

**Paper presented at the 7th Developing Leadership Capacity Conference**

**15th – 16th July 2015, hosted by Henley Business School**

**How did Bernard Bass and John Kotter frame  
transformational leadership and leading change?**

Dr Mark Hughes (m.a.hughes@brighton.ac.uk)

Reader in Organizational Change

Brighton Business School/CROME

University of Brighton

Mithras House

Lewes Road

Brighton BN2 4AT

**Abstract**

Leadership is realized when one or more individual successfully frames and defines the reality for others (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). Today, there is an extensive social construction of leadership literature which emphasizes leadership as a co-constructed reality (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). Frame analysis offers an alternative lens to view leadership development, in this instance specifically with regards to transformational leadership and leading change. Gail Fairhurst's (Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996; Fairhurst, 2011) practically orientated books on framing leadership provide a framework for analysing two practitioner orientated accounts of leadership; *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (Bass, 1985) and *Leading Change* (Kotter, 1996). In concluding, firstly leadership writers co-construct realities of transformational leadership and leading change. Secondly, there are potential practical benefits for leadership development of such intangible framing processes. Thirdly, potential leadership development framing must recognise the ethics of framing.

## **Introduction**

For many leadership theorists, leadership and change are synonymous with leadership, influencing individuals, organizations or communities to move from the ‘status quo’ to something different (Ladkin et al, 2010). The focus of this paper is upon how leaders are developed for such activities, in particular how leadership writers frame thinking with regards to transformational leadership and leading change of those being developed. We know that leadership is realized when one or more individual successfully frames and defines reality for others (Smircich and Morgan, 1982) and today, there is an extensive social construction of leadership literature emphasising the co-constructed realities of leadership (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). It is unlikely that either Bernard Bass or John Kotter consciously/explicitly used framing in either of their books featured here. However, more broadly their writing has been influential in framing the reality of transformational leadership and leading change respectively. By association these leadership commentators framed how leaders undertook these activities and how leaders were/are developed to undertake these activities.

In terms of the paper’s structure, the unifying theme of the next section is leadership as the management of meaning, revisiting debates about leadership as social construction which have informed leadership framing. This is followed by an analysis of the reality construction of transformational leadership, through a frame analysis of *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (Bass, 1985) and the reality construction of change leadership through a frame analysis of *Leading Change* (Kotter, 1996). The discussion section is organized around framing questions developed from Fairhurst (2011) and their practical implications for leadership development and leadership developers. Finally, three conclusions are drawn with regards to leadership writers co-constructing reality, framing potentially informing leadership development and acknowledgement of ethical responsibilities which accompany framing.

## **Framing leadership**

When Fairhurst (2011:51) writes ‘in today’s new market economies, recall that leaders are the architects of change, while managers are the everyday problem solvers’ she is framing a very particular account of leadership and management, probably undertaken knowingly given its context within her book on framing. In her framing, leaders and managers are respectively contrasted and privileged as ‘architects of change’ and as ‘everyday problem solvers’. This is pertinent to the framing featured within this paper and how leadership writers construct realities of transformational leadership and leading change. But before focussing upon Bass and Kotter, it is necessary to understand the theoretical background and development of today’s interest in framing in general and leadership framing in particular. Cornelissen et al (2011) reviewed the framing and legitimization of strategic change, highlighting the development of framing and its different applications in different fields and institutional settings, tracing the basic idea of framing back to Bateson (1955/1972). There has been a tendency for leadership researchers and scholars to focus upon how leaders frame reality for

their followers, rather than reflexively focussing upon how leadership writers themselves construct realities, as well as, interpretations of framing by readers and employees. Again it is informative to broaden the focus from leaders and leadership for a moment.

In other words, the nature of the change process and its outcomes can potentially be explained by the way in which it is authored or scripted, and during the process edited and revised, by key narrators, sometimes (but not always) known as change agents or change leaders. (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007:670)

Buchanan and Dawson's (2007) concern is with single voiced narratives of change, instead they argue for greater engagement with organizational change as a polyvocal and multi-story process, rather than the single monologue of a leader. Sonenshein (2010) citing Buchanan and Dawson (2007) encourage scholars to account for the construction of meanings by both managers and employees in understanding how meanings change over time and across organizational levels. In the analysis reported here the focus is upon the single voiced leadership narratives of Bernard Bass and John Kotter with these sense making concerns revisited in the discussion section.

