach, 2007; Van den Broek, 2004; Willmott, 1993), critical leadership (Alvesson, 2019; Blom and Alvesson, 2015;

Learmonth and Morrell, 2019), “leaderism” (Bresnen *et al.*, 2015; Martin *et al.*, 2015; O’Reilly and Reed, 2011) and teamwork (Knights and McCabe, 2003; Musson and Duberley, 2007; Proença, 2010).

Chapter 7: Implications from Depth Grammar

7.1 Introduction

The following chapter builds on the preceding work to serve as a second discussion chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the main argument which emerged in this thesis; what was observed in the process of this research was not just the role which concepts of leadership played directly in disguising the continued operation of power in Agile contexts, but that there was a broader issue around what was made unsayable about organising by these and other related parts of the Agile rhetoric. In other words, returning to the Wittgensteinian foundations of the project, these discussion chapters will explore those events in the account which are liminal to, or indeed violated a perceived legitimated grammar suggested by the analysis of participants texts (Table 13).

The argument presented in section 6.2 shows the practical significance of the thesis for those participating in Agile. The argument is articulated by leveraging research around the matters of self-organisation, leadership and organisational reform in the context of comparable programmes of neo-bureaucratic control (Martin *et al.*, 2015; O'Reilly and Reed, 2010; Reed, 2016). In a way, then, this chapter completes the critically reflective inquiry by providing a fuller exploration of the proverbial flies in Agile's supposedly appealing, democratic soup. Engaging in such a process of critical open investigation is vital to fulfilling the aims of the third research question, in speaking to the issues that arose around the concepts of organisation highlighted and challenging the current halo around Agile (Knights and McCabe, 2000b, p. 1487). These discussions, then, foreground empirical challenges to, rather than just the grey

areas in, what one could call Agile’s “Santa’s workshop” or “Hollywood/Disneyland” template (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 3-5; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 46).

The later elements in this chapter are intended to strike a more considerate and reflective tone. Section 6.3 is dedicated to articulating a balanced criticism of advocating for Agile practices. This balanced criticism is intended to function as a warning to practitioners to be mindful of the ways in which they look to achieve Agility and the implications of both their rhetoric and their actions. Section 6.4 offers a reflection on the research itself, noting the limitations of power as conceptualised here and exploring the space for further investigation into the role of resistance in Agile contexts (Knights and McCabe, 2000b; McCabe, Ciuk and Gilbert, 2019; Thomas and Davies, 2005). This section also discusses, in part 6.4.2, the contributions of a Wittgensteinian approach to the research. This second discussion chapter then closes with a concluding section before the thesis moves towards an overall conclusion chapter.

7.2 Leadership in Agile teams: Power Camouflaged

It was noted earlier that core ideas associated with Agile, such as autonomy and self-organisation, as well as peripheral concepts which are transplanted into the discourse, such as servant leadership, serve an important purpose as an answer to the ambiguity which plagues the discourse as the result of “voids” in transitional rhetoric. This kind of void, as described by scholars of leadership, “emerges when one aspect of one discourse is not reflected in the other” (Ekman, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2018, pp. 316-317). This tension can be seen acting strongly to confound the role of coach, for example, contributing significantly to the tensions noted in the relevant category

between the drive to support the team towards Agile and the pressure to manage teams' practices in line with organisationally defined Agile principles.

Picking up where section 5.3 leaves off, the following discussion explores the camouflage and the camouflaged; the proceeding section will argue for the role which notions of leadership were perceived to play in ameliorating this void, camouflaging the ongoing operation and complex impact of power in the context of Agile methodologies. In contradiction to the Agile literature and rhetoric around self-organisation and servant leadership (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 37; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2011, p. 74; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7), this power was seen as largely resting in the hands of the same actors who were powerful before the shift to Agile. It almost goes without saying that this means executives and managerial figures (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, p. 309; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211); the discourse of leadership doesn't change who is in a position of power, rather it changes how that power is represented within the organisation (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998, pp. 466-467). Returning to the findings, these are the executive figures who shape the politicised orthodoxy identified in the category of the same name (Table 13). As an aspect which points to the coaches' roles as enforcers of this politicised orthodoxy, part of what is camouflaged is the influence wielded by these figures. Such a situation was reflected in the opposing manifestations grouped under the category "tension in the role of coach".

The term "camouflage" is employed here to suggest an idea of fitness for a specific organisational climate, in other words a good degree of relation to the space of legitimated expression within a firm (Macfarlane, 2014; O'Reilly and Reed, 2010; 2011). With disguise, one could say there isn't necessarily an implied context for suitability;

a false moustache might cut it just as well in the jungle as tundra. However, camouflage implies a degree of environmental or target specificity. Peter Forbes, in his work exploring mimicry and camouflage describes the latter as “the resemblance that one life-form has either to another or to a part of the environment” (2011, p. 4). Even the octopus, with its adaptive camouflage, must mimic the surroundings if it wishes to evade detection; one would expect that the uniform for a space force should similarly require some innovation beyond the conventionally available olive-beige patterns. In this way, the specific notions which obscure the operation of power in these contexts are fitted to the prevailing preferences, or ideological landscape, of the Agile community (Appelo, 2011, pp. 156-158; Medinilla, 2012, p. 64). In this fashion, one can understand the prevalence of concepts like servant leadership, and leadership more generally, as being a palatable mediation of the manager (ER₁, pp. 1-3; ER₁₀, pp. 3-5; ER₈, p. 8).

The following section is comprised of three parts. Sub-section 6.2.1 presents the argument that variously presented notions of leadership serve as a camouflage for the ongoing operations of power in Agile contexts. This point has been discussed throughout this chapter, but it is here that the argument is brought together. The following sub-section, 6.2.2, is a smaller element intended to introduce the work around leaderism which was influential as a sensitizing lens (Thornberg, 2012) and which highlighted the ongoing role of power and central control in “post-bureaucratic” contexts (O’Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1080). The final sub-section, 6.2.3, looks to discuss that which was perceived to be concealed. This sub-section argues that a large part of what the notion of “servant leadership”, indeed “leadership” more generally, serves to cover up is the continued influence of positional power in this

process of Agile self-organisation (Barker, 1993; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2013, p. 425; Whitworth, 2008, p. 435).

7.2.1 Arguing for Leadership's Role (and Leadership Roles) as

Camouflage

The delegitimated aspect of “Leadership Concepts” is “(Servant) Leadership as camouflage”. It is argued here that there were two key avenues of impact where leadership functioned as a camouflage in the accounts analysed; the concept of “Servant leadership” and also the more general leadership roles previously discussed. This was shown in the depth grammar through the use of brackets around the term servant in “(Servant) Leadership as camouflage” and the contrast between the legitimated aspect “Agile ‘leader’ as support” and the delegitimated aspect “Agile ‘leader’ as enforcer. To a lesser extent, these elements were also reflected in the practical mediations associated with the relevant concepts. This sub-section will proceed by first discussing the role that leadership plays in filling voids between Agile and current organisational models, especially as a palatable alternative for managers. The focus then shifts on to the impact of the halo around leadership, or the perception that this concept is benign and self-evidently preferable to management. Finally, there is an effort to consider the practical impact of leadership concepts as discussed by Agile practitioners in the face of these benign representations with the aim of showing the divergence.

As has been argued through the depth grammar, the discourse in the experience reports, and the Agile literature, emphasises a clear and distinct shift in the ideals which govern managerial action and power. As the findings reported, practitioners framed this change as “from command and control to leadership” or “managers now

used servant leadership”. This is visible in the depth grammar through the “Agile rhetoric” for concepts such as “leadership concepts” and “command and control”. The explicit linkage between old and new concepts can be thought of as a reflection of Agile as something akin to a “hybrid culture”; a fusion which develops “through confirmation, re-formulation and rejection of discursive influences” (Crevani *et al.*, 2015, p. 148). This emergence of an understanding which was a compromise based around the motivated notions of leadership in Agile is remarked upon in some of the more reflective Agile research (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 321-322). Dissenting opinions captured under categories like “Agile creates dramatic change” and especially those exemplars associated with “fraught relationship with control” showed an awareness of this negotiation among practitioners. This awareness is reflected in the depth grammar through many of the practical mediations, but namely in “contextually mediated change”.

The argument presented here, is that the notions of “leadership” are employed to articulate the expected shift in responsibilities, but also to mediate tensions between Agile and whatever managerial model came before it (Ekman, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2018, p. 313; O’Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1095). It is further argued that these notions, while more palatable for managerial figures themselves, make it harder to frame effective critique of managerial action in an Agile context (Blom and Alvesson, 2015, p. 486; Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998, pp. 466-467; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 102). This sense was conveyed in the depth grammar by the marginalisation of such remarks about the camouflaging into a perceived space of delegitimation.

Central to the aforementioned argument about the increased challenge facing effective critique is the loaded ambiguity of these more palatable notions used to articulate the shift in managerial obligations. Other researchers in critical leadership studies have noted that anything that is seen as good can be framed as an aspect of “leadership”, while those more problematic aspects of the role are discounted as a vestige of some now delegitimated “management” (Blom and Alvesson, 2015, p. 485). Such practices were in evidence throughout the reports, giving rise to the Agile rhetoric label “(Servant) Leadership as key” and reflected in the manifestations “Agile transforming responsibilities”, “Agile Looks for Servant Leadership” and “New Agile ‘Leadership’ Roles”. Each of these manifestations speak in their own way to the replacement of “management” sentiments with “leadership” ones. This could be as explicit as Kilby in his talk about there being no middle management in his company, only servant leaders (ER18, p. 8). The complex negotiation that is necessitated by the above fusion of discursive influences is papered over by the prevailing discourses around leadership in these contexts. As Learmonth and Morrell phrase it, “the routine, readymade uses of ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ are redrawing our picture of relations at work” (2019, p. 4).

It might be said that a part of the benign re-presentation of managerial figures in the Agile rhetoric is in service of an effort on the part of practitioners who employ these concepts to “seduce” these managerial figures into engaging in more open, emancipatory modes of work (Ford and Harding, 2007, pp. 486-488). Exposure to material like that promoted by the Agile practitioners in these reports, Ford and Harding argue, could result in managerial figures who are genuinely invested in making a difference:

In enacting the role of the emotionally in-touch, open leader they may also be effecting more subtle managerial controls over other employees. However, equipping managers with the language of an organization that should care suggests a number of other possible outcomes. Some may have seen different possibilities of being. They may be attracted to the concept of the caring organization which has been opened up for them.

Ford and Harding, 2007, pp. 487-488

Consider the change of heart which Heidi Helfand described as she began to see the error of her ways as a command and control enforcer of Agile (ER11, p. 3-4). This shift in orientation represents a realisation of the legitimated rhetoric around authority figures which is set out in the depth grammar, namely those aspects which regulate the activities of executive actors, especially the new Agile leadership figures. In short, it is fair to say that at least some of the accounts suggested a genuine change in managerial attitudes towards employees in the context firms and this is something which will be further addressed when discussion shifts towards more sympathetic reflection. Despite the potential positive impact of these new legitimating concepts, others would argue that the transplanted ideas serve to valorise executive actors and to defang critique (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 40-41). Returning to the depth grammar, this concept of defanged critique was a significant factor in the space of legitimacy afforded around ideas of leadership and leadership figures. A lack of complexity or space for negativity in the language of “servant leadership” makes it hard to express the role these actors or processes may actually play (2015, p. 487). Therefore, as is reflected in the depth grammar provided (Table 13), the possibility for negative vocabulary in relation to Agile is only really contained at the margins, in a

delegitimated space. It was common enough to question whether someone is a servant leader, such as when Miller at National Geographic points out that executives “cling to ‘command and control’ management” and “the concept of servant leadership is not yet internalized” by her team (ER21, p. 3). One would be hard pressed to find excerpts where this servant leadership itself is questioned. Anything undesirable is a vestige of management or command and control (ER10, p. 3; ER11, p. 2; ER21, p. 3).

The research conducted by Agile scholars into participants experiences of these leadership notions shows a questionable practical impact; a notable absence in practice, even (Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, p. 427). This suggests that the term “servant leadership” is not the most effective way to describe how these Agile teams were actually managed, though it was an aspiration in these contexts (Alvesson and Jonsson, 2016, pp. 9-10). The arguments presented through this project confirm these findings in a way, contributing further evidence to suggest that “servant leadership” is a rhetorical device firstly, rather than a practically impactful organising concept in most Agile contexts. More often, the reports reflected leadership figures who were torn between the pressure to sustain or increase adherence to the organisationally sanctioned vision of Agile and the rhetorical aim to be a supportive figure, as was suggested by the category “Tension in the role of coach”. This can arise from over-strong Agile orthodoxy (ER11, p. 2), as well as commercial pressures from the top down (ER6, p. 5; ER32). Concerningly, this aligns with Learmonth and Morrell’s cynical assertions on the topic:

terms like servanthood, compassion and empathy are usually dead- ends. They are just too seductive and easy to signal, but in reality very, very hard to do, especially in light of the commercial and other pressures bosses are under.

Even in those reports which exclusively reflected the legitimated rhetoric set out in the depth grammar, the events related in these accounts undermine the discourse that these figures are simply “servant leaders” who support the team members autonomy. Serena, the transformational figure at the centre of a discussed shift in organisational practices at Vistaprint, is one such example. She is another Agile practitioner who takes pains to emphasise that “the role of manager as they knew it was gone” and that these figures had to “become servant leaders and coaches” (ER9, p. 4). Serena, as the story is told, “reinvented the contact centre experience at Vistaprint” (ER9, p. 2). There is a paradoxical emphasis on the actions of this leader, rather than the staff who presumably also facilitated this shift; the focus is clearly on the actions of the “natural servant leader” Serena Godfrey. This account could just as well have focused on the actions of those team members who have stepped up to the plate when given the opportunity. Instead, the account is very much oriented around the “leader” who facilitated the change. One might call this a damning example of how these terms “pre-package the world in ways that flatter bosses and flatten workers” (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 133).

Perhaps Serena was actually vital to the process; certainly in reading the account it is apparent that she had to push against normative cultural and organisational pressures to manage her department in the usual manner and she has clearly advocated for the autonomy of her subordinates (ER9, pp. 2-3). The story woven around Serena, though, strongly echoes Alvesson’s notions of the “Hollywood” and “Disneyland” ideologies which, he argues, drives much leadership discourse (2019, pp. 3-5); here is a textbook example of the virtuous, enlightened “servant leader” who will “transform followers

into much better people... interested in commitment to the leader and organization” (ibid., p. 4). This sentiment was not isolated to the report focusing on Serena and this was captured in the findings through the manifestation “Agile creates dramatic change” and in the depth grammar through aspects such as “Agile is right”, the delegitimated side of the discourse around the drivers for Agile.

There is more literature which can help one to consider this valorising tendency directed towards leadership actors in the experience reports. Drawing on the work of Alvesson and Kärreman, one can easily establish parallels between the “servant leadership” discourse within much of Agile and the notion of “saint-canonization” invoked by these authors to problematise such ideas; talk with a “strong religious, messianic overtone”, where “leaders are power-oriented... only for the good of the organization” (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2016, p. 144). Such a characterisation is deeply reflective of the discourse in several of the empirical accounts, such as Nick Tune’s, where he talks about the “heroic saviours” GDS, who salvaged government IT through their benevolent “dictatorship” (ER32, p. 5). Again, these quotes reflect the valorising tendency contained within the leadership discourse in Agile which is connected to both the characterisation of Agile as a clear and necessary “good”, relating to politicized orthodoxy, and to the presentation of leadership figures as benevolent influencers, an aspect of “coach-as-support”. Of course, as Learmonth and Morrell were highlighted as pointing out previously, the realities of the ongoing need to “manage” can quickly catch up to this discourse of radical change and this is an opinion held by some Agile scholars also (Bossavit and Gaillot, 2004; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017, pp. 4-8).

To recap, so far it has been argued that servant leadership serves to camouflage the influence which coaches and scrum masters, as well as their executive sponsors, continue to wield. The notion does this by providing rationalisations for the level of control they retain, such as with the idea of “saint-canonization” and by the elimination of negative vocabulary, apart from by pointing back to previous notions like “management” as the problematic source of delegitimated practices. This argument contributes to and advances the discussion on the impact of servant leadership on the lived experience of Agile practitioners by suggesting ways that this notion can actually work against these actors (Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, p. 427).

7.2.2 Leaderism and Contributions to Agile Organisational Research

The findings, thorough the Agile rhetoric “(Servant) Leadership as key” and “Agile ‘leader’ as support”, showed that concepts of leadership become the answer to the manager, now perhaps coach or scrum master, who is struggling to understand their new identity in the organisation (Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016, p. 640; Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 32-33; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017, p. 7). The Agile rhetoric of the concepts “self-organisation” and “command and control” point to the simultaneous process whereby the operational staff are sold a similar and compatible rationalisation of the changes to the organisation (Hoda and Murugesan, 2016b, p. 245; Moe, Dingsøy and Dybå, 2008, p. 76). Consider, for example, the manifestations grouped under the category “Agile regulates ‘leadership’ practice”, as well as those under the manifestation “Agile transforming responsibilities”, where one sees the disappearance of managerial roles and there is a subsequent compensatory emphasis on leadership principles.

