Exploring how managers ‘become’ in a contact centre: moving beyond “the repetition of familiar cultural tales” to intentional fulfillment.

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INTRODUCTION

My research project aims to discover how an individual employed in a contact centre (CC) as a first line manager (FLM) ‘becomes’ by engagement with everyday work. I am interested to discover how individuals develop the knowledge, skills and experiences from workplace practices to construct themselves as FLMs. Whilst it will be problematic to disentangle learning experiences from formal off the job education and training interventions, the prime focus of the investigation is how individuals become managers by learning on the job and through participation in work. My interest is on managers as individuals, not management per se and this will be explored from the individual’s point of view as it will be shown later that this focus has been overlooked in the literature.

There are many studies concerning methods of management development, such as short training courses or longer educational programmes, that focus on performance outcomes (for example, Bramley 1988, Endres & Kleiner 1990, Hedges & Moss 1996, Mabey 2005), but interest in exploring managers becoming has been rather limited (for example, Hill, 1992; Watson & Harris, 1999). Studies of formal management development adopt the metaphor of learning as acquisition, the idea that knowledge and skills are identified entities to be collected and applied in a job context, and address the interests of one stakeholder in learning, the employer. I take a different ontological stance and adopt the metaphor of learning as becoming (Colley, James, Tedder & Diment, 2003) as I wish to investigate the personal histories, identities, stories and perceptions of becoming in a given work context from an individual’s stand point. A key challenge at the start of the project is how to plan the research design to discover truths without simply producing interesting description, and “the repetition of familiar cultural tales” (Miller & Glassner, 2004, p.125).

In this paper I will briefly outline the background that gave rise to the research question, explain and justify my ontological and epistemological stance to the investigation, before outlining my selected research methods. The paper will then address issues of data justification that need to be addressed for meaningful conclusions to be drawn.
THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Background considerations
From an employer standpoint, FLMs are the pivotal link between an organisation’s senior management and its operational staff. It is suggested that their role exists to: translate strategy and policy into practice; respond to change; and lead and direct support staff (for example Templar, 2005). Individual reality may prove otherwise. However, to fulfil both their own, and their employer’s expectations of what they do and how they function, they need relevant management and leadership knowledge, skills and attitudes or dispositions. The complex methods by which they develop such are significant to study as first, learning is not their prime purpose in attending work, and second, an extensive literature search in Human Resource Development (HRD) has found no coverage of ‘learning to become’ in the identified context.

It is argued that HRD practice is dominated by a positivist paradigm that seeks to establish clear links from the sum of individual experiences to organisationally valued performance (CIPD, 2003; Mabey, op.cit). Literature mainly focuses on a single perspective, the employer, who provides, commissions or supports training (and occasionally education) almost as a commodity to homogeneous groups. This ignores the fact that individuals are heterogeneous, an issue that has been understood for some time yet has only had limited subsequent attention in the literature (March, 1991; Marengo & Tordjman, 1996; Tordjman, 2007). The delivery of training is often treated systemically. Buckley & Caple (2004) discuss a mechanistic four-part process for training that possibly has its roots in US military work in the early part of the nineteenth century This framework is well-cited and if not always well-used by practitioners to achieve job performance. Harrison (2005) maintains this strong positivist stance and considers the links between HRD activities and business strategy (vertical integration) and the alignment of HRD with other people management processes, such as recruitment, pay and employment conditions (horizontal integration). Neither of these approaches considers the aspirations and motivations of individuals to develop, nor their reward for participation. This gives rise to two issues. First, a naïve assumption that learning solely for performance is a good thing per se, and a second cynical view, certainly from a learner’s perspective, that there is an implied threat arising from a failure to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes. Inability to perform a job role by using developed knowledge and skills could result in dismissal – a logical step from viewing HRD as part of the performance management system that includes a disciplinary procedure. This is consistent with the ‘hard’ approach to human resource management (Storey, 1987) and reinforces power and control by “managers exercising ‘sovereign’ disciplinary power” (Valentin, 2006, p.21). It follows that the development of individuals is an instrumental process to support performance outputs and reinforces organisational power and control exercised by senior managers.
With the emergence of writings in critical HRD (Rigg, Stewart & Trehan, 2007), there is growing disillusionment with the positivist paradigm and its links with performance and measurement, an issue recognised by Yeo, “because the process of learning is volatile and that knowledge acquisition occurs at several levels, any attempt to measure intangibles can be problematic” (2003, p. 71). Further, the assumption that there is a causal link between HRD activity and organisational performance is problematic. Individual workers through their own agency have a range of different values, expectations and motivations, free will, and employers ought not therefore to expect consistent behaviour in patterned ways. In terms of development, each will have unique experiences of prior learning and a distinct capacity to develop, discrete threshold levels of competence, and singular opportunities to consolidate any new knowledge and skills and recreate knowledge from other contexts. This is recognised by Casey (1999) who states that “people learn diversely and indelibly through their experiences of work and workplaces” (p.15).