In the seventies, when Pondy (1978) depicted leadership as primarily concerned with managing meaning he made a connection with earlier interest in social construction (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and built a bridge to later interest in leadership discourses (Fairhurst, 2008). The leader as a manager of meaning unifies these different schools of thought. This view of leadership is captured by Bryman (2004:754) as follows '... the importance and significance of the leader as a manager of meaning who actively manipulates symbols in order to instil a vision, manage change, and achieve support for his or her direction'. Social construction of leadership literature is now extensive having grown rapidly over the past 15 years (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). This literature possesses two interrelated characteristics; firstly eschewing a leader-centric approach in which the leader's personality, style, and/or behaviour are primary determining influences on follower's thoughts and actions. Secondly, there is an emphasis upon leadership as a co-constructed reality and as an outcome of interaction between and among social actors. Social constructionist perspectives question common assumptions that leaders inside organizations respond to their external environment (context). Instead, Grint (2005) for example favouring a social constructionist perspective suggested that leaders may construct a context and that '...we should pay more attention to the role of leaders and decision-makers in the construction of contexts that legitimates their intended or executed actions and accounts' (Grint, 2005:1472).

Fairhurst (2008) regarded discursive leadership and leadership psychology as alternating lenses, in this sense they were neither superior nor derivative of each other. Leadership psychologists have been very influential in explaining leadership in general and transformational leadership in particular. Framing applied to leadership is an important outcrop of social constructionism, language and discourse which may complement existing leadership theories rather than replacing them. 'Leadership situations are those in which there exists an obligation or a perceived right on the part of certain individuals to define the reality of others' (Smircich and Morgan, 1982:258). This at the time radical explanation of

leadership is now accepted within critical conceptualizations of leadership, although rarely acknowledged within leadership studies orthodoxy. Indeed against a backdrop of structural-functional philosophical assumptions which underpin leadership studies orthodoxy (Rost, 1993; Collinson, 2012) it is difficult to imagine heroic conceptualisations privileging leaders as being replaced with far less potent depictions of leaders as managers of meaning. Gail Fairhurst's (Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996; Fairhurst, 2011) practically orientated books on framing leadership offer a framework to analyse the two chosen practitioner orientated leadership books (Bass, 1985; Kotter, 1996).

In the ground breaking, *The Art of Framing: Managing the Language of Leadership*, Fairhurst and Sarr (1996:3) described framing as an essential tool for the manager of meaning, 'to determine the meaning of a subject is to make sense of it, to judge its character and significance.' The book benefitted from Gail Fairhurst being an established academic researching inside an organization in which Bob Sarr (her co-author) worked. They used an analogy of a gifted grapher focussing their camera and framing their subject so that a person viewing the photograph knew what the photographer intended, they identified three components of framing; language, thought and forethought. The cautionary note here is that 'as photographers decide what lies inside the frame, authors decide which information to present' (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007: 677).

Their discussion of goals is pertinent to the transformation and change themes of this paper, suggesting that '...ambiguous language and generally framed goals often help facilitate organizational change' (Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996:37). Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) identified tools used to design memorable frames; metaphors, jargon and catchphrases, contrast, spin and stories. When, Fairhurst (2005) revisited *The Art of Framing* and its critical and practitioner reception she acknowledged that practicing managers either really embraced the concept or struggled with it. In terms of those practicing managers embracing the concept she noted that they '... seem to place a premium on communication especially regarding its role in organizational change' (Fairhurst, 2005:167).

*The Power of Framing: Creating the Language of Leadership* (Fairhurst, 2011) built upon *The Art of Framing* (Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996), but went into framing more deeply and consequently it particularly informs the frame analysis reported here. Fairhurst (2011:2) presented six rules guiding the relationship between leadership and reality construction (see Box 1).

- 1) Leaders often cannot control events, but they can control the context under which events are seen if they recognize a framing opportunity.
- 2) At its most basic level, framing reality means defining “the situation here and now” in ways that connect with others.
- 3) “Reality” is often contested. Framing a subject is an act of persuasion by leaders, one imbued with ethical choices.
- 4) It is the uncertainty, confusion, and undecidability of “the situation here and now” that opens it up for interpretation and provides an opportunity for the more verbally skilled among us to emerge as leaders.
- 5) Ultimately, leadership is a design problem. Leaders must figure out what leadership is in the context of what they do and, through the framing and actions, persuade themselves and other people that they are doing it.
- 6) Effective framing requires that leaders be able to control their own spontaneous communications.