The vagueness of this Agile rhetoric when applied without reflection, especially such notions as servant leadership or indeed self-organisation, leaves their status as little more than “a way of handling discursive tensions” that arise in the face of whatever change is determined to be desirable (Ekman, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2018, p. 317). This was suggested by the depth grammar and the contrast when comparing the Agile rhetoric and acceptable practical mediations to the delegitimated aspects. The Agile rhetoric across each of the concepts, as presented in table 13, combines to present a prevailing motif in these accounts that managers must go from being the locus of control to acting as a supportive, influential figure; a transition from the iron gauntlet to the silk glove.

As was argued previously in section 5.2.7, however, the power exercised by these managerial actors is not diminished in this role and may even be enhanced. Such shifts were described in the delegitimated aspects of the depth grammar, such as “politically contingent change” and “(Servant) leadership as camouflage”. Indeed, each delegitimated aspect combines to form an interrelated whole where the Agile rhetoric is seen to be subverted for managerialist concerns. Yet this subversion is made hard to challenge by the rhetoric of Agile itself, which provides an ample framework for justification and obfuscation. The notion of servant leadership, then, is proposed as one of these mediations which conceals the tensions between the two states previously discussed by providing a rationalisation for both managers and operational staff as to how this old role is erased and yet reflected in the new organisational environment.

It is worth further engaging with this idea of integrated tensions in the Agile project. O’Reilly and Reed talk about the “internalizing of disparate interests”, along with the

associated “tensions and conflicts”, into a “unitarist logic” (O’Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1095). Similarly, Ekman, Lindgren and Packendorff talk about the “tensions and voids” that emerged between “notions of managerialism and leaderism” (2018, p. 313).

Returning to the case of the coaches, scrum masters and the like, these tensions between managerialism and leaderism are reflected in the split priorities of these figures which were noted in the category “tension in the role of coach”; the competing drives to influence or manage teams practices, yet also to support them in line with the democratic rhetoric of Agile. Consider, in this light, Gratton and West’s candid confession:

The Scrum Master occupied the same hierarchical position in the organization, reporting to a director or VP. These upper managers had not had the same exposure to scrum and still expected scrum masters to manage the work

ER10, p. 3

Moving into the depth grammar, the juxtaposition of legitimated talk about “Agile ‘leader’ as support” stands in stark contrast to the widely downplayed or absent discussion around “Agile ‘leader’ as enforcer”. While the former is happily foregrounded as good “leadership”, the latter is othered as “managerial” action unbefitting of Agile. In this fashion, drawing on the language of Orwell via Willmott, these notions become a way of camouflaging the “doublethink” of a push towards autonomy in “systematically” constrained contexts (1993, p. 515).

7.2.3 Describing Power Camouflaged: Implications of a Subtitle

As much as the camouflage employed, it is important to consider what is camouflaged. The following sub-section will discuss this topic by drawing on research from leaderism and critical leadership studies to articulate a perspective which challenges the established Agile rhetoric and even the practical mediation. This perspective serves to highlight instead the delegitimated aspects of the Agile depth grammar which point to the continued power of managerial actors in Agile, aspects which go under-discussed by practitioners and academics alike. The sub-section will begin by arguing the continued existence of a powerful “central oligarchy” in Agile which is concealed by the discourses of leadership and self-organisation. The focus will then shift to the role of Agile ‘leadership’ figures as both participants in, and protectors of, this group. This topic links forward to an exploration of the disciplinary tools employed by these actors, where it is argued that normative control is sustained through the concept of the “Agile mindset”, enforcing a managerial orthodoxy. Finally, this sub-section will explore that research from Agile which shows a nascent awareness of these issues and suggests points of light within the overall discourse.

Already there has been significant exploration into the mediation of tensions between managerial roles and new Agile positions. Returning to the earlier discussions of “leadership” figures and their influence on team members, these actors have significant power through their impact on the nature of “strong social control” applied to team members (Barker, 1993, p. 426; Kirsch, Ko and Haney, 2010, p. 485; Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, p. 429). These tensions are embodied in the depth grammar through the conflict between the Agile rhetoric of “Agile ‘leader’ as support” and the delegitimated aspect of “Agile ‘leader’ as enforcer”. A further argument of this thesis is

that this discourse that serves to create a positive image around leadership figures also de-emphasises their role and actions in enforcing the categorised politicised orthodoxy.

Drawing on the artful summary of others, it is argued here that the prevailing discourse around organising in Agile “mystifies the superordinate prerogative afforded to elites”, while serving to construct and justify a “quasi-pluralist” hierarchy which aligns “the interests of other agents with those of the elite” (O’Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1092). The Agile community shows a nascent awareness of this risk, as demonstrated by the critiques offered by scholars Hodgson and Briand that leadership notions represent a “seductive veil” for the “pervasive reapplication of traditional and formulaic management” (2013, p. 322). Such a process is seen to take place through the delegitimated aspects of the depth grammar, where “change” becomes “politically contingent change”, where “self-organisation” morphs into “Agile self-organisation” and where the “support” of Agile leaders is seen in the light of “enforcement”.

Reed notes that in arrangements reflecting a leadership driven, self-organisation centric discourse “a central oligarchy unobtrusively retains strategic control over middle- and lower-level elites” (Reed, 2016, p. 207). This control is maintained through a “hierarchically containable horizontal exercise of delegated leadership and influence” (ibid., p. 207), such as those “leadership” processes which are enshrined in Agile. This dynamic of limited delegation but retained control was notably present through the depth grammar, especially in the contrast between the Agile rhetoric and delegitimated aspects of the concepts “change”, “self-organisation”, “command and control” and “purpose of Agile roles”. In addition to the depth grammar, such an

arrangement was reflected in the findings through the categories associated with these concepts. Especially relevant to the discussion of this subversion of democratic ideals are the manifestations “Agile as political”, “Coach-as-potent-influencer”, “controlled Agile implementation” and “increased personal accountability”.

In each of these cases, the legitimated rhetoric points to employee self-determination and autonomy, while the delegitimated aspect speaks to the deeper control which is retained. To exemplify, consider the legitimated aspect of change; this concept is presented in a light which suggests radical overhaul in line with Agile principles and team inclinations, but the observed and undiscussed reality was of politically contingent change shaped and enforced by Agile executive actors. Regardless of the surface layer of emancipatory discourse, the implications of such a system are also that organisational members can be “drawn into a political process” aimed at making and sustaining changes expected by this powerful centre (ibid., p. 208). This political process is essentially the engagement with what was referred to as the “politicized orthodoxy” of Agile in the findings.

The question of who is assigned these type of roles in the first place can be a contentious and challenging issue in itself, with some Agile scholars noting that the distribution of “leadership” is often restricted by and to those who currently have power within the organisation (Chreim, 2015, p. 536). This was certainly the case in many of the accounts analysed, where Agile “leadership” teams were essentially rebranded managerial units, charged with the goal of enacting servant leadership (ER₁, pp. 1-3; ER₁₈, p. 8), or specially hired consultants who were brought on by management to drive Agile adoption (ER₂₃, p. 1; ER₃₁, p. 1). However, even when these figures are not necessarily drawn from the ranks of pre-existing management

their overall purpose is still to contribute to executive control, as was the case with the trained evangelists at Exxon who would “not take no for an answer”, discussed in the account by Rosenbaugh and Adrian (ER30, p. 5) or indeed Barker’s facilitators (Barker, 1993, p. 426).

The accepted discourse in the Agile community is that these figures rely on social influence and principles of servant leadership in order to engage in a benign sort of context-setting and value-generation based around a logic of ostensibly supporting the team and building relationships (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, p. 33; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2013, pp. 422-423; Kirsch, Ko and Haney, 2010, pp. 469-470). The delegitimated shadow of this role, captured by the nominal group “the Agile police”, is that the coaches, project managers and scrum masters who are supposed to act as supports to the team act in the role of enforcer also (Bossavit and Gaillot, 2004; Hodgson and Briand, 2013, p. 321; Lous *et al.*, 2018, p. 18). This has already been discussed extensively in section 5.2.5, but consider again the incident with Jeff Howey and his talk of disobedient little leaguers, as well as the benevolent dictatorship of GDS described by Nick Tune or the forced adoption that Murman writes of, as exemplary of this (ER13, ER23, ER32).

Throughout the reports analysed, there were ample examples of Agile “leadership” figures acting to discipline teams towards specific modes of operation, indeed even specific understandings of concepts or shared mental models. The prime example here might be the repeated admonitions to drive the organisation towards a shared and legitimated “Agile mindset”, a notion which occurs frequently throughout the literature also (Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016, pp. 637-638; Denning, 2016, p. 13; van Waardenburg and van Vliet, 2013, pp. 2165-2166). Captured as a nominal group,

this concept serves as an exemplar which helps to build the manifestation “Agile creates dramatic change”. The “dramatic change” in this case is nothing less than an attempt to shape the very self of the employees, both executive and operational, in question (D’Cruz and Noronha, 2006, pp. 354-360; Knights and McCabe, 2000a, pp. 423-424; Musson and Duberley, 2007, pp. 157-162).

The organisational methods camouflaged in Agile amount to something akin to normative control which serves to discipline employees towards particular modes of being and interaction in organisations (Kraus, Kennergren and von Unge, 2017, pp. 42-44), with the pervasive nominal group “Agile mindset” perhaps being the most direct demonstration of this drive. Such sustained control is pressed away from the fore by the Agile rhetoric that the organisation is transitioning to be “against command and control”; the move to Agile is often positioned as an emancipatory one in the accounts and the characterisation of “leadership” figures is correspondingly benign. The cases highlighted earlier around Serena or the GDS are examples of the valorisation which Learmonth and Morrell, as well as others, discuss in their critical research (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2016, p. 140; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 102, 132-133).

Exploring further research around concertive or normative control, this concept of the Agile mindset bears significant resemblance to the value systems employed to govern teams in other studied contexts (Barker, 1993, pp. 420-425; D’Cruz and Noronha, 2006, pp. 359-360; Kraus, Kennergren and von Unge, 2017, pp. 42-44).

Through such concepts, managerial actors access to the very selves of their employees is legitimated, enabling a shaping of these actors in line with organisational objectives or requirements (Musson and Duberley, 2007, p. 157). This trend is primarily noted

through the manifestation “Coach-as-potent-influencer”, but there are aspects that were reflected in “New Agile “Leadership” Roles” and also the category “Fraught Relationship with Control”. These tendencies are discussed in some of the more reflectively engaged Agile literature. However, currently the emphasis on the impact which such leadership figures have in reinforcing, rather than adjusting, managerial-led value systems is lacking (Annosi *et al.*, 2016, p. 525; D’Cruz and Noronha, 2006, pp. 359-360).

The analysis produced from these accounts aligns with and serves to reinforce a growing awareness in the Agile community that these new executive figures, by merit of their power and the position that they hold, have the capacity to engage in significant acts of organisational sensemaking and sensehiding (Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998, pp. 466-467; Whittle *et al.*, 2015, pp. 380-382). To refer back to the depth grammar, there is an increased sensitivity to the idea that “Agile requires concertive control”. Agile leaders’ role in the establishment and maintenance of systems which bound the scope of legitimated action points to this capacity for control of context; the agile mindset is an amorphous concept from the literature which is amenable to adaption and these “leadership” figures are empowered to interpret and shape the meaning of such notions in their duty to provide this vision (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, p. 321; Medinilla, 2012, pp. 63-64, 86-88; Parker, Holesgrove and Pathak, 2015, p. 119). The concept of Agile mindset, and the control which this gives executives over the space of legitimacy has already been explored throughout this chapter, but it is helpful to surface again the talk of creating “Agile mindset alignment” across the institution (ER25, p. 2), or of staff being asked to “break all [their] thinking habits” to adopt such a mindset (ER15, p. 3). This concept is an eminently concrete vestige of the politicized orthodoxy which was identified in the

category “Enforcing politicized orthodoxy”, and Agile “leaders” are central to its establishment and maintenance.

The influential aspect of these new Agile roles is discussed openly, as was highlighted earlier, but the potentially problematic connotations of such an influence are not often explored in the context of the general tendency towards treating these actors as being engaged in a process that is good by virtue of the benefits of Agile (Blom and Alvesson, 2015; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008, p. 847; Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 33-40). This idea was reflected in the depth grammar through the delegitimated aspect “Agile is right”, which speaks to the sense that the ends justify the means, so long as Agility is achieved. Think here about the language of practitioners, true believers like Brown. There is an explicit dismissal of dissent as a marker of indoctrination to old ways; they resist because they “just don’t get it” (ER3, p. 1). Similarly, Nick Tune downplays the resistant staff in government IT as “apathetic” for their lack of commitment to the program set out by GDS (ER32, p. 5). This can easily be related to the research by Diefenbach into resistance to change management; he too observed this marginalisation of dissent through this notion that these actors simply need further guidance. Resistance is reframed, then, not to challenge but rather further justify the application of change management practices (Diefenbach, 2007, p. 133).

This chapter has argued that the language of leadership contributes to a lack of critical exploration into these phenomena by acting as a camouflage and limiting the legitimated discursive space for conflict or resistance, as discussed in the preceding sections (Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998, pp. 466-467). This issue extends to include general models, as well as the more specific concepts like servant leadership; particularly, the idealistic, valorising tone of the latter and the positive ambiguity of

the former are problematic (Blom and Alvesson, 2015, p. 488; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 40-41). Returning to the research questions set out at the beginning of this thesis, it is argued that this unacknowledged aspect of Agile contributes significantly to resistance towards the method at an operational level.

The explicit assumption that teams must overhaul their practices to be “Agile” combines in a toxic mix with the normative managerial system and increasing executive appetite for the perceived productivity benefits of the method. It is argued that this mix of increased normative control, combined with the valorisation of executives, creates a strong pro-organisational orthodoxy in many contexts. Agile researchers are increasingly aware of this issue (Annosi *et al.*, 2016, p. 322; Hodgson and Briand, 2013, p. 525; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017, pp. 4-8), but this thesis serves to substantially develop this position. The aim of this research is not to advocate for the abandonment of Agile on these bases, but rather to call for greater reflexivity and explicit awareness of these mechanics among Agile practitioners and evangelists, as well as researchers. In other words, to repeat the phrasing used in the introduction, this chapter has served to challenge the benign halo which exists around Agile modes of organisation in the literature and in “bewitched” practitioners language (Knights and McCabe, 2000b, p. 1495).

7.3 A Balanced Criticism: The Implications of Influencing for

Agile Practice

It helps to remember that the manifesto itself is a document which merely codified a large group of experienced programmers’ efforts to do better work and, as such, was a response to the predominant model of organisation at the time (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp.

28-29; Hohl *et al.*, 2018, pp. 15-19). There are now emerging methodologies which are seen as proceeding further from Agile, such as Lean, but it cannot be understated that the methods continue to have significant impact in the contemporary business world (Gale, 2012, pp. 31-33; Vilkki and Erdogmus, 2012, pp. 61-62). The preceding discussion was informed by an open-minded and inquisitive approach, the contributions of which will be examined in the following section. However, it is one that is well justified considering the overwhelming preponderance of research which aims only at furthering a purely instrumental understanding of Agile (Appendix E). As was stated previously, a major aim of this thesis was to challenge the halo around Agile which is established by those “bewitched” by the method (Knights and McCabe, 2000b, p. 1487). It is important, though, that this criticism is balanced and so the focus shifts now on to the ways in which Agile can still be considered a more palatable substitute to prior models when considered in its proper context (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 321-322; Hohl *et al.*, 2018, pp. 30-31).

It is worth noting, in the first instance, that Agile is most often problematised not so much in itself, but rather in the failure to engender any significant departure from conventional approaches to management. In other words, a large failing perceived in Agile, seemingly validated by the arguments of this research, is that there is not enough of a change in practice from established, centralised control (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 321-322; Hohl *et al.*, 2018, p. 31). In this sense, then, the reflective research conducted here is not intended to attack the fundamental bases of Agile as a notion, so much as it serves to highlight the current failings of these bases as implemented in organisations. The end result of such an analysis is not the wholesale disposal of Agile ways of working and a return to the traditional waterfall model. Instead, the purpose of conducting such a study is to contribute to the small but

growing body of work which engages more reflectively with notions associated with Agility (Hohl *et al.*, 2018; Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Martin *et al.*, 2006; Taylor, 2016). In particular, the contribution of this study has been to highlight perceived problematic areas or blind spots in the applied rhetoric of Agile; namely, this investigation has critically described the treatment of those concepts around issues of leadership and organisation, filling an identifiable gap in the Agile literature (de la Barra *et al.*, 2015; Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 99; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 96).