Occupational learning has been shown to occur in much broader and sophisticated ways than training and education courses and various writers have adopted various expressions to describe this: learning as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), metaphors such as learning as acquisition and participation (Sfard, 1998), learning as becoming (Colley et al., op.cit.). Eraut, Alderton, Cole and Senker (1998) extend this further by positing that individuals learn at work through socialisation, peripheral participation, self-directed doing, coaching and supervision and target setting, reflecting unique experiences based on biography, role demands, motivations and experience of reflection. The voice of the individual in occupational learning processes needs greater recognition, a point recognised by Shaw and Homan; “the mechanisms for encouraging organisations to invest in and share power with employees, need to be located with the individual” (2002, p. 20). It is this lacuna in current knowledge about how FLMs in a CC ‘become’, and a lack of focus about individual manager learning in a CC context that results in my keen interest in the topic.

**Research context**
The proposed research setting is the outsourced CC of a local authority that has a strong track record of providing formal management development pathways through training and education. However, unsurprisingly, it has not investigated informal learning, perhaps due to informal learning being largely incidental and perceived as difficult to manage. CCs are stimulating arenas to study as they are a relatively new and growing industry sector in the public sector and moving towards maturity in the private sector. Whilst they are of increasing interest to the academic community, much of that interest centres on use of information technologies; process services and marketing (Hughes, 2006), management of staff issue (Robinson & Morley, 2006; Soing, Mellor, Moore, & Firth, 2006), and performance management (Higgs, 2004; Mahesh &
Kasturi, 2006). CCs are also interesting as they are high intensity work environments, yet unlike others, for example an accident and emergency facility in a hospital, CCs are often characterised by low level work complexity; low level skill needs as they are driven by technology; and high staff turnover as staff commitment is generally low (Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004). This literature maintains the primary standpoint of employers ignoring the voice of individuals

**METHODOLOGY**

Research design

Having mapped the context for the investigation, I must now consider the design for the project. Cresswell (2003), informed by the work of Crotty (1998), suggested that the use of a framework for research is a useful device “to provide guidance about all facets of the study” (p.3). I consider it appropriate to structure the research work so that I present a coherent argument capable of justification. Adopting Cresswell’s suggestion I will present:

- my theoretical perspective and knowledge claims about the topic for investigation
- the strategies for enquiry, before a consideration of
- data gathering methods

Theoretical perspective

A researcher’s ontological stance, how he views the world, needs to be established to give a specific focus to the study. Social researchers question the canons of the natural sciences that adopt a positivist stance as this assumes that there is a single ‘out-there’ reality separate from individuals who inhabit it. Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggest that this is unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, positivism denies the intrusion of human values and second, individuals have a free will to act out of choice. As suggested above, individuals have unique experiences and aspirations, and it is their free will, agency, which offers them choice about their. Therefore, to produce a universal theory about subjective human behaviour in a context is impossible: no a priori theory could summarise the perspectives of autonomous individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 985). As Valentin comments “there is no single discoverable true meaning, only numerous different interpretations” (op.cit., p.21) suggesting that researchers should be alert to ambiguities, differences and divergences in the social world. This has an echo to Weber’s notion of Verstehen, understanding and interpretation of human activities by an outside observer.