### **Box 1 – Reality construction rules (Fairhurst, 2011)**

These rules of reality construction (see Box 1) provide a helpful and succinct way into leadership reality construction. More specifically, Fairhurst (2011) highlighted framing skill components related to cultural discourses, mental models and core framing tasks and focussed upon five types of memorable frame commonly used by leaders; metaphorical, master, simplifying, gain and loss and believability. In terms of the leadership context of framing, Fairhurst (2011:184) offered the following guidance ‘first, you must focus on the “who, what, when, where, why” details of the situation at hand to discern framing at work. Second, you must figure out the design problem of the leader or leaders involved.’ Six framing questions have been adapted from Fairhurst (2011) which are believed to be particularly applicable to identifying framing within the featured books of Bernard Bass and John Kotter (spontaneous communication is unlikely to occur in the context of a book, so it has been omitted).

- 1) What cultural discourse is being employed?
- 2) What is driving the framing of the specific situation (why, where, what and who questions)?
- 3) What mental model is being promoted?
- 4) How can leaders control the context under which events are seen if they recognize a framing opportunity?
- 5) Are metaphorical, master, simplifying, gain and loss and believability frames utilised?
- 6) What is leadership in the context of what leaders do and how do they persuade themselves and others that they are doing it (the design problem)?

### **Box 2 - Leadership framing questions (based upon Fairhurst, 2011)**

In the next two sections, these framing questions (Box 2) are applied to *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (Bass, 1985) and *Leading Change* (Kotter, 1996) in order to gain insights into the construction of particular transformational leadership and leading change realities. However, first it is necessary to summarize the key components of what Bass (1985) and Kotter (1996) were proposing (see Box 3).

<b>Bass (1985) Transformational and Transactional Leadership</b>	<b>Kotter (1996) Eight stage leadership process for creating major change</b>
Transformational or transactional leadership dependent upon antecedents of :	1. Establishing a sense of urgency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External environment</li> <li>• Organizational environment</li> </ul>	2. Forming a powerful guiding coalition
Transformational leadership factors	3. Creating a vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charismatic leadership</li> <li>• Individualized consideration</li> <li>• Intellectual stimulation</li> </ul>	4. Communicating the vision
Transactional leadership factors	5. Empowering others to act on the vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contingent reward</li> <li>• Management by exception</li> </ul>	6. Planning for and creating short term wins
	7. Consolidating improvements and producing still more change
	8. Institutionalizing new approaches

**Box 3 – Key characteristics of Bass (1985) and Kotter’s (1996) leadership prescriptions**

In Box 3, key characteristics of the leadership prescriptions of Bass (1985) and Kotter (1996) are summarized. Bass (1985) was chosen as one of the earliest expositions of transformational leadership with Bass (1985: xv) himself humbly referring to this book as an ‘initial statement’ and ‘preliminary scaffolding’. Since this early exposition much has been written about transformational leadership with Bass and Riggio (2006) offering a far more sophisticated account of transformational leadership and Diaz-Saenz (2011) referring to transformational leadership as the most studied and debated idea of the past 30 years of leadership studies. However, Haslam et al (2011) warned that leaders often resort to a literal interpretation of the term transformational as organizational transformation, whereas what Bass and others primarily offered was a leadership approach towards transforming followers. Kotter had made many contributions to leadership studies prior to *Leading Change* (Kotter, 1996), but this was the book which famously prescribed how leaders should lead change. This was a book about organizational transformation and Kotter frequently referred to transformation, despite referring to change in the book’s title. This frame analysis was originally undertaken as part of a literature review of the leadership of organizational change literature (see Hughes, 2015a). The leadership development implications of such framing are the focus of the discussion section, but first how were transformational leadership and leading change framed?

## **Bernard Bass and the reality construction of transformational leadership**

This frame analysis is informed by and organized around the six framing questions introduced in Box 2, offering new insights into the construction of Bass's (1985) particular account of transformational leadership as summarized in Box 3.