The preceding section served to develop a deeper analysis of the issues around leadership and the links between this concept and the ongoing, but concealed, operation of power in Agile contexts (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). The categories "Agile regulates leadership practice" and "tension in the role of coach" give us the most insight into the former. The interface between these and categories such as "the dark art of control", "tension in the role of coach" and "enforcing politicized orthodoxy" has shown some of the ways in which these "leadership" actors come to maintain power over employees through a kind of normative management which goes unacknowledged as a form of control in the Agile discourse. The gap which was filled in the literature, then, was the development of a nascent critical awareness which speaks to the ongoing, yet severely underemphasized, role of power and control in the managerial practices of Agile "leaders" (Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017; Whitworth, 2008).

As it was stated above, it can perhaps best be put that the main point of this thesis is not so much that Agile is inherently problematic. Rather, the aim is to point to the problematic aspects of the current discourse in Agile around organisation and to

challenge the “halo” which exists around the method (Knights and McCabe, 2000b, p. 1487). As stated above, these problematic aspects can be related mainly back to the characterisation and employment of notions of leadership and self-organisation. Specifically, the critical literature around leadership and leaderism has helped to establish an understanding of the ways in which these notions become problematic (Alvesson, 2019; Ekman, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2018; Martin *et al.*, 2015; Reed, 2016). Most importantly, the interface between vague notions of self-organisation, legitimacy of mindset and leadership results in the possible emergence of a potent regime cloaked in a benign discourse of consent and self-determination (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019; O’Reilly and Reed, 2011). This space for plausible transition is captured by the delegitimated aspects of the depth grammar in each concept; self-organisation then becomes explicitly Agile self-organisation, a politicized orthodoxy develops which enshrines the organisation’s interpretation of Agile as “right” and the Agile “leader” comes to act as an enforcer of this orthodoxy (Table 13).

Given that the issue perceived was, ultimately, the camouflaging of power and politics associated with this uncritical acceptance of Agile rhetoric around servant leadership and self-organisation, it seems contradictory to point back to a past where these figures had more overt and directly potent control as being preferable. Hardy, by way of Foucault, would suggest that simply engaging in an act of academically driven critical delegitimation is not enough; a push to “judge from on high” flattens the ways in which these approaches may actually benefit workers (Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998, pp. 475-476). The best solution to be offered, perhaps, is to move forwards with increased sensitivity to these issues (Ford and Harding, 2007, pp. 486-490; Martin *et al.*, 2006, pp. 221-222; Parker, 2018, pp. 209-211). The answer should not, however, come in the form of calls for more “legitimate” Agile. The preceding analysis and

review of literature, especially in those excerpts grouped under the category “enforcing politicized orthodoxy” has shown that there is already a problematic element of strong orthodoxy perceived among more “devoted” Agile practitioners (Harding and Read, 2017, p. 10; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2013, pp. 438-439; Martin *et al.*, 2006, pp. 221-222).

A fuller discussion of these routes forwards from this study will be conducted in the concluding chapter. Briefly, though, this thesis is amenable to the conclusion reached by Ford and Harding with respect to their efforts to bring criticality to leadership development:

Critical and reflexive dialogical approaches may have a major impact upon trainers, for they can help to bring power imbalances and means of control to the fore, so that trainers recognize our complicity in co-constructing the realities of leadership and organizations.

Ford and Harding, 2007, p. 489

For now, it is important to emphasise that these findings are mainly indictments of Agile as implemented at the organisational level; specific operational practices, such as pair programming or story generation, are not discussed here. This points to another key consideration to take on board along with these findings; Agile implementation results in changes beyond the level of the organisational-conceptual, often entailing the use of new practices for planning and operational work more generally (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 49-70; Hohl *et al.*, 2018, pp. 31-32; Williams, 2010, pp. 10-39). In other words, this research does not speak to the whole of “Agility” but rather those aspects which relate to certain key principles which are in the manifesto

and have been adopted in the community at large (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp. 29-33; Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 33-47; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2013, pp. 422-427).

7.4 Reflection: Limitations and the Contribution of Language

Games

The purpose of the following section is to engage in a process of reflection. These reflections are aimed at both unpacking that which was absent from the analysis and also that which was contributed by the choice of approach. The first sub-section, part 6.4.1, bounds the power which was described in the preceding sections of the chapter; in foregrounding the continually enshrined influence of executive actors it is key that one does not commit a similar error in flattening fully agential employees (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 4; McCabe, Ciuk and Gilbert, 2019, pp. 4-6; Thomas and Davies, 2005, p. 684). With this in mind, the key focus here is on addressing the limits of power and the ways in which resistance can continue in the face of efforts towards even concertive control (Hardy and Thomas, 2014, pp. 343-344). The next sub-section, numbered 6.4.2, discusses the contribution of a Wittgensteinian approach to the topic of Agile organization and leadership. Here, it is argued that the philosophically informed approach to research has enabled a form of investigation which is capable of providing space for critique and the challenging of core concepts while not being explicitly critical in orientation and which was sensitive, therefore, to the emergence of unanticipated concerns and issues in participants texts.

7.4.1 The Role of Resistance and The Limits of Power

This thesis has looked at some of the ways in which resistance was marginalized, downplayed and disabled (Diefenbach, 2007, pp. 133-134; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan,

1998, pp. 466-467). This attention has come in the form of an interest in the delegitimated and that which is concealed. However, taking on board the established insights of researchers whose focus is on the capacity for dissent, the space available for employees and supervisors alike to consciously avoid or specifically undermine participation in these initiatives is also worth investigating and respecting (Hardy and Thomas, 2014; McCabe, Ciuk and Gilbert, 2019; Thomas, Sargent and Hardy, 2011). None of the proceeding discussion is to say that resistance, where it occurred in the accounts analysed, was ignored. Rather, the purpose of this section is to suggest the ways in which the scope of the findings is limited and may be advanced upon in future studies.

To return to the purposes of this thesis, an aim which emerged through this research was to challenge the halo around Agile methods. As such, the focus has been much more on the impact of the prevailing Agile discourse on the space of presented possibility, rather than on the efforts of employees to resist these changes in specific contexts. To use the terminology employed by Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan in articulating this, one might think of this thesis as calling attention to primarily the first three dimensions of power described by Lukes (Lukes, 2004). These three dimensions speak to the allocation of key resources, access to decision making and finally control of the space of legitimacy (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998, pp. 465-468). This calling to attention, then, manifests in that the main focus of the findings which emerged were the ways in which power, and the ideas guiding the powerful, can shape the space of meaning and legitimacy within the organisation (Diefenbach, 2007; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Thomas and Davies, 2005, p. 684). This thesis has argued that there has been an observable intensification of this lattermost power under Agile (Hardy and Thomas, 2014, pp. 321-322). What remains to be explored,

though, is the role which employees themselves have in shaping their response to these attempts to control their “mindset” (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998, pp. 467-468; McCabe, Ciuk and Gilbert, 2019, pp. 4-7; Thomas and Davies, 2005, pp. 685-687).

Thomas and Davies discuss resistance “at the level of meanings and identities” (2005, p. 688). In such a context, “resistance is understood as a constant process of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of dominant discourses” (ibid., p. 688).

There are many parallels between the subject of their study, New Public Management (NPM), and Agile. These parallels extend to the way in which each method looks to offer managerially influenced identities. Thomas and Davies contribute valuable insights as to the ways that “individuals draw on alternative subject positions [to] assert their identities” (ibid., p. 690). Particularly relevant to showing the space for resistance in the context of this research is their discussion on employees “exploiting the looseness and contradictions within the discourse” in order to construct an alternative identity to that presented by the firm (ibid., pp. 692-693). One of the primary findings to emerge from this research was a similar element of “looseness and contradiction” in Agile, endemic to both constituent concepts and the overall notion of Agile itself.

Another area which stands to be investigated in an Agile context is the notion of constructive resistance which contributes to the overall health of a change initiative. Such resistance is discussed by Thomas, Sargent and Hardy in their 2011 paper, as well as McCabe, Ciuk and Gilbert in their later 2019 paper. Thomas, Sargent and Hardy note the role which facilitative resistance has to play in “conceptual expansion, combination and reframing” (2011, p. 33). McCabe, Ciuk and Gilbert discuss the notion of “pragmatic resistance” (2019, p. 2). They note that “pragmatic resistance enabled

the very change it challenged” and that it could be thought to “reflect a commitment to what is seen as ‘real work’” (ibid., p. 20).

What this thesis has shown, in relation to the issue of resistance, is that Agile may not present a sufficiently coherent and potent system of ideals that they can be used to completely govern employees' behaviours and ensure attempts to control the “mindset”, essentially the selves, of staff (Knights and McCabe, 2000a, pp. 431-432; Thomas and Davies, 2005, pp. 699-701). The nature of resistance, the ways in which this shift can and is being resisted effectively, is an important focal point for future research and will do much to elevate the discussion of power in Agile beyond a semi-totalizing and critical perspective (Knights and McCabe, 2000a, p. 426; Van den Broek, 2004, p. 10). However, the initial challenge which this research responds to is not advancing an extant and developed critically reflective tradition, as with the work of Hardy or Knights, but rather to advocate for the establishment and promotion of such a mode of thought within the Agile community.

7.4.2 Wittgenstein and Open Critique

Depth grammar is an often overlooked part of Wittgenstein's rich conceptual language, its importance lies in the way it connects language in the flow of action through the notion of “form of life”, which refers to that shared world-experience necessary for mutual understanding in this flow of action (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 94-95, PI §241-242). The concept of depth grammar is intrinsically linked to the philosophy of Wittgenstein and the notion of creating “an order” with the purpose of “finding and inventing *intermediate* links” which enable one to better engage in a project of “seeing connections” (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 54-55, 56, PI §122, PI §132). It

does, therefore, go beyond approaches that conceptualise or surface power such as critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001).

Depth grammar stands as a useful point of entry for interpretivist researchers who are interested in what emerges from the context, or from the interface between context and specific concepts (Heracleous, 2004, pp. 180-188). As described by Schatzki, the method described by Wittgenstein is “comparative” and “context constructing” (1991, p. 324). In this sense, then, one might think of it as adjacent to philosophical hermeneutics in the vein of Heidegger or Gadamer, but again there are stark differences in the epistemological aims of these approaches, especially as this relates to the closure of interpretation (Gadamer, 2008, pp. xxxiii-xxxix; Kerr, 1965, pp. 518-520).

This contribution of open, yet curious investigation stems from the explicit purposes of the research method. Drawing on the words of Schatzki, it was the pursuit of method in Wittgenstein’s “epistemological and methodological remarks” which has most informed the construction of the research method, and so the findings (Schatzki, 2000, pp. 93-94). The results of such an analytical process are not so much to be taken by themselves as final, but rather used to facilitate productive discussions with practitioners as to their own understandings and experiences. In this way, such a product stays true to Wittgenstein’s commitment to “avoid unfairness or vacuity in our assertions” by being circumspect about their universality as “a preconception to which reality *must* respond” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §131).

7.5 Conclusion

To quickly recap the argued depth grammar, it was suggested that several concepts were of significant importance for issues of organisation within the reflective accounts analysed for this research. Reflecting on the treatment of these concepts, the depth grammar was constructed to align with the fragmentations between rhetoric and practical mediations as described by the practitioners themselves. This act of construction was conducted while drawing upon literature from the wider body of research in Agile to show the connections between the findings being described and the current state of the conversation outside of the reflective data selected (Beck *et al.*, 2001; Griffiths *et al.*, 2017; Schwaber and Sutherland, 2017). Thus, a sense of the prevailing rhetoric, differentiated from a reasonable practical adjustment, differing again from a delegitimated aberration in practice was established. This perceived order was shown in the trisection of depth grammar into “Agile Rhetoric”, “Practical Mediation” and “Delegitimated Aspect”. The purpose of establishing this order was not just to offer a description of Agile organising practices, but also to challenge the halo established around these practices in the literature and in “bewitched” practitioners’ talk (Knights and McCabe, 2000b).

The concept of “Change”, for example, which was seen to be central in many ways to the basic proposition of Agile, could be thought of as undergoing something of a shift from being radical and sweeping in theory, to being politically contingent by merit of contextual mediation (Table 13). This contextual mediation, in turn, is based on the influence of powerful actors, both new and established, whose impact is downplayed by a suitably benign re-branding under new “leadership” concepts. These issues were noted through the development of “self-organisation”, “leadership concepts”,

“command and control” and “leadership figures” (Table 13). Finally, there was an exploration of the remarkably potent orthodoxy which can often be associated with Agile and the negative implications of this uncritical valorisation of the method. This was discussed through the section on “drivers of Agile” (Table 13).

The latter half of the chapter served to connect the research conducted here to productive conversations ongoing in other bodies of work in order to facilitate a deeper analysis of the issues which were perceived in the reports. There were two main movements to this process. The first section explored the ways in which notions of “leadership”, especially “servant leadership”, serve as a camouflage for the ongoing operation of power in these contexts (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 29-31; Blom and Alvesson, 2015, p. 486; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 40-41, 102). A following section explored what was camouflaged, in other words this element of the chapter discussed the power these “leaders” exercise which is concealed (Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998, pp. 465-470). This included developing an awareness of these actors’ role in the maintenance of concertive or normative control (Barker, 1993; Knights and McCabe, 2003; Musson and Duberley, 2007) in ostensibly self-organising contexts (Macfarlane, 2014, pp. 2-3; Martin *et al.*, 2015, pp. 19-24; O’Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1094).

Critical research on the impact of leadership suggests that it is important the Agile community is circumspect about the potential benefits versus the risks of concepts which stray so close towards “saint-canonisation”, like servant leadership (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2016, p. 144). Such notions may have benefits in luring executives towards these initiatives, acting as seductive draws, but the impact of these ideas is questionable in practice (Ford and Harding, 2007, pp. 486-488; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 41). The “readymade language” of leadership, more generally,

contributes to the halo effect through the creation of a “Disneyland/Hollywood template” for managers which camouflages and obscures their continued power and influence (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 29-31). This influence is particularly key in the context of values-based concertive control, where the ability to set interpretations of what is and is not legitimated action is a significant boon to those already in power (Hohl *et al.*, 2018, p. 17; Kraus, Kennergren and von Unge, 2017, pp. 42-44; O’Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1092).

These insights were largely pre-empted by researchers in “leaderism”, who discuss these issues in the reforms which they see sweeping public sector industries like healthcare and education (Ekman, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2018, pp. 314-315; Martin *et al.*, 2015, pp. 24-27; McDonald, 2014, pp. 227-228). There were also significant departures between the situations discussed in this literature and those presented in the experience reports, such as the generally well-defined nature of Agile practices and the issues it responds to (Beck *et al.*, 2001, p. 34; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008, pp. 840-853; Griffiths *et al.*, 2017). Thus, the parallels between the problematic situations perceived in Agile and these contexts were discussed fully. In particular, the role of leadership as a potentially troubling empty signifier was again established, albeit from a different perspective (Ekman, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2018, p. 317).

Critique is not, however, the end of the discussion and there is a necessary reconciliatory note to finish. It is suggested that the best route forward is not a return to the old ways of waterfall, nor a headlong push into the next emerging fad. Rather, as the focus shifts to the trajectory of change in organisational practices, the call is for practitioners and scholars alike to engage more reflectively, to consider diverse perspectives and to avoid blind dogmatism which would have one present any

phenomenon in a purely virtuous or vilifying light (Ford and Harding, 2007, pp. 486-490; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998, pp. 473-475; Knights and McCabe, 2000a, pp. 426-427). Indeed, one purpose for the employment of literature around “leaderism” and “teamworking” is that these scholars maintain a critical distance, while engaging productively with their focal notions (Bresnen *et al.*, 2015, pp. 464-467; Knights and McCabe, 2000a; 2003; Martin *et al.*, 2015, pp. 26-27). The aim of this thesis is to act as a constructive criticism and a point for future discussion, rather than a confident refusal of all options. Indeed, circling back round to the opening remarks about philosophy, a circumspect framing is really the only appropriate role for such research as this (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, §131-132). All of these reconciliatory notions will become relevant again as the final chapter in the thesis looks to revisit the document as a whole.

Chapter 8: Conclusions, Contributions and

Continuations

This thesis is one drop in a growing stream of publications which aim to dethrone the “leadership” concept and forego any specific emphasis on the notion (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003a, p. 379; Alvesson, 2019, p. 11; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211). Rejecting the “leaderly” assumptions of much modern organisational scholarship, these leadership agnostics look to re-emphasise a wider range of notions to articulate practitioners’ ways of working. This study contributed to this nascent body in several ways; the leadership literature review brings together this still emergent area into a coherent whole, while the research itself serves to employ the notion and demonstrate its value empirically. The findings described and discussed through chapters four and five have fulfilled this aim. The application of agnosticism helped to generate novel interpretations which pointed to the problematic implications of leadership as applied in Agile, while not privileging this concept above others in the description of organisational practices.