Bryman (1998) is more direct when he comments that for qualitative researchers the subject matter is “people and their social reality” (p.52) and they cannot usefully be extracted from that reality to be examined in a laboratory. Additionally he recognises that to gain an understanding of social reality requires experience of that reality, a point that has a consistency to the views of Canguilhem (summarised by Renard, in Rheinberger, 2005) that “it is humanity that produces
science and not the other way around” (p.188). This point is taken further by Holstein and Gubrium (2004) who advise that “understanding how the meaning-making process unfolds . . . is as critical as apprehending what is substantively asked and conveyed” (p.142). As I seek to explore ‘becoming’ from an individual perspective, the individual agency of the research participants will result in different world views. This is consistent with a Perspective Idealist ontology that regards “constructions of reality as just different ways of perceiving and making sense of an external world” (Blaikie, 2007, p.17). This ethnographic study will explore these constructions.

In sum, the participants in the research are sui generis who draw on unique experiences and make individual sense of their world. Theory can be proposed from their experiences and this makes their individual stories of ‘becoming’ significant. Further consideration of grounded theory and case study design is needed.

**Strategies for enquiry**

As the research methodology must “remain true to the nature of the phenomenon under study”. (Matza, 1969, p.5), I intend to adopt an interpretive stance to enable an exploration of individual meaning. This is consistent with the demand of Gummesson (2007) who asks, “does the research properly capture the critical aspects of the phenomenon we want to understand” (p.132). A constructionist epistemology recognises that “social actors socially construct their reality” (Blaikie, op.cit., p.22), and this helps them to make their world personally meaningful and deal with issues of power and status. In consequence, how FLMs ‘become’ is informed by their actions and experiences. The phenomenon of individuals attending and engaging in work must recognise that realities are dynamic and “in a constant state of revision” (Bryman, 2001, p18). The work structure and environment will influence what and how individuals learn on the job and attempting to separate the person learning from the context within which they learn is problematic and artificial (Evans & Kersh, 2006). This in turn will determine the research strategy.

Gubrium and Holstein (2000), in drawing on the work of Schutz, argue that the world should be viewed from the experiences of those who inhabit it: researchers should guard against replacing social reality with “a fictional non-existing world constructed by the scientific observer” (p.263). As I have no experience of working in a CC, if I attempted to reflect my version of that environment it would be a personal construction of the context, not the views of the inhabitants. To gain an understanding of the different meanings individuals construct in a CC requires interpretation through critical analysis. Therefore, interpretive privilege engagement with the richness of the data (thick description, Geertz, 1973) from the standpoint of FLMs rather than that of an employer.
No research strategy can claim to capture all aspects of a research topic. A deductive approach would not be appropriate for the project as it would impose theory into a context to prove a hypothesis or not. My attempt to uncover meaning could not be served by this approach as individual meaning could be outside the scope of a given theory. Proving, or not, a theory validates that theory and does not uncover individual meaning or realities.