***What cultural discourse is being employed?*** In the Preface to *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (Bass, 1985) cultural reference points are immediately apparent; President John. F. Kennedy, Theodore Roosevelt, Mahatma Gandhi. Bass's discourse however was one of change, rather than continuity 'a shift in paradigm is in order. Another concept is required to go beyond these limits. To achieve follower performance beyond the ordinary limits, leadership must be transformational' (Bass, 1985: xiii). In the opening chapter, Bass acknowledged the centrality of promoting change for individuals, groups and organizations. In Chapter Nine, Bass focused upon *The Organizational Environment* and the emergence of transformational or transactional leadership being dependent upon '...the historical, social, economic and cultural milieu in which leadership occurs...' (Bass, 1985:153). Bass (1985) regarded the social and political environment of the United States at the time of writing as conducive to the emergence of transformational leadership.

***What is driving the framing of the specific situation (why, where, what and who questions)?*** In answering this question, Fairhurst (2011) focuses upon the organizational level for her leadership readers. Whilst, Bass's ideas are applicable at an organizational level, transformational leadership is framed for readers at a more generic level.

Why does America require transformational leaders? Answer = In order to complement the transactional leaders which already exist.

Where are American organizations heading? Answer = Towards more change and environmental turbulence.

In terms of what really counts in American organizations, Bass (1985:183) made a strong case for moral leadership 'the well-being of organizational life is better served in the long run by moral leadership.' Bass (1985:186) suggested that 'we expect that profit-maximizers will be transactional leaders and quality of life managers will be transformational.' The concept of transformational leadership speaks directly to the fourth sub-question - who are we?

The transactional leader accepts group and self-identities as currently defined; the transformational leader changes them...The transformational leader changes the social warp and woof of reality. (Bass, 1985:24)

The framing of transformational leadership is driven by a requirement for transformational leaders to act morally in promoting and facilitating change through transforming follower identities - changing their reality.

***What mental model is being promoted?*** For Fairhurst (2011) mental models relate to deeply held images we hold which inform our thoughts, actions and words. In this sense, Bass's mental model underpinning his book is that a particular form of leadership, transformational leadership results in transformation. More tangibly Bass's conceptual model of transformational leadership becomes the mental model for Bass and subsequent readers (see Diaz-Saenz, 2011 for further discussion). In this early exposition of transformational leadership, Bass (1985: xv) is thinking aloud 'the models that are presented should be seen as preliminary scaffolding. They suggest a variety of relationships about which much empirical testing still remains to be done.' The final sentence of the book concludes with Bass (1985:230) declaring some confidence in '...the transformational factors of charismatic leadership, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation, and the transactional factors of contingent reward and management-by-exception.' By the end of his book Bass (1985) appears to have satisfied at least himself about the potential of the emerging mental model of transformational leadership.

***How can leaders control the context under which events are seen if they recognize a framing opportunity?*** Bass (1985:4) surprisingly acknowledges the role of the leader in framing the context, although without use the language of framing.

More quantity is no longer enough; quality must improve dramatically. Leaders may help in bringing about a radical shift in attention. For instance, groups oriented toward traditional beliefs will be shifted so that they come to value modern approaches. The contextual framework may be changed by leaders.

Bass's reference to leaders co-constructing their context is tantalising, but it is as far as Bass goes and he did not appear to have been a social constructionist (see Fairhurst and Grant, 2010 for discussion of the impact of social construction upon leadership). Bass crosses discipline boundaries and his writing appears to have been heavily influenced by psychology and to a lesser extent political science. Sociological analysis of leadership potentially elaborating the context would have been informative.

***Are metaphorical, master, simplifying, gain and loss and believability frames utilised?*** The book is divided into six parts with each part introduced through a short vignette 'As acting General Manager, Henderson...' (page 1), 'After the first meeting with the Director...' (page 33), 'Eleanor Samuels had...' (page 79). These vignettes appear to offer fictitious glimpses into organizational life, with no apparent continuities between vignettes. In terms of framing these vignettes may be regarded as metaphorical frames transferring meaning between entities and/or as simplifying frames offering illustrations before the more complicated discussion of concepts. The master frame repeatedly invoked throughout the book was explaining transformational leadership as being different from transactional leadership.

Contrast features prominently in Fairhurst and Sarr (1996:111) when they write '...contrast is very useful because sometimes we can say what our subject is not more easily than we can say what it is.' Differentiation through contrast informs the master framing of transformational leadership, although the potential downside of such contrast is erroneously

assuming that transformational leadership is always superior and/or preferential to transactional leadership. Gain and loss framing is also applicable to differentiations between transformational leadership and transactional leadership. There will be gains or losses if the most appropriate form of leadership is/is not applied to a particular situation. Finally, in terms of believability framing, credibility is gained through the use of extensive supporting references. And through Bass's (1985: xiv) personal legitimacy referring to '...studying leadership behaviour over the past 35 years...' suggesting that he has been on a quest and that this is far more than a whim. Also, the book's dedication to James MacGregor Burns may be part of the framing, aligning Bass with many leadership studies scholars who favoured Burns's (1978) mental model.