The research questions which informed the study were developed through both of the literature reviews and were refined throughout the research process in response to concerns which emerged from the project. Repeated once more here for clarity, the questions are as follows:

1. How was organisational work discussed in the context of Agile and what were the focal points of this discussion?
 - a. Which intertextual touchstones are drawn upon for discursive resources?

2. Is the “leadership” concept important to Agile practice?
 - a. How do the practical findings correspond to the literature?
3. What pressures arose in Agile contexts around the highlighted issues of organisation?

The following sub-sections of section 7.1, then, are intended to summarise the key contributions of the research with respect to the questions posed here. In broad terms, question one relates to sub-section 7.1.3, while questions two and three are covered across sub-sections 7.1.4 and 7.1.5. The other sub-sections in this proceeding section serve to explore the contributions of the research method and framing, and so sit outside of these research questions, providing important concluding remarks on the innovative commitments of the research.

The philosophical underpinning of this project is important to keep in mind here. The aim of this study was never to determine truths about how Agile teams organise. Rather, the purpose here was to provide a rigorously established interpretive description of how key concepts were seen to be drawn upon or indeed went largely unmentioned in the accounts analysed (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 56-57, PI §133). As such, the nature of any contribution to knowledge will be shaped by these commitments. In other words, the study serves fully as an empirical demonstration of agnosticism. However, it is only suggestive of how organising in Agile was seen to be “pulled off” in these particular contexts. As such, the discussions of tensions and of organising practices are to be taken as indicative interpretations, to be further sharpened through application in context, in partnership with practitioners (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §130-131). Such discussions will be the focus of part of the section on further research. Despite their indicative nature, these findings are still

seen as worth conveying in that they were certainly useful during the conduct of the study and they may continue to be so for another audience, in another similar context.

8.1 Concluding Research and Contributions to Knowledge

The following discussion of research outputs will consist of five main sections. The first serves to recap the contributions of a Wittgensteinian approach to the investigation. The proceeding element, sub-section 7.1.2, serves to reiterate the contribution of the research conducted here in establishing an empirical basis for leadership agnosticism. The next sub-section is focused on the findings around key focal points of organization in Agile, which is to say the concepts which were seen to facilitate and describe organizational work throughout the reports analysed. Continuing this movement, from more abstract concerns towards issues of practicality, the next substantial discussion, in sub-section 7.1.4, will be a summary of the findings on tensions in the Agile project with regards to power and democratic discourse. These tensions are contradictory pressures or paradoxes which organizational members are exposed to as a result of Agile and the changes brought following adoption. Finally, through sub-section 7.1.5, there will be a discussion of what these findings may mean for Agile practitioners and especially for those looking to advocate for the method.

8.1.1 Contributions of Wittgensteinian Investigation

The Wittgensteinian approach to investigation adopted in this study was important to the conduct of the research. The role which this approach played will be discussed through the following sub-section. This exploration begins by briefly tracing, again,

the adoption of a Wittgensteinian position in the development of this project. This journey was already described in the leadership literature review. It starts with the work of Kelly and his adoption of Wittgensteinian concepts, by way of Pondy, to describe his reconceptualization of leadership (Kelly, 2008; Pondy, 1989). In this way, the first contribution of an approach based on the philosophy of Wittgenstein was the facilitation of leadership agnosticism, which was enabled through the focus on meaning as “produced and sustained through activity” (Kelly, 2008, p. 769).

However, the reliance on the work of Wittgenstein has shaped more than the conceptualization of leadership and the philosophical positioning of the research outputs is another key contribution of the method. The work conducted in this thesis represents a genuine commitment to an epistemology of interpretivism, where the research outputs are reflectively positioned with respect to the limits imposed by this decision. Such a commitment is intended to place the work as something other than theory; the aim is to produce a useful description and actionable information which can be employed in an explicitly comparative capacity (Schatzki, 1991, p. 324; Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 56, PI §130-131). In targeting such an output, the researcher moves away from the search to confirm etic concepts and toward a goal to co-produce better understandings of organizational practice in-situ (Costantino, 2008, p. 119).

Stemming from this focus on the emic, combined with a full commitment to interpretivism, was a great capacity for emergence. Indeed, one of the main challenges in moving from research to write-up was the process of narrowing the focus from the wide range of interesting routes for fruitful investigation to a specific sub-set of issues which related more directly to the aims set at the beginning of the research. As the section on future research will show, there is ample space for further

investigation of these topics. It is my opinion that the interpretive research method employed was a factor in enabling the emergence of this diverse range of potential avenues moving forwards.

The Wittgensteinian inquiry described in this thesis uses familiar tools from qualitative coding and linguistics to facilitate an analysis in line with the philosophical and methodological contributions of the author (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Saldaña, 2021; Schatzki, 2000, pp. 93-94). This analysis arrives at a somewhat novel destination in pursuing the notions set out by Wittgenstein around language use (Schatzki, 1996, pp. 102-105); an interpretive description is offered of “depth grammar”, an understanding of Agile discourse around organising. The interpretive bricolage of these elements together represents a novel approach to the study of organizational language. In practice, this bricolage may be compared to CDA as a more open-ended and less explicitly critical systematic study of language or as a more focused relation to the philosophical hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer (Gadamer, 2008, pp. xxxiii-xxxix; Kerr, 1965, pp. 518-520).

Depth grammar, through this thesis, was found to be a productive tool for analysis on the basis of the broad findings presented; demonstrated by the successful push to comment on the pluralities of what was said, what was marginalised within that as “acceptable” and what was positioned as delegitimated in the accounts (Schatzki, 1996, pp. 102-105; Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 176-177, PI §664). This rendering of multiple viable perspectives within the language points to plurality in expression and prevents the collapse of the analysis into a singular perspective, influenced by notions such as power or the search for hermeneutic closure (Fairclough, 2001; Gadamer, 2008, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii). Depth grammar, then, stands to benefit those researchers who are

interested in pursuing further the nascent recognition among those influenced by the linguistic turn that we might frame some of these fraught, contested concepts such as leadership in such an explicitly plural way in order to progress in productive study (Blom and Alvesson, 2015, pp. 485-486; Choi and Richards, 2017, pp. 222-223; Kelly, 2008, pp. 772-779).

Recapping the points raised above, there are three main areas where the choice to engage through a Wittgensteinian lens has been beneficial to the conduct of the research. Firstly, there is the positioning of the work and the contribution to knowledge offered by the research and, secondly, there is the role which this method played in facilitating an agnostic approach to the concept of leadership. The third area of benefit was in the drive towards emergence and to allow the research itself to guide the areas of interest. The first of these was a philosophical point about claims to knowledge and the centrality of circumspect positioning to Wittgensteinian inquiry, the latter represented more practical contributions to the research. In particular, the focus here was on the successful project of working with leadership while retaining the sense of the concept as a plausibly impactful “empty signifier” and on the emergence of stimulating research issues from the practitioners texts, rather than researcher-determined questions (Kelly, 2008, pp. 775-779; Schatzki, 1991, p. 324; Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 52, PI §109).

8.1.2 Empirical Exploration of Agnosticism

A coherent frame of “leadership agnosticism” was crafted through the course of the leadership literature review. However, this notion is still nascent and the literature supporting it is largely theoretical in nature. One primary task, then, of this thesis was the “fleshing out” of agnosticism by way of a substantial empirical implementation. As

was stated in the discussion chapters, if the metric of success for agnosticism is a sceptical analysis of leadership, this project was seen to fulfil the aim of empirically demonstrating the distinctiveness and value of the position as a novel approach. It is the opinion of the author that studies conducted under a rationale of agnosticism come close to the aim of truly describing leadership as an “empty signifier”, without presuming some aspect of its function or importance as Kelly, Fairhurst and other discursive scholars do (Clifton and Dai, 2019, pp. 5-8; Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014, p. 22; Kelly, 2014, p. 912).

Agnosticism here is not the out-of-hand rejection of leadership as a concept, rather this guiding rationale encourages one to be open to other concepts of organization which are or may be in simultaneous operation. The concept, then, is intended to act as a tool in the reflexive scholar’s toolkit; agnosticism as a rationale pushes scholars of organization to reach beyond the “ready-made-phrases” of leadership as a descriptor, encouraging new attentiveness to the notions actually used by practitioners to facilitate large-scale collaboration (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 14-15). In this respect, agnosticism was more than fit for purpose. As will be discussed in more depth during the findings, the drive to emphasize alternative concepts led to a major shift from the literature in how arrangements of self-organization were discussed; the traditional “shared leadership” discourse, which is so often associated with Agile, failed to materialize verbatim and instead these working arrangements were described as “self-management” or some such term. Without the drive towards agnosticism, this departure from expectations may have gone unnoticed, with self-organization being subsumed under the etic category “shared leadership”.

With this spirit of participant orientation in mind, it is important to note the way in which the leadership discourse was sometimes found to operate in a vague, non-specific fashion. These employments, which were termed “unmarked leadership”, are observed through the interaction between SFG and the drive for agnosticism; Michael Halliday’s work contributes this idea of “unmarked” use, where word choice is not particularly notable and fits with norms of expression (2014, p. 97). This category was taken to refer to those incidents where participants did use the term “leader” in their talk, but it was perhaps employed as a simple descriptor for an employee with authority or some similar casual employment. Finally, moving towards specificity along similar lines were those moments where participants used the terms “leader” or “leadership” to refer to specific roles and actions within the organization. As was noted in the findings, these situations occasionally reflected an understanding of leadership as distinct and valuable. The identification of these areas of distinct employment was seen as contributing to the investigative project in that it suggested which ideas were circulating and how they were being articulated.

As an empirical demonstration of agnosticism, this research project represents a good start. The study conducted here shows the unique contribution of such a perspective and makes it clear that an analysis based in a logic of agnosticism is not just plausible, it is necessary for the emergence of diverse organizational concepts; the alternative is a continuation of the leadership discourse through new guises *ad-infinitum*, with even critical scholars knitting fresh clothing for the wolf (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 4-5; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, pp. 8-10; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211). The project is only a good start because unless it grasps the interest of a significant number of organizational researchers, agnosticism will be scant challenge to the torrent of

leadership publications which continue to emphasize and valorise so many facets of this notion.

Without the reach to influence practitioners this form of agnosticism could quickly be rendered moot simply through the ongoing colonization of organizational talk by concepts of leadership (Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 4-6). At this point, and some may argue we have already reached such a point, will those looking to challenge the supremacy of “leadership” be forced to work against their participants own perspectives? For now, I hope, this thesis demonstrates that there remain at least some areas where this is not the case and it might yet be possible to “to put the signal-man back in his box” (Parker, 2018, p. 211) without the imposition of an etic conceptual void. Such concerns, however, are better addressed in the discussions of future work where a more proactive tone can be adopted. For now, it is important to move on to a recap of the research content itself, rather than the contributions to leadership literature.

8.1.3 Focal Points of Organisational Discussion in Agile

The picture which was painted of organisation in Agile, the sightseers sketch, depicted arrangements more diverse than the literature might suggest to an outsider. Of course, given the philosophical commitments of this thesis, the understanding suggested by this analysis is only an understanding. However, it is taken as indicative and worth pursuing as a discursive aid with informed audiences. Returning to the subject at hand, the aforementioned diversity is not just in practical experience, but in surrounding concepts and terminology. This diversity was represented through the notions of “Agile Rhetoric” as differentiated from “Practical Mediation” and “Delegitimated Aspect”.

Organizational work in Agile was characterized in diverse ways, yet there were some recurrent resemblances between the reports analysed. These recurrent resemblances were described through the research. To recap, the six core concepts around which the depth grammar was established were “Change”, “Self-Organisation”, “Leadership Concepts”, “Command and Control”, “Purpose of Agile Roles” and “Drivers of Agile”. The importance of “self-organization”, notions of “autonomy”, a complementary emphasis on “trust” and an explicit rejection of “command and control” seem to function as a realization of the manifesto’s calls for independent, empowered teams and individuals (Beck *et al.*, 2001, pp. 29-32). The Agile manifesto, in some ways, pointed to the insignificance of leadership discourse in this context; the manifesto itself never talks in terms of “leadership” or “leaders”. However, this can be contrasted with some of the guidance offered by Agile texts in the broader literature, which do at least mention servant leadership explicitly (Griffiths *et al.*, 2017, pp. 33-38; Sutherland, 2014, p. 133).

The scarcity of certain varieties of leadership talk in the practitioners accounts, and indeed the distribution of those references that did exist, contrasted sharply with what was suggested by the Agile literature review (Appendix C). This points to the need for further in-depth, qualitative studies of Agile organizational practices grounded in some sense of agnosticism. The overrepresentation of the concept in literature seems a compelling case of “seeing leadership everywhere” and also of reification within the Agile research community (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 4-5; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, pp. 8-10; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211). If the findings of this study contrast with the literature, which other aspects of Agile organization have gone unremarked as a result of taking stated commitments to various theoretical aims at face value? It is telling that many of the studies which do fit this profile, of in-depth

qualitative research, find that the reality of Agile is more complicated than the literature suggests and that certain aspects of organizational change especially are hard to pull off in practice (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, pp. 92-96; Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, pp. 426-427; Moe, Dingsøy and Kvangardsnes, 2009, pp. 8-9).

The findings of this thesis follow a similar trend to that discussed above, in this case pointing specifically to the questionable nature of leadership discourse in practice (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 4-5; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016b, pp. 8-10; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211) and the integration of significant tensions as a result of power persisting or even growing through organizational changes associated with Agile (Ekman, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2018; O'Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1095). What this study showed, building on a nascent awareness which emerged from Agile literature itself in addition to work on "Leaderism" and the like, was that a primary role of the concept was to obscure and explain away the ongoing operation of power in these contexts (Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017). In this way, it quickly becomes apparent that Agile represents an impactful context for attempts to combat and critique the burgeoning leadership concept. Given the external rhetorical image presented by Agile, the results of the research were surprising. That Agile represents fertile ground for more proactive efforts at promoting leadership agnosticism among practitioners certainly was unexpected, but it is not unwelcome.

Servant leadership and similar broad concepts of leadership were observed to act in a significant capacity to articulate the expected role of the manager in the new Agile organization. The categories "Agile Regulates 'Leadership' Practice", and to a lesser extent "Tension in the Role of Coach", spoke to this act of replacement and showed the role which these notions have to play as focal points of organization. In the

adoption of especially the servant leadership discourse, there are strong elements of the sort of valorisation discussed in section 3.2.1.c. The ideal coach or scrum master, for example, often embodies the positive aspects of both servant and transformational leadership discourses as a supportive, influential mentor (Greenleaf, 1970; Riggio and Bass, 2006, pp. 2-12; van Dierendonck, 2011). There were questions suggested through the review of Agile literature over the practical impact of these various leadership theories (Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016, p. 639; Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, p. 427; Moe, Dingsøyr and Dybå, 2009, pp. 25-26). Regardless, the notion clearly was influential in participants talk and their conceptualisation of certain activities.

As was shown in the findings, and in the summary undertaken in this chapter, leadership cannot be entirely divorced from Agile as it was observed in these contexts. This does not come as a surprise in many ways. This thesis has already reiterated several times the idea that the time for preventative action on the part of sceptical scholars has long passed, and “leadership” is well and truly out there in organizational contexts (Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211). However, this does not mean that the idea is beyond challenge. The overwhelming conclusion one can draw from the preceding work is that there is ample room and appetite for reflection in the Agile community (Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017; Whitworth, 2008). Similarly, the preceding research has highlighted a wealth of more specific terminology which could be and is motivated in-place of problematic leadership concepts. Of course, these terms are themselves empty signifiers and not without their problems. They are, however, preferable to the expanding and problematic vagueness of variously labelled “leaderships” (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 10-11; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 37-39; Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211).

8.1.4 Power, Leadership and the Agile Project

In the context of top-down mandated change, as is now common for Agile transformations, the change process can easily become politically fraught (Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017). As was seen through the findings and discussions, the organizational changes that come with Agile have the potential to create “winners and losers” of a sort; those who are seen as “Agile”, and thus fit for the new organization, and those who are not. The nature of this “Agile” as defined is heavily influenced by an orthodoxy established by powerful actors in the transformation process. In the case of bottom up transformation, it is still possible that the changes can become a sort of technocratic coup d'état, where a specific group of Agile experts come to control the organisation through the orthodoxy of the method. In both these cases, a fluid notion of “agility”, one which is acknowledged by the community itself to often be variously understood, becomes a key arbiter of perceived legitimacy and performance (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 91; Dingsøyr *et al.*, 2012, p. 1214).

Often, it falls to the Agile coach to enforce the aforementioned political orthodoxy and many coaches lamented their role as effectively the “agile police” (Helfand, 2015, pp. 2-3; Howey, 2016, p. 2). These coaches are expected to act as guides and “servant leaders”, supporting their teams in the journey towards Agility. However, in practice the relationship between coaches and their “students” was often that of the shepherd to the sheep; the coaches must be sensitive to the needs of their flock, but ultimately they are tasked with steering them towards specific ends and away from others. It has already been noted that this relationship is presented in a way which makes it difficult or certainly more challenging to critique the role as intended, in line with the issues

highlighted through the leadership literature review (Blom and Alvesson, 2015, p. 486; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998, pp. 466-467; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, p. 102).