In contrast, an inductive strategy draws generalisations from observations which can be subject to further investigation. Pure induction, however, is not possible as pre-existing knowledge of the terrain cannot be forgotten and ignored: I have already undertaken study learning at work, and am therefore influenced by extant theories. This leads to the adoption of an abductive strategy as the best compromise for this specific project. This has been used in the natural sciences to generate hypotheses and is now considered relevant to constructing theory in interpretive studies (Blaikie, op.cit.), although it more commonly understood as an iterative approach. It is recognised that in qualitative inquiry there is overlap between conventions but the layers of an abductive research strategy will allow freedom to explore individual ‘becoming’ by reference to both the data captured and existing theories. These layers have been summarised by Blaikie, (op.cit., p.90) as follows:

“Everyday concepts and meanings
provide the basis for
social action/interaction

about which

social actors can give accounts

from which

social scientific description can be made

from which

social theories can be generated

or which can be understood in terms of existing

social theories and perspectives”

(emphasis in original)

This strategy reflects Peirce’s notion of ‘hypotheses on probation’ (in Levin-Rozalis, 2004), an iterative process of checking and rechecking against observations that gives the opportunity to widen and modify possible explanations. I consider this strategy appropriate as the abductive layers allow the possibility of understanding using existing theory but relating this to the data revealed as well as the data in isolation. This research strategy is suggested when the research aim is to discover new knowledge and iterate between theory and the data collected (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Use of an abductive research strategy is of interest as it has not been widely used in social sciences, but is used in the field of information and communication technology,

In sum, to allow the individual FLM a voice to explore journeys of becoming in the specific context, a constructionist epistemology will be adopted and this is consistent with the interpretivist ontological stance.

METHODS

Methods selected for an investigation need to accord with the espoused ontological and epistemological stance for the project to avoid paradigm incommensurability. Methods also need to be relevant for the scale of the investigation. There are fifteen FLMs in the participant organisation and it is proposed to invite all of them to participate, a workable number for an interpretive study. To limit the number of invitations would have an effect, not only on those selected, but those not selected (“why/why not me?”).

To discover individual becoming in a CC context, I plan to conduct a series of linked methods that broaden traditional approaches to enquiry. The single site for the investigation will become an ethnographic case study, to expose the researcher to elements that may not be easily codified when observed. A number of studies about becoming have primarily used semi-structured interviews (Allan, 2006; Hales, 2005; Rees & Porter, 2005). I suggest that this sole method limits the opportunity to gather rich data, a view shared with Sandelowski (2002) who refers to a naïve overuse of interviews in qualitative research. Capturing data by a single method may lead to little more than “the repetition of familiar cultural tales” (Miller & Glassner, op.cit.), and limit my potential to explore the participants’ experiences and uncover true meaning. Additional methods will enable the FLMs’ accounts of becoming to be viewed socially, in terms of interpersonal relationships, as well as sociologically, reflecting their biographies. Using other methods justified below will add to the fine grain of the data to reveal a richer account of becoming in the given context.

In an introductory phase I will meet with the FLMs to introduce them to aims of the project and encourage them to participate. In particular, at this crucial early point in the research process, I will offer them dual interest and benefit in the process. This heeds a call for interactive research to give “something back to respondents and their communities, rather than research that is pointed exclusively toward restricted academic audiences” (Ellis & Berger, 2003, p.160). Research which only considers the interests of the researcher has attracted comment from McLaren (1995) that “such a form of engagement amounts to little more than a form of ethnographic vampirism” (p.287). Possible individual benefit to participation in the project will include the opportunity to reflect on the skills and knowledge that each individual offers in an
employment exchange, to clarify who they are as a FLM, to reflect on the attributes that privilege their participation in work, and to inform their future learning agenda, as signalled in the introduction to this paper. This discussion will be reinforced through a participant information sheet to signal the research phases and their subsequent involvement. During this phase, I will request that the participants complete a short questionnaire to both gather ontogenic data and initially enquire about their intentionality to become a FLM. In addition, I will invite them to maintain a learning journal of significant events, similar to a continuing professional development records used by professional bodies. I anticipate resistance to this which is often seen as a bureaucratic chore, but will suggest that such a record is useful for annual reviews of performance and development. Both the questionnaire and the journal may help the participants to recall learning episodes in preparation for later interviews. Rather than relying on memory in later interview when each could potentially feel under pressure, participants can draw from their recorded experiences.