***What is leadership in the context of what leaders do and how do they persuade themselves and others that they are doing it (the design problem)?*** *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (Bass, 1985) speaks directly to the design problem. The book explains a requirement for transactional leadership and for transformational leadership. In this way the book explains the purpose of leadership for the reader in terms of what is required. Bass (1985:20) succinctly described a transformational leader '...as one who motivates us to do more than we originally expected to do.' We are offered a design of what a transformational leader does, which may be achieved through charismatic leadership, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation as transformational resources, but this does not preclude transactional resources of contingent reward and management-by-exception. If favoured transformational leadership offers a design for both what leaders do and a design for followers and other stakeholders of what their leaders should be doing.

### **John Kotter and the reality construction of leading change**

This frame analysis is informed by and organized around six framing questions introduced in Box 2, offering new insights into the construction of Kotter's (1996) particular account of leading change as summarized in Box 3.

***What cultural discourse is being employed?*** *Leading Change* (Kotter, 1996) commences with an anxiety provoking first chapter – *Transforming Organizations: Why Firms Fail*. Whilst, this is a depressing way to commence a book, it was very much in tune with cultural discourses of the day, which questioned the efficacy of managing change (Beer et al, 1990) and looked towards the East as a competitive threat, as well as, a potential solution in terms of the management of culture (Peters and Waterman, 1982).

***What is driving the framing of the specific situation (why, where, what and who questions)?*** In answering this question it is important to acknowledge that Kotter gave considerable impetus to interest in mission, vision and values in organizations. Again, in the context of a leadership book Kotter was speaking to a broad audience rather than to a single organization.

Why did American organizations arrive at the situation which Kotter was framing?  
Answer = Because they had overemphasised management at the expense of leadership.

Where are organizations heading? Answer = Toward operating environments which will be far more uncertain and turbulent.

What really counts in organizations? Answer = Leading change.

Who are we, may be related to two of Kotter's eight steps. The second step encourages the creation of a guiding coalition, in this way instead of individualistic leadership there was an emphasis upon a powerful leadership group. The fifth step encourages empowering employees for broad based action and in this way Kotter implies that everyone is potentially involved within a change process.

***What mental model is being promoted?*** Kotter had written extensively about leadership with *Leading Change* a change orientated extension of his thinking around differentiating leadership and management (Kotter, 1988 and 1990). In this way his writing reflected the mental model of leadership he had been developing for some time. A central element of Kotter's (1996) *Leading Change* prescription was his eight-stage process (see Box 3). The book was organized around these eight stages and sufficiently simple for readers to remember and internalize. It is likely that this model became the mental model of change leadership for many leaders and academics even if they cannot attribute the model to John Kotter; certainly the language of these eight steps pervades many organizations today.

***How can leaders control the context under which events are seen if they recognize a framing opportunity?*** Kotter did not explicitly encourage leaders to control the context; however there is strong environmental determinism within his writing. Kotter (1996:3) begins his introductory chapter with the following sentence 'by any objective measure, the amount of significant, often traumatic, change in organizations has grown tremendously over the past two decades.' Kotter uses the background of a traumatic and changing environment as a rationale for leadership processes subsequently prescribed in order to create major change. Kotter's construction of a particular account of a turbulent context potentially framed the context in which leaders operated, as well as, offering leaders a context which justified their leadership actions. In this sense, Kotter framed the context even if the language of framing was not employed.

***Are metaphorical, master, simplifying, gain and loss and believability frames utilised?*** Kotter's (1996) writing is rich in metaphors with the most obvious his eight step leadership process for successful transformation. Steps literally describe steps, but equally imply a rational, linear and sequential process for leaders to lead successful change. Kotter's master frame emphasises leading change, rather than managing change, although Kotter does acknowledge that management is as important leadership. Kotter's eight steps themselves and how they are depicted may be seen as simplifying frames (the whole book can be read during a single train journey). The book contains many case studies of anonymous leaders working in anonymous organizations again simplifying concepts under discussion. Gain and loss is one of the main ways leading change is framed. Transformation efforts were depicted

as failing (the loss) as a consequence of leadership errors (Kotter, 1995). Whereas, in *Leading Change* eight errors are reversed into proactive means to lead change resulting in a successful outcome (the gain). Believability framing is very different to Bernard Bass with Kotter consciously not including supporting references in his book primarily aimed at practitioners. The book gains credibility from many endorsements of senior leaders contained within and on the dustcover of the book. Case studies whilst anonymous appear plausible and Kotter's track record of working as a consultant with large American corporations and his leadership publications and earlier research projects gives his book legitimacy.