Leadership played an important part in concealing the ongoing existence of this substantial power which is possessed by the “central oligarchy” retained or even established through an Agile transformation (Reed, 2016, p. 207). It was noted through the discussion chapters that the discourse of employee self-determination and organisation often sits atop a delegitimated, and so undiscussed, process of power retention. This retention is realised through such moves as the distribution of agency through “leadership” to already powerful actors and the establishment of a politicised orthodoxy or mindset which is controlled by these actors (Annosi *et al.*, 2016, p. 322; Hodgson and Briand, 2013, p. 525; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017, pp. 4-8). One key contribution of this thesis is the comprehensive identification and documentation of such a process. This output stands as a contribution by providing a much needed, and called for, account of the challenges in Agile and the failures of the method to pull off stated ambitions around employee empowerment (de la Barra *et al.*, 2015; Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 99; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 96).

Considering the previously discussed tensions, the role of coaches and the like as influencers was seen to be corrupted up to a point; one former coach, Sean Dunn, noted that there was a top-down pressure to “fix” organizations and teams which resulted in coaches being inflicted upon unwilling employees (ER6, p. 6). However, in the case of more proselytic “true believers”, this research has shown that problematic efforts to “fix” organizations need not arise exclusively from top-down implementations (Freudenberg, 2017; Mäki-Runsas, Wistrand and Karlsson, 2019; Owen, 2015). In this sense, then, both top-down and bottom-up Agile

implementations can suffer these issues, albeit perhaps driven in different ways. At the centre of these issues, by merit of their pivotal roles in perpetuating the change towards Agile, are the coach, scrum master and other “leadership” actors. It is in the context of the coaches positioning as a support to the teams, a resource to be drawn upon by the team, that these realities become problematic. Just as with the organizational commitments, it is the contradiction between rhetoric and action which is troublesome here.

The continued reliance on control, albeit concertive control, in the context of outright denial is what gives rise to the label “the dark art of control” (Barker, 1993); dark not in the sense that it is poorly understood, rather dark in that it is viewed with suspicion and yet wielded towards “benign” ends in a form of Agile utilitarianism. If the ends justify the means, then this is because of the proselytic orthodoxy which was seen to characterise certain practitioners’ engagements with Agile. To these “true believers”, if somebody disagrees with Agile it is because they don’t “get it”, or because they have been trained to feel that way by decades “in industry” and they are considered delinquent if they resist (ER3, p.1, ER13, p. 6, ER32, p. 5). Perhaps this is not inherently problematic, but it is largely at odds with the explicit message of the manifesto, and so the methods related to it, that it is these employees themselves who are best placed to make decisions about how work is achieved.

Just as the role of the coach is left to circumstance in practice, so too is the role of the employee in many of these reports. The ambiguous nature of Agile means that the definition of this notion is generally subject to change based on the organization in question. In practice, this means that employees are asked to “improve” in line with a politically sanctioned method, often while simultaneously being told they are being

empowered to direct their own work. The increase in personal responsibility means that staff are subject to significant scrutiny through this process of change, which moves beyond restructuring planning to reshaping these employees holistic work experience. The distributed accountability results in an increasing intra-organizational pressure to be agile, which could be said to be a manifestation of social pressures involved in the maintenance of concertive control (Barker, 1993, pp. 420-429). This high pressure, fast paced, highly visible workstyle has been remarked upon before in the Agile literature as being an issue (Whitworth, 2008, pp. 434-435). However, while this experience of stress is recognised, it remains under-investigated (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 97; Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, p. 427).

8.1.5 Implications for Practitioners

The findings of this thesis have important implications for Agile practitioners, both in the tensions around power that were identified and also in the description offered of the conceptualization of organizational work. The latter is, perhaps, more abstract. However, it is worth stating that the Agile community currently has a diverse and somewhat specific organizational vocabulary. This research has aligned with suggestions that there is still, though, a degree of uncertainty associated with these terms (Chen, Ravichandar and Proctor, 2016, p. 639; Kropp, Meier and Biddle, 2016, p. 427; Moe, Dingsøy and Dybå, 2009, pp. 25-26). Self-organization may not overlap with other concepts to the same degree as leadership, but it still carries vague associations which must be clarified in practice.

The problem with the aforementioned ambiguity is not in the presence, but the subsequent treatment. When the ambiguity is reduced down through processes of reification to a simpler set of concepts and “readymade” answers there is increased

risk that under-addressed tensions will be integrated into the organisation (Alvesson, 2019, pp. 34-35; O'Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1095; Learmonth and Morrell, 2019, pp. 13-21). The rhetoric, departing from the lived experience of practitioners, becomes an “alienating social myth”, to borrow the words of Gemmill and Oakley (1992). Thus, the first key implication suggested by the research for practitioners is an emphatic call for those engaging in Agile implementation to make these empty signifiers more transparent. In practice, this means clarifying what such concepts will mean for the working experience of those who are expected to, for example, “self-organize”. This must not, though, come in the form of calls to enact “legitimate” practice. Such a move would likely be problematic considering the existing issues with strong politicised orthodoxy (Harding and Read, 2017, p. 10; Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2013, pp. 438-439; Martin *et al.*, 2006, pp. 221-222).

Organizations can be a hostile environment for more exploratory inquiry. However, this study suggests that Agile organizations could benefit from greater introspection as to the connect, or disconnect, between their actions, statements and the communal understanding of Agile in the context of the wider organisation; practitioners must learn to be critical of the “halo” around Agile methods (Knights and McCabe, 2000b, p. 1487). This much was identified in the second discussion chapter through the section exploring the implications of influencing for Agile practice. Such a need has been identified already by scholars within Agile literature, but this thesis serves to both answer these calls and redouble the assertion that such understandings are important to the ongoing health of the Agile project (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 106; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 104).

Introspective inquiry was shown in several accounts and, as told, was very successful in mitigating some of the paradoxical tensions around politics, control and orthodoxy (ER6, ER11). Part of the reason for highlighting these tensions, then, is to suggest some areas which are worth addressing as a starting point in such a project. The key message to take away for practitioners from this research project is that an active, self-reflective engagement with the criticisms offered is the best way to gain value from the findings (Ford and Harding, 2007, pp. 486-490; Martin *et al.*, 2006, pp. 221-222; Parker, 2018, pp. 209-211). This is to say that the emphasis here is not so much on what was said as “the real state of affairs”, but rather on what was said being the starting point for a discussion which practitioners themselves must participate in; a dialogue between the notions of this thesis and the specific organization, as it is perceived by its constituents.

The tensions identified have some inherent value in their ability to start a discussion with practitioners. In other words, the act of highlighting these issues will hopefully promote the sort of introspection described above. This is what is meant when it is said that the insights can have value even if they are not “true” in any universally applicable sense; the tensions gain value in their capability to promote further discussions. In terms of lessons for the wider community, rather than specific organizations, it is harder to say because of the philosophical commitments.

Nevertheless, it is felt that there would be significant value in inter-organizational communities of practice reflecting on these tensions and the issues surfaced through this research also. While some issues can be thought of as contingent on organizational culture, it is important that the community more visibly comes to terms with the role which aspects like concertive control, resistance and power play in

Agile, lest they continue to represent something akin to skeletons in the closet (Hodgson and Briand, 2013, pp. 321-322; Hohl *et al.*, 2018, p. 31).

8.2 Future Research

With the discussions shifting towards application of the thesis findings, it is worth moving to the matter of future avenues for research and collaboration. Here, there are four areas of contribution which were seen as being potentially fruitful. The perceived value of these areas was based around both the demand for greater clarity in the literature reviewed and also the empirical insights which emerged in the course of the research project. For clarity, each of these potential directions is addressed in a dedicated section. Briefly, these sections will focus on the following: the role of resistance in opposing and also helping to sustain Agile; the space for researching the topic of identity in the context of Agile, especially as it relates to the Agile mindset; the need for more detailed and focused research into power in Agile contexts; and new areas for the further empirical application of leadership agnosticism, with an eye to developing a breadth of examples to support this emergent area.

8.2.1 The Role(s) of Resistance in Agile

In the second discussion chapter it was noted that there is significant room for discussing the role of resistance in Agile contexts in future research. The research conducted here suggests two primary avenues of interest for scholars who are interested in pursuing the topic further. Firstly, there is the underexplored topic of outright resistance to Agile implementations. There is some research already available which investigates the causes for failure of Agile initiatives (Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 96; McAvoy and Butler, 2009a). However, it is proposed here that a substantial empirical

investigation and description of these resistive processes would represent a novel contribution to knowledge in the Agile literature and fill the identified gap in the current understanding of challenges facing practitioners (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 106; Gregory *et al.*, 2016, p. 103). Secondly, there is a significant gap in the Agile literature around the facilitative role which resistance may play in contributing to the establishment of a sustainable and healthy change initiative. Such a contribution provides an alternative theoretical perspective from which to consider the issues around self-organisation and team self-direction.

On the former of these directions previously described, that of giving voice to those who would resist Agile, one direction for future research is to establish the alternative discourses or even just “subject positions” within the Agile discourse which are drawn upon to articulate and “assert [the] identities” of participating staff (Thomas and Davies, 2005, pp. 688-693). The focus of this potential avenue of impact is investigating the ways in which the “looseness and contradictions” associated with Agile are exploited by uncooperative staff with the aim of resisting the change being implemented (*ibid.*, pp. 692-693). Thinking back to the analysis, one might consider the Agile initiative described by Nick Tune as indicative of this possibility, where another organisational actor took control of the Agile initiative and positioned themselves as an authority through a competing interpretation of the Agile discourse. In such an instance, Tune claims that his hopes for generating change had “crashed and burned” (ER32, p. 4).

The current state of research into this topic in the Agile literature is not particularly advanced, with the focus placed primarily on the role which resistance plays in an instrumental capacity as a barrier to initiative implementation (Gregory *et al.*, 2016,

pp. 96-103; Hodgson and Briand, 2013, p. 309; Lindkvist *et al.*, 2016, pp. 1-2). As such, there is a significant gap open for work which offers an empirical account of the discursive resources employed in this act of resistance. The fulfilment of this aim would represent a significant contribution in fleshing out the current understanding of Agile change processes (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 106). In addition, the nature of Agile itself, as discussed above, provides ample ground for interesting empirical research which will contribute significantly to showing the applicability of these writings on resistance.

With regards to the second potential route for research into resistance, a study investigating the role of “pragmatic resistance”, which McCabe, Ciuk and Gilbert found “enabled the very change it challenged”, would be beneficial by providing a new perspective from which to consider self-organisation practices (2019, pp. 2, 20). The applications of such insight may extend beyond this area, with pragmatic resistance also contributing potentially to the formation of Agile mindset and so the broader orthodoxy which governs Agile practice in context (Knights and McCabe, 2000a, pp. 431-432; Thomas, Sargent and Hardy, 2011, p. 33).

The work previously referenced by McCabe, Ciuk and Gilbert is especially interesting in the context of these discussions on future research; the paper has been recently published and an empirical investigation of “pragmatic resistance” in Agile would represent a potent strike while the iron is still hot. Such an investigation would dovetail nicely with the explicit interest Agile practitioners profess in self-organising structures and the decision to trust staff with autonomy. As such, this compatibility is twofold; it offers ample space for relevant examples to come to the fore, given an

existing rhetorical emphasis in Agile on something akin to “pragmatic resistance”, while also offering a comfortable home for the theoretical outputs of such a study.

8.2.2 Agile and Identity

The identity work implicit in the drive to define and sustain some contextually adapted notion of “Agile mindset” in employees is another plausible area of future research which was suggested by the findings of this project. These connections were already hinted at through the previous sub-section on resistance and Agile, where it was noted that this resistance often emerges in response to attempts at managerial control of organisational subjectivities and meanings open to employees (Knights and McCabe, 2000a, pp. 432-433; Thomas and Davies, 2005, pp. 685-686). One might think of this direction for research as the “other side of the coin” to the work on resistance; this avenue of investigation would point primarily to that which resistance interacts with, that is to say the identity work of the Agile discourse as delivered, rather than the constructive or oppositional process of engaging with this work from the employees perspective.

There is ample work still to be done in this area. This thesis has shown that there is complex identity work ongoing in the reconceptualization of the organisation which accompanies a shift towards Agile methodologies. In purely practical terms the work of employees is often radically transformed, and the rhetorical presentation of such work similarly follows course. Atop this change is another in the configuration of the firm and in the rhetoric around positions involved in the doing and management of projects. Such changes are facilitated through significant identity work in notions such as the “Agile mindset” and the influencing actions of coaches and scrum masters. Through the experience report texts, authors and organisational actors alike were

positioned in various ways; participants were seen as “evangelists”, coaches strive towards leadership-based identities while chastising themselves for being “command and control-aholics” and teams are expected to reconceptualise and see themselves as self-organising.

The quantity of research on this topic in the Agile literature is minimal; the notion of identity is discussed in several papers with relation to a sense of “team identity” (Appelo, 2011, pp. 106, 248; Medinilla, 2012, pp. 89-91; Moe, Dingsøyr and Dybå, 2008), but there is only one Agile paper which was uncovered through the processes of literature review that focused on the topic (Whitworth, 2008). This paper is an exception which proves the rule that Agile research is yet to begin dissecting the identity work which has been identified through the preceding research project.

8.2.3 A Fuller Study of Power in Agile

This thesis has highlighted some of the ways in which power was seen to act, and to be obscured from ready view, in Agile contexts. However, this research was not conducted from an initial position with a focus on theorising power in the frame of Agile methodologies. Such research, in my opinion, would represent a significant contribution to the Agile community by providing a more complete view of organisational dynamics. This work would also, though, represent an interesting context for scholars interested in the topic of power itself; the limited delegation entailed by Agile provides great space for an interesting discussion about the boundaries of democratic organisational practices. There is significant room in Agile practice to examine the extent to which power is actually exchanged, modified or distributed through implementation (Dikert, Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2016, p. 106; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998, pp. 466-468).

Such research might take a broader focus than that adopted in this thesis, looking to investigate the role which the Agile discourse as a whole has to play in the changing, or indeed the maintenance, of power structures within the firm. In this way, such a study would extend beyond the insights of this thesis into the employment of leadership as a facilitative aspect of this process. Among the notions identified in this research, self-organisation seems another likely candidate for fruitful study. However, there is also room to discuss such aspects as the selection of specific working practices. Practices such as pair programming, where employees are tasked to work in groups when coding, represent another way in which Agile regulates work even as it proposes to enact trust and self-organisation (Lindkvist *et al.*, 2016, pp. 580-581; Tessem, 2014, p. 878). Research in this field might ask questions about how these practices are selected and enforced, and what the deeper implications of this process may be.

The notion of power is referenced in the Agile literature primarily through the concept of “empowerment” and studies into this process (Hoda, Noble and Marshall, 2012, pp. 625-629; Tessem, 2014). Research into power itself in Agile contexts is very limited in nature, though, and the primary publications which focus on the topic in any substantial capacity have been included as a part of this research (Hoda, 2013; Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Nkukwana and Terblanche, 2017). Even reviews of Agile research fail to identify this relative absence in the literature, suggesting that the topic is yet to emerge as a concern or area of interest for the majority of Agile scholars, meaning there is ample room for development on this subject (Abrahamsson, Conboy and Wang, 2009; Acharya and Colomo-Palacios, 2019; Dybå and Dingsøy, 2008).

8.2.4 New Areas for Leadership Agnosticism

Udo Kelle discusses the possibility of turning to other fields with the concepts derived from or sharpened in a research project. They focus on the concept of “emotional labour” and the application of this idea to a wide range of fields. The basic proposition is that scholars may draw on their prior theoretical categories, either derived from “grand theory” or their own empirical investigations, as “sensitizing concepts” in future investigations (2014, p. 566). The research conducted here into organizational practices in Agile firms was successful from the perspective of leadership agnosticism, in the sense that a sketch was produced of these organizing practices which could be seen as useful in offering description without significant pre-established reliance on “leadership” as an explanatory concept.

Ideally, this project would be reproduced across other contexts far removed from that of Agile. The aim here would be to show the broad applicability of leadership agnosticism as a guiding rationale for studies of organization outside of contexts which often tout themselves as “leaderless” in some capacity. The reason for this emphasis is the need to demonstrate that the dissolving of “leadership” as an a priori concern is not a project to be isolated to “alternative” organizational arrangements, but rather something which must find footing in a broader, more mainstream setting. If not, the notion of “leadership agnosticism” risks being misconstrued as another articulation of democratic principles, a pointed rejection of what leadership is taken to signify, rather than the effort to move towards any and all resonant alternative vocabularies.