This first phase will be followed by observations of the participants actually in their work environment. Access over a three week period will be negotiated with the employer to observe FLMs in situ, using social network analysis techniques (Emirbayer & Goodwin 1994; Hatala, J. (2006) to gather data from events as they occur. This will map the relationships between participants and their colleagues through their daily routines and in meetings. Observations will enable the researcher to witness the physical and psychological environment in which the participants operate, and witness any issues of managerial power. There will also be the opportunity to gather data about workplace affordances, opportunities to learn, that might privilege or constrain a FLM’s becoming, as this may be significant (Morgan, 1997; Billet, 2001).

A third phase will use interviews to generate rich data for thick descriptive analysis, and it must be recognised that they will need to be more than the popular view of an interview as ‘a conversation with a purpose’. Semi-structured interviews will use participants “practical reasoning and the ways in which they make the social world sensible to themselves as the central focus” (Bryman, op.cit., p.53). They permit “an openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions” (Kvale, 1996, p.124) to explore issues of importance to the participant. The type of questions used in the interviews will fall into three main types; ‘descriptive’, to collect samples of the FLMs language, for example, “why did you accept the job of a FLM?”; ‘structural’, to discover cultural knowledge, such as “what have you learned through attending meetings?”, and ‘contrast’ to elicit meaning, for example “to what extent do other FLMs share this view?” (from Spradley 1979). These will be digitally recorded for later transcription for participants to have the opportunity to comment and confirm that the transcript accurately reflects their views. The data from the interviews will form ‘discourse analysis’, a development from conventional ethnography as the researcher will interpret meaning from the data. A content analysis of the
interview data will be considered alongside the data from observations, to consider participant perception with perceived reality, consistent with the abductive layers outlined above.

After the interview process, focus groups will enable feedback about the main themes emerging from the project before exploring interpersonal learning amongst the participants. I am sensitive to ‘participant fatigue’, as involvement on too many occasions may reduce their motivation to contribute. As the employer may voice concerns about the time its FLMs spend on away from their regular duties, the focus groups will be conducted as part of normal team meetings.

A final phase will encourage participant reflection of the process. A short questionnaire to all FLMs should stimulate reflections about participation in the research process, to see if this has had any effect on their perception of their own. This may have limited utility for the project but it maintains the possible benefits to the individuals of their participation.

JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Having proposed a phased approach to the research to generate rich data, two key questions now arise. How can I justify the project data as knowledge, and how will this lead to the production of theory? In this section I will first consider issues of truth as related to the descriptive accounts of becoming as told by the participants before considering aspects of validity.

Jarvis (1992) makes an important point in the quest for truth, “if meaning does not reside in phenomena but in people’s understanding of the world, it is difficult to accept the idea of an objective truth being verifiable” (p.168). In interpretive studies, there is a tradition of treating truth as an ongoing process of knowledge claims. Husserl, (in Tieszen, 1995) proposes that the life world existed before science and that the intuited world, as experienced by individuals, existed before the generation of theory. Prehistoric man intuitively discovered how to survive before medical science pronounced on the need to eat and drink regularly. This might suggest that the canons of science are little more than formalised and coded expressions of human intuition, organised by interest groups. Do factions subscribe to and then defend an ontological and epistemological position to justify their claims to knowledge? It then follows that differing world views are likely to exist which does not grant any tradition a pre-eminent claim to a universal view of doctrine. The current debate in the medical world over the use of the MMR vaccine illustrates this point (Batty, 2008).

Husserl claims that truth is “meaning-fulfilment” (op.cit., p.99), based on the principle of intentionality of consciousness - the relationship between thought and the perceived world. An individual can start with an intention, a concept, but may not develop this into action observable
by others. For example, in a team meeting, a FLM may consider offering to take responsibility for an action but does not say anything to complete the intention. Husserl makes a distinction between meaning-giving, the intention of an expression or an experience, and meaning-fulfilment when that intention is confirmed to the individual. As an individual may make sense of his world through his or her agency, he discovers truth when experience matches his interpretation of that experience. In an interpretive study, the concept of intentional fulfilment, analytical iterations to explore different possible interpretations and alternative views, only serve to add to the richness of the picture revealed. For example, a FLM can view a reprimand from a senior manager as a threat or an opportunity to learn depending on his interpretation. The experience only becomes meaningful to him (justified) when he reaches an interpretation of an experience that is in concert with his interpretation.