***What is leadership in the context of what leaders do and how do they persuade themselves and others that they are doing it (the design problem)?*** *Leading Change* (1996) included in TIME's (2014) 25 most influential business management books highlights its continuing practitioner appeal. However, equally this book has influenced academic debate if gauged by citation counts (see Hughes, 2015a). In this way the book offered an account of what leaders do in the context of change, atypically endorsed by both practitioners and academics. If leaders choose to follow the eight steps they had a rationale for doing change leadership, a justification for how they do change leadership and a methodology for doing change leadership. Equally if they had studied leadership at a business school they are likely to have been taught about Kotter's (1996) *Leading Change*. As an approach to leadership in the context of change, this was approach is likely to be persuasive for leaders and other stakeholders in leadership offering a solution to the design problem.

### **Discussion – Framing transformation and change orientated leadership development**

If gauged by citation counts Bass and Riggio's (2006) *Transformational Leadership* and Kotter's (1996) *Leading Change* have been by far more the most influential approaches towards leading transformation and leading change (see Hughes, 2015a). Bass and Riggio (2006) suggested that transformational leaders went beyond exchanges or agreements, achieving superior results through employing one or more of four components; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. The focus of transformational leadership is upon leaders transforming followers/subordinates. Bass and Riggio (2006) acknowledged that little research had examined how transformational leadership affected organizational change (see also Yukl, 1999 identification of guiding and facilitating change as missing from transformational leadership). Kotter (1996) offered an eight step methodology for leaders to 'successfully' lead transformations (see Box 3). In 2012, a new edition was published with a revised preface in which Kotter (2012:vii) claimed 'the material in this book is not only still relevant now, sixteen years after it was published, but I believe it is more relevant, and for one reason the speed of change continues to increase.'

The framing analysis of Bass's (1985) *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* and Kotter's (1996) *Leading Change* reported here highlighted two very different constructions of the leadership of transformation and change reality. The two previous sections informed by the writings of Gail Fairhurst offered different accounts of constructing the leadership reality of transformation and change. However, one of the similarities was encouraging leaders to work with uncertainty 'it is the uncertainty, confusion and undecidability of the 'situation here and now' that opens it up for interpretation and provides an opportunity for the more verbally skilled among us to emerge as leaders' (Fairhurst, 2011: 7). There is a synergy between the uncertainties of transformation and change and the leadership framing opportunities inherent within acts of framing (see also accounts of framing strategic change, Sonenshein, 2010 and Cornelissen et al, 2011).

Reality as constructed by leadership writers (Pondy, Fairhurst, Bass and Kotte) has implications for leadership developers and leaders in a manner similar to Russian dolls are nested within each other. Nested within the reality construction of a leadership writer, is the construction of reality of a leadership reader (the leadership developer) who then constructs realities of leading transformation and change for leaders, who construct what it is to lead transformation and change (the design problem) and finally followers construct a reality of what it is to be lead within the context of transformation and change, which they themselves may frame positively or negatively. In order to elaborate upon this analogy, six analytical questions (Box 2) which informed the two previous sections are restated as normative leadership development statements. However, these prescriptions are tempered with an acknowledgement of the potential sense making of those being developed.