One specific finding which has potential value as a distinct contribution is the idea of “unmarked leadership”. This notion describes a category of “leadership talk” which is

pervasive and hard to challenge in the context of the modern lexicon; as Learmonth and Morrell discuss, the term leader and associated phrasings have crept further in to ordinary language over the past few decades (2019, pp. 29-31). The emerging body of leadership agnosticism could benefit from a concise articulation of its central arguments, and the notion of “unmarked leadership” is seen as one potential way to bring further attention to this expansion of “leadership”, from an academic theory and term of reference for political figures to a phrase used to describe any person or group in a position of formal or informal authority (ibid., p. 30).

One factor of interest around leadership which was noted during the process of corrections was the growth in leadership rhetoric around the time of the 2007 recession, as visible in the systematic literature results (Figure 3). Grint, among others, has already conducted significant research into leadership and the role this concept may play in contexts where “wicked problems” are perceived (Fraher and Grint, 2016a; Grint, 2010; Palazzo, 2012). However, a sceptical frame of reference may enable a more critical view of this emergence to develop, more along the lines of the insights scholars of leaderism have delivered in their work on the transition between administration, management and leadership in the NHS (Bresnen *et al.*, 2015; O’Reilly and Reed, 2011; O’Reilly and Reed, 2010).

Finally, it is the opinion of the author that a proactive effort must be made on the part of leadership agnostics to engage with industry to address the spread of leadership notions with these practitioners; it is good to identify scholarship which fails to interrogate the idea sufficiently, but the greatest progress might perhaps be made in distributing a “vaccine” rather than trying to stem supply. Put plainly, critical scholars might be better served by promoting critical mindsets in those practitioners who are

receptive (Ford and Harding, 2007, p. 489). Encouraging widespread scepticism would be a step towards unravelling vague and problematic leadership discourses from the inside out (Parker, 2018, p. 211).

8.3 Closing Reflections

This research project has been a process of treading seldom walked, but nevertheless pre-established, paths. The value comes in what was seen during the journey along these paths. There are critical investigations of organizational practice in Agile, but they are few and far between, with a large proportion of research falling distinctly towards the instrumental, efficiency focused end of the scale, as was shown in the Agile literature review (Appendix D, Appendix E). This is not necessarily problematic, as a wealth of navel-gazing is not something which is likely to be thought of as Agile. Nevertheless, there is a need for more work along the lines of Elizabeth Whitworth's study on Agile teams, Sean Dunn's reflection on coaching and the more critical work published by Moe and his fellow authors (ER6, Moe, Dingsøy and Dybå, 2009; Whitworth, 2008). These sorts of publications can only serve to strengthen the Agile community of practice by surfacing recurrent concerns, issues and blind spots. In addressing these concerns, practitioners might help cement the status of Agile as something more than a broadly adopted "fad" management method (Sharp *et al.*, 2006).

In pushing for closure in this research project, there has been the ongoing, nagging sense that there is more to see and describe; new ways to present what was seen and perspectives that go as of yet undiscovered. However, there is also the competing sense, arising from the philosophical grounding of this thesis, that at some point the questions must end and application take their place. It is in this moment that the

series of examples can end and the serious discussions of what was found can begin (Wittgenstein, 2009, pp. 56-57, PI §133). In many ways, the challenge has been in knowing when to call an end to the exploration and look to consolidate on what has already been uncovered.

Reflecting on the contributions of leadership agnosticism, it is my fervent wish that this notion attains a greater following and subsequent impact on organizational studies. The torrent of leadership publications is a well-documented problem and some intervention is needed to ensure that the future of organizational studies is not simply articulated in terms of “leadership-as” and “leadership-of” (Alvesson, 2019, p. 1; Ford and Harding, 2007, p. 477; Ford, Harding and Learmonth, 2008, p. 9). The notion of agnosticism offers the tantalizing possibility of a legitimate break away from these leadership-centric “alternatives”. This break away here was implemented in two stages, essentially delimiting existing discourse and establishing gaps, overlap and so on. In this sense, the “signal man” was not just put in a box of sorts, a path was charted to seeing that some of their work was also undone (Parker, 2018, pp. 210-211). Of course, this can only be practically meaningful if these results are disseminated to practitioners in way that communicates the value in avoiding the vague and problematic language of leadership. As such, I feel it worth concluding with a reiteration of calls for these findings to be further applied in specific empirical contexts, for the benefit of both Agile practitioners and scholars of organization.

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Appendix

Agile manifesto values

<i>Value 1</i>	Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.
<i>Value 2</i>	Working software over comprehensive documentation.
<i>Value 3</i>	Customer collaboration over contract negotiation.
<i>Value 4</i>	Responding to change over following a plan."

Appendix A - Agile Manifesto Values (Beck et al. 2001, p. 34)

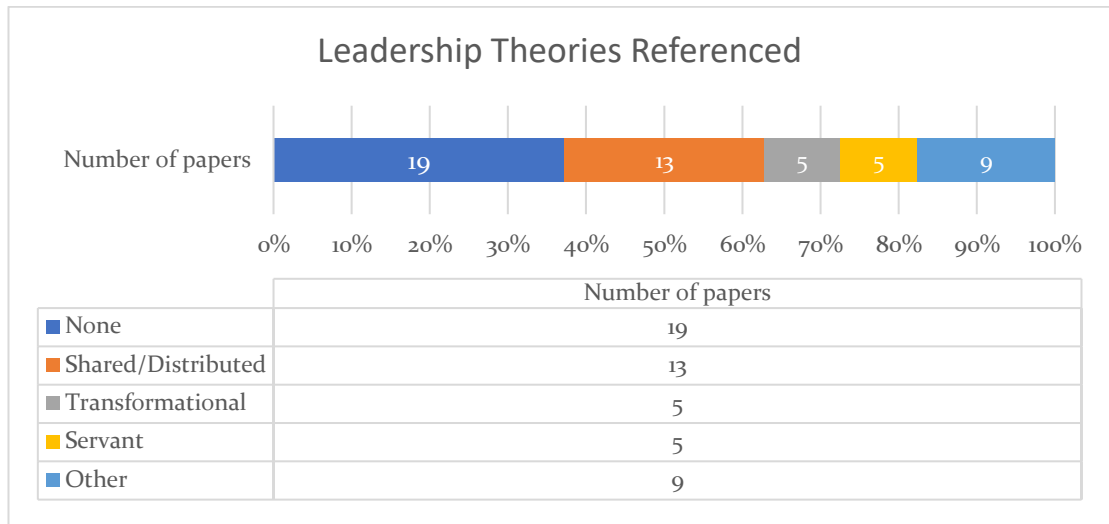
Agile manifesto principles

<i>Principle 1</i>	Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
<i>Principle 2</i>	Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.
<i>Principle 3</i>	Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
<i>Principle 4</i>	Business people and developers work together daily throughout the project.
<i>Principle 5</i>	Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.
<i>Principle 6</i>	The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.
<i>Principle 7</i>	Working software is the primary measure of progress.
<i>Principle 8</i>	Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
<i>Principle 9</i>	Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
<i>Principle 10</i>	Simplicity—the art of maximizing the amount of work not done—is essential.
<i>Principle 11</i>	The best architectures, requirements and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.

Principle 12

At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

Appendix B - Agile Manifesto Principles (Beck et al. 2001, p. 34)



Appendix C - Results from Systematic Review of Leadership Theory in Agile Literature

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Appendix D - Papers Included in Systematic Review

Systematic Literature Review Results Summary (Continues on overleaf)

Quality Notes Key - ER - Experience report, HC - High credibility, LC - Low credibility, MC - Med. Credibility, T- Transparent, MT- Minimal transparency, W- Wide, P- Practical, T- Theoretical, I - instrumental, D- Descriptive, L- Leadership, C- Clear, S- Scope, NS- No scope, LR- Low reliability, Re- Researcher

Study No.	Year	Publication Type	Relevance to lead.	Lead theories	Methods	Rigour	Relevance	Credibility
1	2009	Experience Report	3	None	Experience report	ER	P	C, S
2	2005	Conference Paper	4	Other theory	Literature based	LC, MT	T-D	C, LR, NS
3	2007	Experience Report	5	None	Experience report	ER	P	C, S
4	2007	Experience Report	3	None	Experience report	ER	P	C, S
5	2003	Conference Paper	3	None	Action research	LC, MT	T-D	C, LR, NS
6	2016	Journal article	4	Servant	Ethnographic	MC, I	P/T-I	C, S
7	2008	Conference Paper	3	None	Survey	MC, I	P/T-I	C, S
8	2018	Journal article	5	Other theory	Ethnographic	HC, I, W	P/T-I	C, S
9	2015	Conference Paper	5	Distributed	Literature based	LC, MT	T-D	C, LR, NS
10	2010	Conference Paper	5	Other theory	Ethnographic	HC, I, W	P-I	C, NS
11	2018	Early access journal paper	4	Other theory	Survey	MC, I	P/T-I	C, S
12	2013	Journal article	3	None	Ethnographic	HC, I	T/P	C, S
13	2013	Journal article	3	None	Ethnographic	HC, I	T/P	C, S, Re
14	2017	Journal article	3	Shared	Survey	MC, I	P/T-I	C, S
15	2016	Conference Paper	5	None	Interviews	MC, I	T/P-L	C, S
16	2016	Conference Paper	3	Servant	Survey	MC, I	T/P	C, S
17	2013	Conference Paper	3	None	Ethnographic	MC, I	T/P	C, S
18	2016	Journal article	3	None	Survey	MC, I	P/T-I	C, S
19	2018	Conference Paper	4	Servant	Ethnographic	HC, I	T/P-I	C, S, Re
20	2008	Conference Paper	4	Other theory	Action research	LC, MT	P/T-I	C, LR, NS
21	2009	Journal article	3	None	Survey+	HC, I	T	C, S
22	2009	Conference Paper	3	None	Ethnographic	HC, I	T/P	C, S
23	2013	Journal article	3	Transformational	Ethnographic	HC, I	P/T	C, S, Re

24	2013	Conference Paper	3	Shared		Ethnographic	HC, T	T/P	C, S
25	2012	Journal article	4	Shared		Ethnographic	HC, T, W	T/P	C, S, Re
26	2015	Conference Paper	3	Shared		Ethnographic	MC, T	T/P	C, S
27	2009	Conference Paper	5	Shared/Transformational		Ethnographic	HC, T, W	T/P-L	C, NS
28	2009	Journal article	4	Shared		Ethnographic	HC, T	T/P-I	C, NS
29	2010	Journal article	4	Shared		Ethnographic	HC, T	T/P	C, S, Re
30	2009	Conference Paper	4	Shared		Interviews	MC, T	P/T-I	C, S
31	2011	Conference Paper	3	None		Ethnographic	HC, T	T/P	C, S
32	2009	Experience Report	5	None		Experience report	ER	P	C, S
33	2017	Journal article	4	Servant		Interviews	MC, T	P	C, S
34	2018	Conference Paper	4	Servant/Shared		Ethnographic	MC, T	P	C, LR, NS
35	2008	Experience Report	5	None		Experience report	ER	P	C, S
36	2013	Journal article	5	Other theory		Ethnographic	MC, T	P-I	C, NS
37	2011	Conference Paper	4	Shared		Action research	HC, T	P/T-I	C, NS
38	2018	Conference Paper	3	Other theory		Survey+	MC, T	P/T-I	C, S
39	2017	Journal article	5	Distributed/Transformational/Other		Survey+	MC, T	P-I	C, S
40	2018	Early access journal paper	3	Shared		Ethnographic	MC, T	P/T-I	C, S
41	2015	Conference Paper	3	Transformational		Literature based	LC, MT	T-D	C, LR, NS
42	2014	Conference Paper	4	Transformational/Other		Literature based	MC, T	T-D	C, NS
43	2015	Conference Paper	4	Transformational		Survey+	HC, T	P-I	C, S
44	2011	Conference Paper	3	None		Survey	LC, MT	P	C, LR, NS
45	2007	Conference Paper	3	None		Literature based	LC, MT	T-D	C, LR, NS
46	2007	Conference Paper	4	None		Action research	LC, MT	T-D	C, LR, NS

Appendix E - Systematic Literature Review Results Overview

Sample Experience Report (Continues on overleaf)



Agile in the UK Government: An Infiltrator's Secrets

NICK TUNE, Independent Consultant (at time of experience)

The UK Government is running an unprecedented agile transformation involving hundreds of development teams across many of its departments and agencies. This paper reveals an insider's independent accounts of the inspiring successes and heart-breaking failures witnessed during a recent two-year period of the transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are countless tales of failed agile transformation, often citing agile's inability to scale. However, I have witnessed agile transformation at government scale. Success is possible, but only if there is true agile leadership at all levels, driving *business* agility - enabling not just a single team, but the entire organisation to minimise the time it takes to respond to customer needs. If just a single phase of a value stream has high cycle times, the team will become a constraint, limiting the agility of the organisation.

Leaders at all levels need to understand, embrace, and promote the core values of agile rather than just the rituals. Core values like iteration, collaboration, and customer focus enable business agility. But the rituals alone - stand ups, user stories, scrum masters - provide only the illusion of agility. Teams that only adopt the rituals will maintain high cycle times, thus they will be bottlenecks. If leaders do not understand the core values, they cannot discern the bottlenecks, and they cannot remove them.

Based on my dramatic experiences of leading development teams during the unprecedented digital transformation in the UK government, but relevant to almost any large organisation, this paper will demonstrate the need for agile leadership at all levels, and the consequences of its absence. This paper will focus on three key types of leadership: organisation-level, business-level, and individual-level.

Note: The definitions of organisation and business are used here loosely. An organisation in this paper aligns with the entire UK government, comprised of many businesses - government departments comprised of between one and one hundred delivery teams. However, the general concepts presented are transferrable to similar organisational structures regardless of precise naming.

2. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENTIRE UK GOVERNMENT GUIDED BY GDS

The UK government took an unprecedented decision in 2011 to begin a government-wide digital transformation. Government Digital Service (GDS), a newly-formed centre of excellence, was created to lead the revolution. Their mission, to transform the relationship between citizen and state. GDS aimed to build the mindset of user needs first combined with a high-speed agile engineering capability across government, on par with the best organisations in the private sector.

A trigger for digital transformation, and subsequently the creation of GDS, was the shocking amount of taxpayer money being wasted on government IT. Large consultancies would hold government departments to ransom, locking them into strict waterfall contracts. The cost of making even the smallest change could run into tens of thousands of pounds, taking months - or even years - to deliver. And when finally delivered, quality was usually low and usability was poor. With the strict waterfall contracts in place, government departments had no ability to regularly iterate and improve their services for the benefit of UK citizens.

IT in the UK government reached a devastating all time low in 2011 - £12 billion was declared wasted on a failed National Health Service (NHS) IT project. The project, now referred to as "the biggest IT failure ever seen" (The Guardian), was symptomatic of a fundamentally broken IT capability in the UK government. It was one of many failed and over-budget attempts at delivering IT projects.

As a transformation specialist, it was the sensational challenge GDS were undertaking that inspired to me to work in government - from the biggest IT failure ever seen, hoping to become the most digitally advanced

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government in the world. I had chosen to join one of the biggest and most important government departments - Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). HMRC are responsible for taxation. I specifically went to join an agency, part of HMRC, responsible for property taxes.

Joining the government agency as a consultant, I had two clear responsibilities. Firstly, I was to be the hands-on technical leader in digital development teams, collaboratively architecting systems and coding. Secondly, I would be supporting civil servants with the transition away from waterfall and outsourcing.

I had been part of transformations at three organisations previously, and lucky to have worked alongside many talented agile practitioners applying Extreme Programming (XP), Continuous Delivery, and Theory of Constraints. Highly aligned to the GDS philosophy, with the skills and experience to deliver their vision, I went into government full of motivation to be part of something historic. My personal goal was to help apply the GDS philosophy at one government agency and demonstrate a positive example for the rest of government, showing the brilliance that can be achieved by following GDS.

3. ORGANISATION LEVEL AGILE LEADERSHIP

For many, GDS and their grand ambitions were typical government - making bold claims to win support, but unlikely to actually deliver on their promise. Yet from the outset, GDS had been clear not just about their goals, but their strategy. GDS insisted user needs would always come first, and new services would be delivered using agile techniques. The big mystery was *how* GDS were going to apply those concepts at government scale. The magnitude of the challenge should not be underestimated - there are hundreds, maybe thousands, of development teams spread across many government departments where big IT outsourcing contracts and the waterfall mentality are deeply ingrained.

3.1 Standards and Assessments

GDS needed to take strong measures, and they did. They created a service manual and service standards to support every new government IT service. The service manual taught departments how to be agile, and how to put user needs first. The service standards provided hard criteria for all government departments and agencies to follow. For example, points 2 and 4 from the 18 point digital service standard:

2. Do ongoing user research

Put a plan in place for ongoing user research and usability testing to continuously seek feedback from users to improve the service.

4. Use agile methods

Build your service using the agile, iterative and user-centred methods set out in the manual.