A difficulty in reaching an understanding of meaning in a context arises when there is a mismatch between findings, experience and interpretation. If an individual is unable to make sense of a situation a dilemma arises – confusion. Heidegger (2005) suggests a resolution to this tension by revisiting the data through iterations until a new interpretation is found: then fulfilment is established. In occupational settings, one form of meaning can be established through conversation and interaction with others. There is, however, a danger that running too many iterations to produce a multiplicity of interpretations will render interpretations meaningless. It is apposite to recall a fictional conversation from the novel *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*: “‘the question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things’” (Carroll, 1982, p.190). This is wholly consistent with the abductive research strategy outlined above in that confidence in findings is established when personal knowledge and experience of becoming relates to the data and new knowledge is created through the iterations that resolve mis-matches by creating interpretations.

This still leaves the need to reconcile issues of confidence in my interpretive study. Hegel (in Pinkard, 2005) offers “an account of truth in terms of unfolding (an Entfalting) within the proper kind of reflective theory (such as Phenomenology), (p.29)”. Yet I question whether “an account of truth” in my study may be sufficiently robust to produce justified forms of knowledge. An unfolding may simply lead to more description that could obscure true meaning and add confusion. Additional description may only add interest without significance.

Heidegger (op.cit.) contributes to the debate by drawing on the Greek idea of *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια), unconcealment, to open up possible paths for understanding, illuminating the phenomenon being explored. Yet Heidegger accepts that this does not lead to truth. Instead he offers the possibility that establishing truth may not always be necessary, inferring that researchers should have confidence in their intuition. He supports this suggestion by drawing on
a metaphysical idea from Aristotle “for it is uneducated not to have an eye for when it is
necessary to look for a proof, and when this is not necessary.” (p.157) (italics added). He offers
no pragmatic solution to resolve this only that “the peculiar quality of that which demands of us
above all else to be admitted can decide” (p.152). This is not helpful to a qualitative researcher
seeking to justify knowledge produced from field work.

The ideas of unfolding and unconcealment may be a starting point for my project as the
individual stories of managers becoming will be a process of revealing meaning to afford
interpretations. A datum may lead to the opening up of a variety of new explanations as the
whole picture is gradually revealed to a researcher, but my focus must be on revealing
meaningful accounts. Wragg (2004) adds to the potential unreliability of qualitative data by
commenting “we often interpret events as we wish to see them, not as they are” (p. 50). This
research project has the potential to produce descriptive accounts of managers’ practices, which,
however interesting, may not be significant, and as a result, I wish to develop two themes to build
confidence in findings.

First, the data will be generalised to theory, not populations, consistent with the views of Bryman
(2008) and Peirce’s ‘hypotheses on probation’ introduced above. Second, in terms of
establishing what is truth in the data generated, I will argue that truth is established when
interpretation of data matches the researcher’s lived experiences – intentional fulfilment
(Sandberg, 2005). This recognises that truth is not an end, but an ongoing process of knowledge
claims. Exploring different interpretations will lead to rich description.

I will now turn to examine the concept of validity in qualitative analysis and the need to consider
how the data revealed through the investigation can generalised to a wider community.
Researchers such as Giorgi (1992, 1994) and Jones (1998) question the adequacy of knowledge
produced from interpretive approaches. They follow the tradition of researchers in the natural
sciences who suggest that the findings of qualitative inquiry are limited, as interpretation from a
limited sample will not lead to generalisations. Categories of validity, such as concurrent,
predictive, convergent, criterion-related and internal/external are associated with positivist
epistemologies that seek to establish universal truths. This is not the goal of qualitative enquiry
and Deleuze and Guattari (in Penner, 2003) go further by positing that truth is not the primary
object of philosophy; philosophy exists to create concepts, supporting a contention identified
above that objective knowledge (a single truth) is not attainable at least not in the social world.