For GDS, guidance is not sufficient to lead a successful agile transformation. GDS enforce service standards by requiring standard assessments at alpha, beta, and live stages of the project lifecycle. GDS can prevent government departments launching a new service or spending more money until the new service satisfies all of the assessment criteria.

Many would argue GDS themselves are in-fact not agile by dictating in a command-and-control fashion. However, my experiences of GDS assessments are largely positive. Government are so deeply locked into their current ways of working with little motivation to change. There is no pressure to turn a profit or out iterate competitors by developing software faster. In fact, I saw a government agency completely crippled by fear. Fear of changing anything to avoid negative publicity, resulting in little effort to change. If GDS did not strictly enforce standards, I am certain there would be no meaningful progress in government IT.

Service standard assessments are certainly not a case of friends in government doing each other a favour. I was the technical representative for my team at an assessment and we failed. We hadn't done enough user research. GDS asked many probing questions and my team couldn't provide the evidence of having spoken to enough different users about how the service would solve their problems. I was upset for my team, but I was happy we failed because we really hadn't done sufficient user research. I was actually excited - I could see GDS were the real deal. I started to believe they were going to achieve something special in the history of government, and I was going to be a part of it.

I believe that all organisations attempting transformation at scale should *consider* adopting service standards and assessments, especially in the early stages. Although, I don't believe they're essential for all organisations. When teams know they have to demonstrably put users first and prove they have engineering capability to iterate frequently, they cannot take shortcuts or hide away from change. However, it is important to note one crucial characteristic of GDS standards and assessments - clarity of their goals. GDS made the service manual and standards publicly accessible online, taking great care to explain why their standards benefit all UK citizens. By being transparent and working in the open, GDS have made themselves accountable to not only the rest of government but every citizen of the UK. GDS are not typical dictators.

4. BUSINESS LEVEL AGILE LEADERSHIP

It is clear from the GDS service manual and assessment criteria, the future vision is for entire value streams to be optimised for customer responsiveness. Accordingly, senior executives in government departments should be designing their organisations so that each service is optimised for continuously receiving feedback from UK citizens and continuously being improved based on the feedback. It shouldn't matter if the feedback requires UI, business logic or data changes, all types of change should be possible in short time frames.

Unfortunately, like many in government, senior executives who are expected to lead digital transformations and drive agile adoption don't actually understand business agility. They aren't focused on the flow of work and limiting batch sizes, and they don't understand the agile software development practices that provide the foundation for business agility. As a consequence, there is a strong tendency to create separate digital teams alongside existing enterprise IT teams. This is where things start to go horribly, horribly wrong in government IT and GDS seem powerless to prevent it.

4.1 Shared Service Ownership Leads to Costly Handovers

Instead of improving customer responsiveness by creating cross-functional teams with end-to-end service ownership, at the government agency I worked for, digital and enterprise IT became competing silos. Each silo had partial ownership of services. The leaders of each silo were competing for power. Digital teams were responsible for conducting user research and demonstrating agile practices to satisfy the GDS criteria. However, digital teams only owned the websites. They could rapidly iterate on the look and feel of web pages, but the business rules and data were still owned by enterprise IT teams with the waterfall mentality.

The result was significantly longer lead times for delivering value to UK citizens due to the significant costs of continual collaboration and bureaucracy between the siloed teams. In some cases the cost of a simple change was so high that the change wasn't even feasible.

Despite attempting an agile transformation, the government agency had maintained its existing waterfall organisation structure. Teams retained their horizontal, activity-oriented structure: the frontend, middle tier, and data teams. Aligning by activity like this necessitates handovers between teams, leading to bottlenecks. Each major piece of work must flow through all of the teams. When one of those teams has cycle times in weeks or months, they act as the weakest link in the chain, causing the entire system to have lead times in weeks or months. I have not seen a single agile success story that involved aligning by activity - the coordination costs are too high and the speed is too slow.

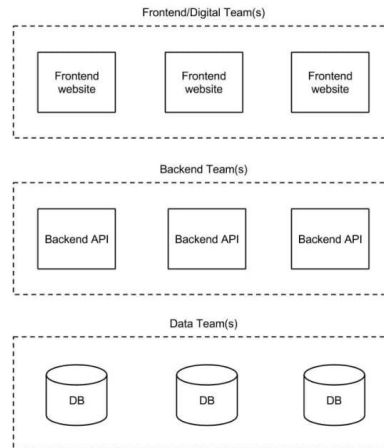


Figure 1: Activity-oriented teams necessitate handovers - work items require processing from each layer

4.2 Outcome-oriented Teams Minimise Handovers

Modern agile organisations strive for autonomous teams who own full business outcomes. Such vertical structure minimises inter-team dependencies. Each team is capable of gathering feedback from customers and acting on it promptly, by implementing the frontend, backend, and data changes without incurring the high costs of collaborating with other teams; other teams likely to be locked into conflicting priorities or the waterfall mentality.

Note: I am not suggesting 100% autonomy is feasible or even desirable. I am arguing that the rate of change within a team should be greater than the rate of change across teams, to maximise autonomy and minimise the costs of collaboration so that lead times are as short as possible.

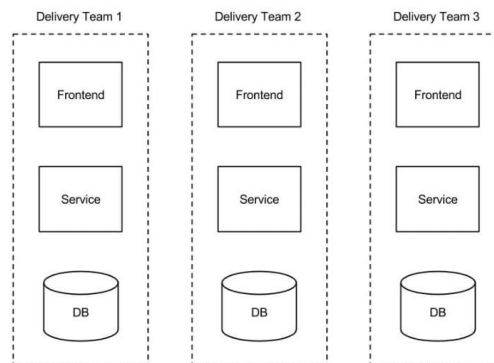


Figure 2: Outcome-oriented teams have end-to-end ownership, increasing autonomy

On a sunny summer afternoon, during an enterprise IT show-and-tell session, all my ambitions of affecting change in government instantly crashed and burned. My mission was inexorably going to fail. It began when an enterprise IT project manager announced she should now be referred to as the scrum master. She then kicked off the meeting by explaining the large number of interdependent teams involved in delivering the new service. She told us how immensely difficult it was to coordinate all of the teams, yet how unavoidable the task was. She

didn't have the experience to understand the glaringly obvious - the problems were totally avoidable. The problems were the result of a flawed, activity-oriented organisation design.

I do not hold the project manager responsible in any way, nor was there any malice on her part. She was part of an enterprise IT department that would only commit to agile rituals. With guidance and support, the project manager's tireless effort and devotion to her team could have been used to powerful effect in driving the agile transformation.

Later in the session there were sales-pitch demonstrations of the new enterprise service bus, the generic rules engine and the business process management tool. Even more dishearteningly, different pieces had been outsourced to different suppliers. The enterprise IT silo were building a huge swiss army knife platform so it would be easy to add any new requirement in the future with little need for programmers - one of the biggest fallacies in IT. During the meeting, I questioned the user need for those tools, and I questioned how the tools would improve customer responsiveness. Angrily, the head of enterprise IT asserted "we'll get to that later". I was extremely disappointed. We were stuck in the old ways of technology first, user needs last. If the enterprise IT teams were slow, digital teams I was working with would be helpless to achieve anything. Worse, enterprise IT were locking the waterfall organisational silos into the technical architecture, leaving absolutely no hope for future improvement.

Later in the meeting the enterprise IT chief ruthlessly asserted "IT has been a liability to the business, too slow. The industry is moving towards these tools [that don't need programmers]". When I attempted to question his misinformed logic, he quickly pointed to the consultant who was selling the BPM system and defensively told me "if you don't believe me, ask him". I was beyond words. They were continuing to practice so many of the anti-patterns that caused government IT to be in a huge mess. How could this complete disregard for user needs and lack of agility pass through a GDS assessment?

Speaking to people in government, there were rumours GDS didn't have the authority over enterprise IT departments. This theory is supported by one of Mike Bracken's final remarks before leaving his position as head of GDS. He bemoaned, "you can't be half agile" (GDS Blog). This is exactly the problem I was seeing - a half agile organisation. Similarly, Paul Shetler left his leadership post in the Australian Digital Transformation Office with similar grievances: "Since great digital services also require great back-office processes, policies, operations, people and systems, IT and operations can't be separated from digital." (Paul Shetler).

Take notice of these systemic problems. If you're applying agile only to pretty frontend websites, but you still have the enterprise mentality for your core systems, you're just putting lipstick on your pig. If you want to be responsive to customer and business needs, you need to have the ability to continuously change software across your entire IT estate. It is therefore, essential, to have in place senior management who have the power and understanding to realign organisational and technical boundaries to optimise the entire value stream. Otherwise, your transformation may leave your organisation in a worse position than before you started.

5. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL AGILE LEADERSHIP

At its core, agile is about moving quickly. Moving quickly necessitates faster decision making, implementation and delivery, all of which require higher collaboration and trust. Consequently, it is hard to achieve agility when many people are not comfortable with the changes. Inside *and* outside of enterprise IT teams, I encountered many such people who were not passionate about the change in UK government IT.

For many civil servants I spoke to, GDS were not the heroic saviours they were in my eyes. GDS were a bunch of egos in London who had started putting hurdles in the way of getting their job done. I noticed this apathy present at all levels, from individual contributors, to middle management, to senior executives. For a number of different reasons, the values GDS espoused - the focus on user needs and the agile mindset, weren't radiating to all in government. This intrigued me a lot. I could see how bad government IT was. I could see the wasted money and horrific IT systems pushed on both citizens and civil servants. Why wasn't everybody passionate about improvement?

One digital team I worked with disliked GDS assessments. The team would rehearse assessments, carefully coordinating themselves for the event like a theatrical performance; "remember not to mention X", "when GDS ask Y tell them Z". People were doing the minimum amount of work possible to satisfy GDS, and they saw it as a chore, an impediment to their jobs. They had no passion for the monumental goal of being part of a government scale digital transformation.

No matter our job title, this is a problem we all have the power to solve by being purposeful and patient leaders. The government agency I worked for had fragmented leadership who were locked in a power struggle. The result was a fragmented, chaotic organisation, where delivery teams lacked purpose, autonomy, and

motivation. Individuals were always under constant pressure to hit the next big deadline. They couldn't see past the next problem, they weren't aligned with the long-term vision, so they mistook GDS for their enemy. To combat this kind of short-term thinking, reassure people about the benefits of change by continually explaining the long-term goals and the benefits agile approaches will bring.

5.1 Patience Enables Change

One of the lessons I learned is that patience leads to positive outcomes. In one digital team, a long-standing civil servant had been brought in to work alongside contractors. For many years, she had been part of a waterfall QA team. Any bugs she didn't catch found in production would be her fault. According to the old philosophy, a tester's job was to do lots of manual testing and catch all the bugs. After so many years, these beliefs had become ingrained into her mindset. When I arrived talking about deploying to production every day without running a full regression suite, she was horrified.

I didn't want to combat resistance by beating agile into her or having a quiet word with her boss. Instead, I shared my vision with her. I let her know her role in the team was vital. I showed how she can play a key role in our ability to achieve continuous delivery by providing more value upstream, working with business analysts to understand user needs and define acceptance criteria. At first she mostly ignored me, probably thinking I was yet another person coming and making lots of grand promises without delivering anything as she had become used to. As I continued to encourage her she slowly changed, though. She changed her story, now telling me there was no point investing all this time in her because she was too old. She kept saying she was five years away from retirement; it was a waste of time to teach her about BDD, HTTP, and pairing on code. She "wouldn't be able to learn them anyway". And that's when I could see clearly that she did want to change; she was just worried she couldn't.

It was a remarkable yet poignant experience to watch her grow into the agile tester role. But it did take time to let go of her old behaviours. For example, she once panicked when there was a bug in production which she hadn't caught during testing. The whole team was always there to constantly reassure her that quality is the responsibility of the whole team. She was a special person who taught me many valuable lessons. We shouldn't write anyone off, especially not because of age, not even if they are 5 years from retirement or have never heard of agile before. The key is not to confuse fear of change with resistance to change. Support those who initially show signs of anxiety and resistance. Make them feel valued without patronising them and they will become your allies and friends.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

My mission to help drive digital transformation in the UK government ended in failure. But the experiences have taught me vital lessons - notably, the need for agile leadership at all levels. Despite my failure, I've still witnessed plenty of inspiring achievements in government, convincing me that agile transformation is possible even at huge government scale. Experienced agile leadership really is key, though.

6.1 True Business Agility Requires Executive Buy-in

At the very top of an organisation, leadership needs to provide support and reward behaviours that encourage true business agility. With service manuals and assessments, GDS provide rich support for government departments, guiding their transformation. And with assessments, GDS reward positive behaviours. If teams demonstrate they are putting user needs first and developing software effectively, they can continue to spend taxpayer money.

6.2 Design Organisation Boundaries to Improve Flow

Agile leadership is also needed at the department or business level. To move faster and achieve the agile benefit of improving customer responsiveness, organisations need an organisation design guided by Theory of Constraints. Each service should ideally be owned end-to-end by a single team. In the government agency I worked for, strategic agile leadership was lacking. The entire organisation was held back by enterprise IT who adopted rituals rather than values, resulting in no improvements to lead times because dependencies between teams resulted in high collaborative overheads. Senior management were incapable of spotting the constraints which anyone who understands true agility would have.

6.3 We all Need to Lead with Patience

The final insight I want you to take is the need for everyone to lead no matter their level. We can all help our peers to acclimatise to the fast pace of agile, regardless of their age or experience. A high-performance culture

needs high performance from everyone. As you try to introduce agile, there will be resistance. For some people, it will be driven by anxiety - scared they can't change. Through patience, perseverance and continued reassurance, you can transform their worry into passion. Your opponents will become allies of your agile transformation.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My shepherd, Irina Tysganok, was instrumental in shaping all aspects of this report. From the narrative, to blend of facts and emotion, to the fine details and formatting. Through our journey together she continually asked meaningful questions, proposed suggestions, and highlighted areas of the report that had potential for improvement. The first draft of this report was an 18-page braindump. Yet she read all of it and provided detailed feedback and we've continually iterated countless times since then. She worked so hard on this report, I hope my efforts were worthy of hers.

I also want to say a special thank you to all of the inspiring people I worked with in the UK government. Even though I shall forever hold the disappointment of failure, I shall forever hold great memories of the heroic team efforts we put in to lead transformation in a system so mightily resistant to change.

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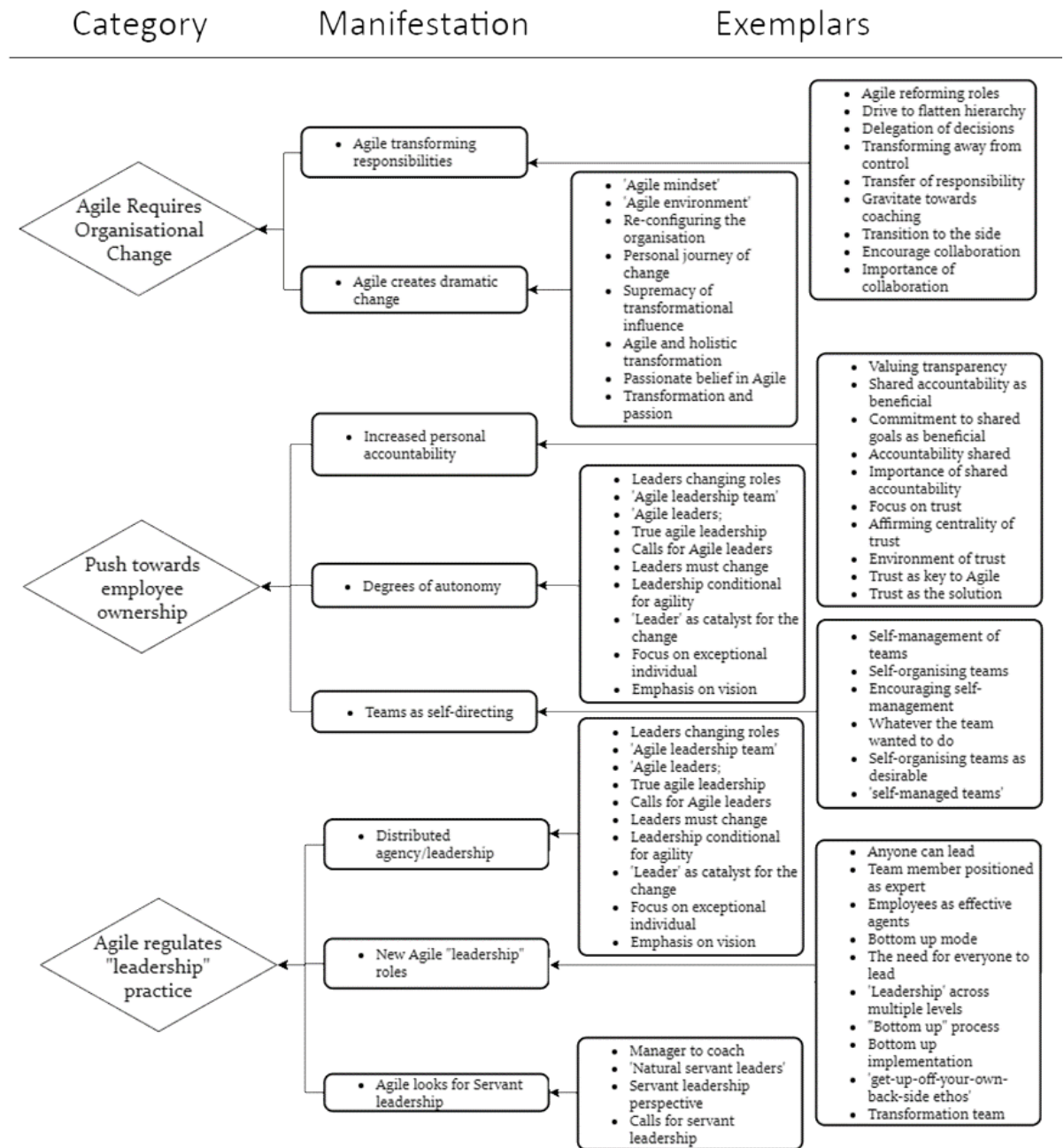
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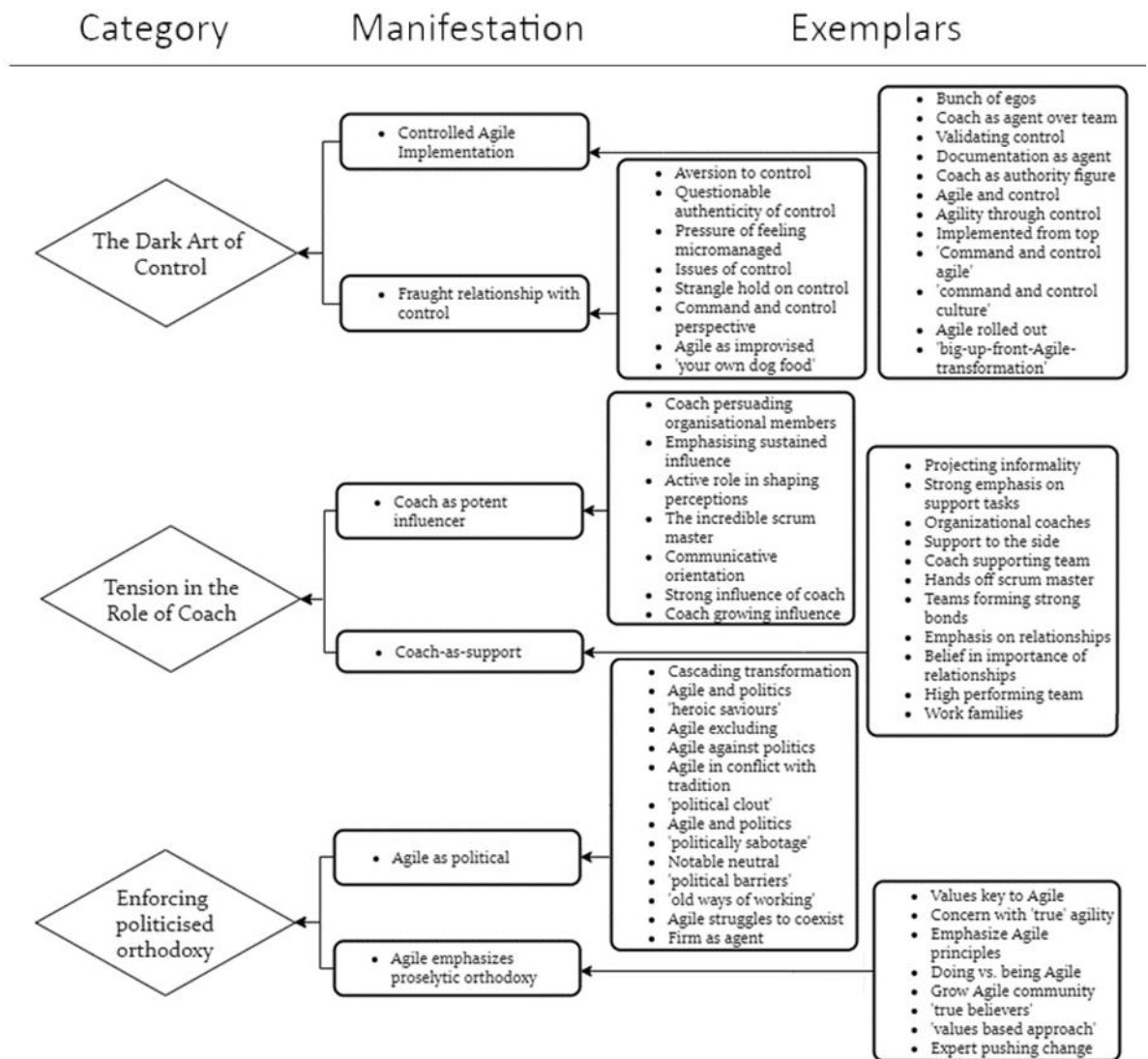
Experience Report Word Frequency Analysis Results

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Similar Words
team	4	2848	3.85	squad, squads, team, teaming, teams, teams', teams'
agile	5	1802	2.36	agile, agile'06, agileness, agility, light, lighting, lightly, lights, nimble, quick, quickly
management	10	1411	1.31	accomplish, accomplished, accomplishing, accomplishment, achievable, achieve, achieved, achievement, achievements, achieving, care, careful, carefully, cares, coach, coached, coaches, coaches', coaching, deal, dealing, direct, directed, direction, directions, directive, directives, director, directors, do', doable, grappling, handle, handled, handling, manage, manageable, managed, management, manager, manager', managers, managers', manages, managing, oversees, realization, realize, realizes, realizing, wielding
practices	9	1162	0.86	applied, applies, apply, applying, do', drill, execute, executed, executing, execution, executive, executives, exercise, exercised, exercises, expert, experts, feasible, good, goodness, goods, much, operate, operated, operates, operating, operation, operational, operationally, operations, operator, pattern, patterns, practical, practice, practiced, practices, practicing, pragmatic, proficiencies, proficient, rehearse, skill, skilled, skilful, skills, useful, uses, viable, virtual, virtually, workable
scrum	5	544	0.74	scrum, scrum', scrummed, scrums
leadership	10	627	0.73	lead, leader, leaders, leadership, leadership', leading, leads
people	6	506	0.68	mass, multitude, people
change	6	531	0.62	alter, altered, change, changed, changes, changing, converted, converting, deepen, exchange, exchanged, interchangeable, modification, modifications, modified, modify, modifying, shift, shifted, shifting, shifts, switch, switching, transfer, transferred, transfers, varied, variety, vary, varying
new	3	448	0.60	fresh, new, newly, newness, novel, raw, young
experience	10	534	0.59	experience, experienced, experiences, experiencing, experiment, experimental', experimentation, experimented, experimenters, experimenting, experiments, feel, feeling, feelings, feels, live, lived, lively, lives, living, receive, received, receives, receiving

Appendix G - Experience Report Word Frequency Analysis (Top 10 words, grouped by synonym in NVivo)

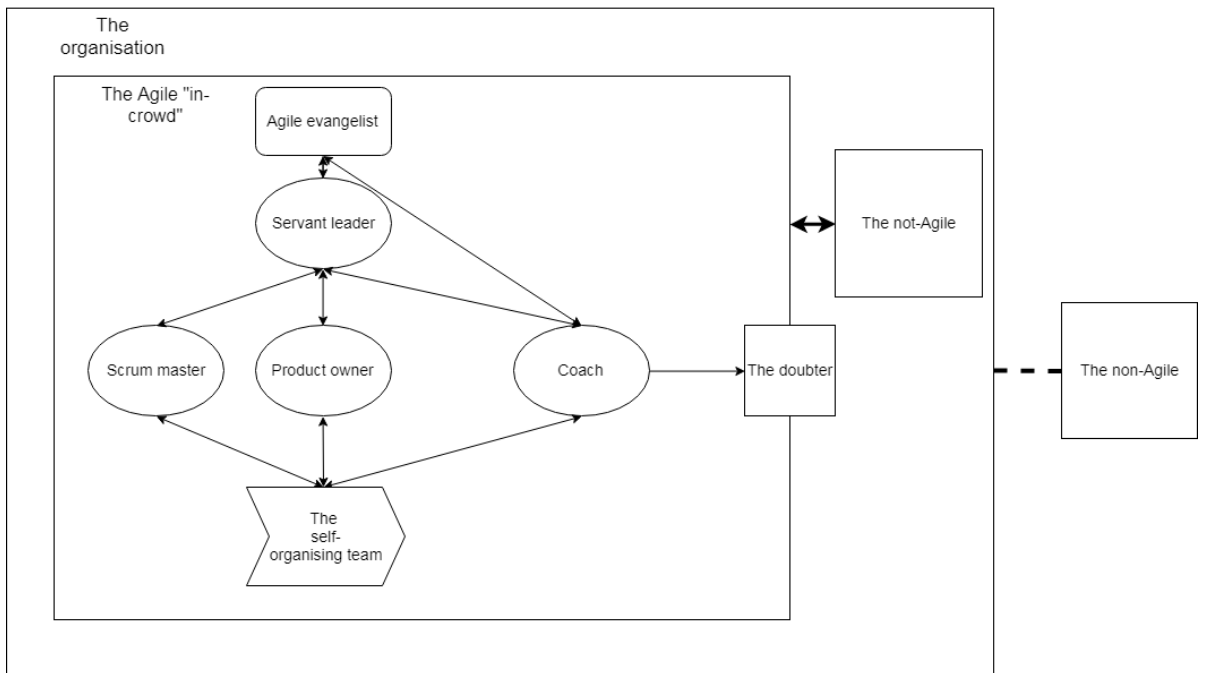
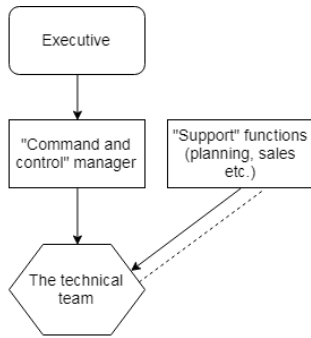
Surveyable Representation of Research Findings (Continues on overleaf)



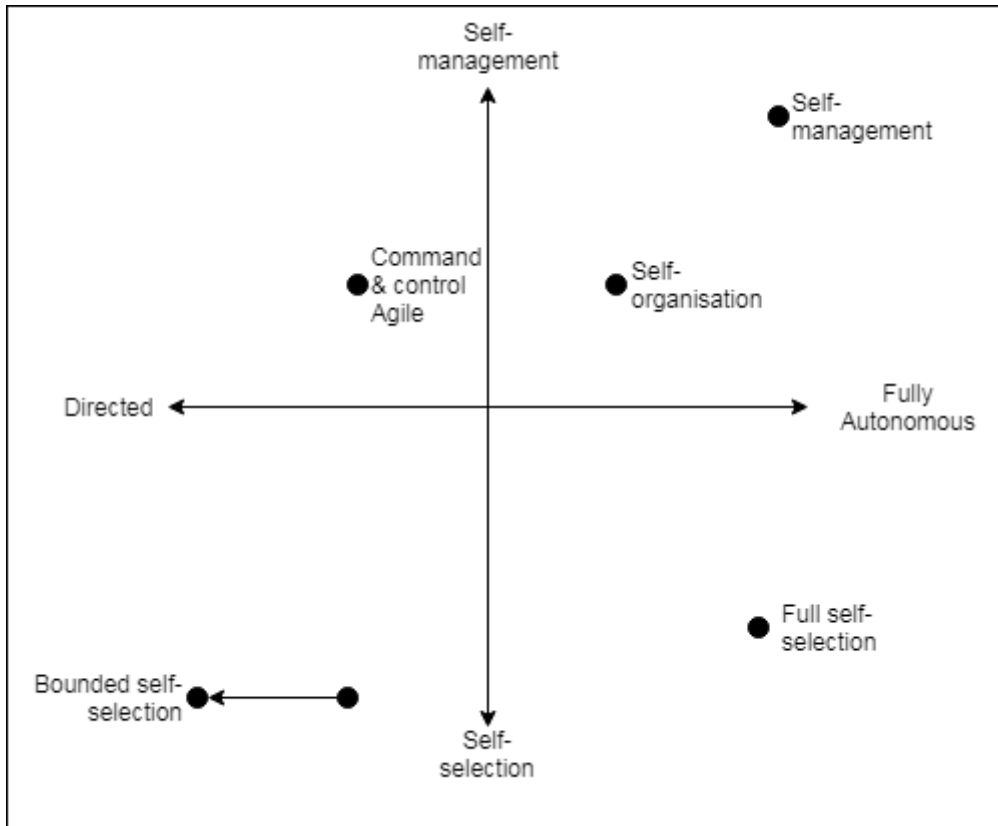


Appendix H - Surveyable Representation

Progression of Diagrams

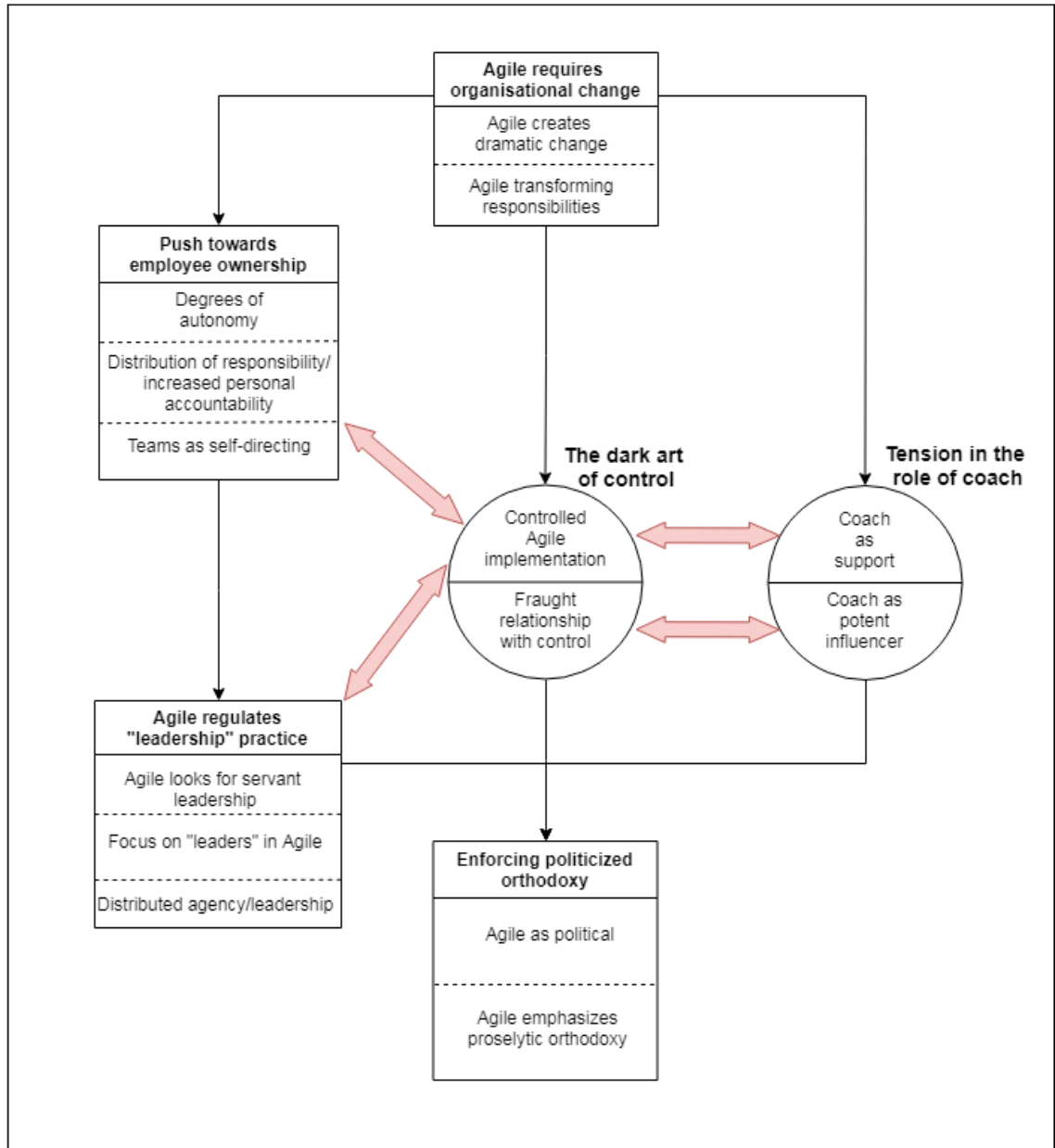


Appendix I - Digitised Excerpt of Memo Sketches



Appendix J - Digitised Memo Sketch 2

Organisation in Agile: An Object of Comparison



Appendix K - Early Draft Representation