In developing this point, some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not
applicable to qualitative research, yet they accept that what they capture as data does need to
have a form of “truth value” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), leading to the adoption of other
expressions, such as ‘trustworthiness’. Other qualitative researchers have totally rejected the
notion of ‘validity’, in any form (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Leininger, 1994) as inappropriate in qualitative enquiry. They argue that truth is only meaningful in a relative way, to a researcher’s ontological and epistemological stance. This allows for individual justification of knowledge from a specific project. Without making such a justification, it is my view that the research findings are exposed to the risk of being considered worthless. From a phenomenological viewpoint, I argue that validity concerns discovering full meaning from the participants (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 1991), and this supports the use of more than one method to gather data. The participants will be offered three opportunities (questionnaire, interview and focus group) to tell their stories and this will be supplemented by data from observations.

Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) suggest four strategies for verification: methodological coherence, using an appropriate sample, collecting data and analysing concurrently and thinking theoretically. In applying this to my project, I have demonstrated methodological coherence earlier and have explained that I will encourage the whole population of FLMs to participate. In writing up notes from observations and transcribing interviews, including participant verification of the transcript, I will note initial interpretations and look for support from emerging ideas across the participants. Continuous iterations using the abductive process can lead to coherence of findings as a focus to the research is maintained. This will lead to credibility that can be explored through thick description (Geertz, op.cit.).

Interpretive analysis is unlikely to generate a universal theory about individual becoming due to the action of human agency. The type of generalisations this project seeks to produce is informed by Kvale’s notion (op.cit.) that an investigation sets a form of precedent that informs future research – analytical generalization. He comments, “by specifying the supporting evidence and making arguments explicit, the researcher can allow readers to judge the soundness of the generalization claim” (p.233). Confidence in research conclusions can be considered by reflecting on two issues. First, the extent to which readers’ relate to the personal ontogenies of the participants. If their interpretations match their experiences as reported in my final work, then they will have meaning fulfilment. Second, readers will need to consider how the characteristics of the organisation participating in the project are exhibited in other settings to which they can relate. This refers to his notion of “case law” generalisation in the English legal system. This will permit a contribution to knowledge. In addition, HRD practice will be informed by the research, as a series of questions will be offered to both individuals and employers for them to consider how more relevant and meaningful learning at and through work can be investigated. This will also privilege a consideration of the value to an individual of development. As process questions, not questions about the content of any development, this should be generalisable to other management contexts as it will enable employers to extend their thinking about the content and process of learning by considering those who will receive the development experience.
In sum, I have suggested a strategy to justify my acceptance of the research data and from this to offer new knowledge for FLMs and their employers to explore how they ‘become’ in CCs. If employers have a framework to question the why, what and how of individual becoming, the outcomes of learning from two standpoints should be more explicit and purposeful.

**CONCLUSION**

In this paper I have explained the background to exploring how managers ‘become’ in a contact centre. I have also clarified my thinking about the ontological and epistemological stance toward the research question and the methods that I will use to generate data for analysis and interpretation. I have proposed an approach that not only seeks a form of truth validity but permits generalisations to be drawn that moves beyond “the repetition of familiar cultural tales” to intentional fulfillment. This paper is ‘work in progress’ towards my thesis and will lead to a more detailed justification for the methods and a time-based plan to instigate research in the field. The outcome of the project is expected to be new knowledge about the journey of an individual in the role of a FLM to become, and a pragmatic call for employers to adopt a more humanistic stance to show equal sensitivity to the development needs of individuals rather than just organisational performance.
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