***Leadership developers need to locate leadership development within relevant cultural discourses*** Fairhurst (2011: 32) writes 'as a historical era plays itself out, the collective experience of its defining events, people, tools, and so on gives rise to particular ways of seeing the world, including ways of talking and behaving.' Leadership development is probably intuitively couched in terms of relevant cultural discourses, but this statement emphasises the centrality of such grounding. Whilst, Bass (1985) and Kotter's (1996) writings were a decade apart they both responded to anxieties within American societies and offering leadership solutions to perceived problems within American corporations. As Bass (1985:155) acknowledged '...the current social and political scene in the United States contains elements conducive for the emergence of transformational leadership.' Guest (1990) highlighted powerful themes within the American Dream viewing America as a land of opportunity where individuals, through hard work and self-improvement could be successful, emphasising '...the importance of strong leadership, a kind of rugged entrepreneurial individualism reflected in and reinforced by a strong organizational culture' (Guest, 1990:391). In the eighties and nineties American economic success was being challenged from the East, particularly Japan. Bass (1985) and Kotter (1996) offered the right message at the right time they were in tune with cultural discourses of the day. This is part of the explanation why they have both been successful in influencing academics, as well as, practitioners. The counterpoint is that such models may be less applicable to, for example,

public service in the UK, such as the National Health Service requiring a different cultural discourse.

***Leadership developers need to ensure that leadership development framing addresses followers – why, where, what and who questions*** In organizational change situations Balogun and Hope Hailey (2008:194) suggested that people want to understand ‘what this all means for me’ (see also Armenakis et al (1999) for a discussion of personal valence). It is informative to revisit Fairhurst’s (2011:7) explanation of these core framing tasks:

Leaders are the organization’s change agents. They should be able to answer the followers’ “why, where, what and who” questions: why we are here (mission), where the organization is headed (vision), what really counts in the organization (values) and who we are (collective identity).

In comparing and contrasting Bass and Kotter’s framing, Bass’s account of leadership was particularly informed by psychology and Kotter’s by strategy. As a consequence of these academic predispositions Bass placed greater emphasis upon values and collective identity with Kotter placing greater emphasis upon mission and vision. Intriguingly, Bass (1985:24) differentiated transactional leaders from transformational leaders in terms of ‘the transactional leader accepts group and self-identities as currently defined; the transformational leader changes them.’ This suggests that for Bass the ‘who’ question was part of the transformation process. Leadership development has to address the followers - why, where, what and who questions, which will inevitably arise during a process of transformation and change. Overviews of leadership development (Day, 2011; Mabey, 2013 and Day et al, 2014) emphasise leadership development as broader than leader development embracing followers and other stakeholders. These framing questions highlight potentially the issues for followers, which leaders and leadership developers need to pre-empt.

***Leadership developers need to thoroughly understand the mental models being disseminated and anticipate their reception*** Earlier frame analysis suggested that Bass (1985) and Kotter’s (1996) conceptual models potentially became their mental models and their readers mental models. Both conceptual models are relatively simple and memorable. However, the implication for leadership developers is a need to fully understand these mental models; their strengths and weaknesses and their earlier expositions, as well as, later expositions. Mental models relate to deeply held images informing our thoughts, actions and words (Fairhurst, 2011). In this sense, it is essential that conceptual models informing such mental models are carefully and accurately conveyed and located within their unique chronological and developmental context. For example, *Transformational Leadership* (Bass and Riggio, 2006) today is the key transformational leadership text, but the framing reported here highlights Bass’s (1985) *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* as an important early exposition. Similarly, discussion of Kotter’s (1996) *Leading Change*, requires reference to Kotter’s earlier writings (see Hughes, 2015 for a discussion of Kotter’s chronology). It is likely that leaders being developed will have already been exposed to theories, models and concepts through MBAs, MScs and other training and development, influence their reception of what is presented.

***Leadership developers need to address how leaders frame their operating contexts*** Initially context appears as a given, something fixed which change/transformation leaders have to respond to. However, those favouring a social constructionist perspective regard the leader as constructing the context which legitimates their intended or executed actions (Grint, 2005). Fairhurst (2011:2) acknowledged that whilst leaders often cannot control events ‘...they can control the context under which events are seen if they recognize a framing opportunity.’ Kotter framed an ever changing turbulent business environment, providing an effective context for sales of his book and a context for his readers to lead within – tough leaders, making tough decisions in a tough environment. In a similar manner, Bass (1985:153) referred to the ‘...the historical, social, economic and cultural milieu in which leadership occurs...’ with the social and political scene in the United States at the time of writing conducive to the emergence of transformational leadership. Leaders potentially frame the context in such a way that their leadership is perceived as a response to the uncertainties usually accompanying transformation and change. The leadership development opportunity is to develop within leadership the capability to frame the operating context, rather than leaders being depicted as passive victims of their operating context.

***Leadership development would benefit from employing metaphorical, master, simplifying, gain and loss and believability frames*** In the two previous sections, transformational leadership and leading change being framed in these ways was illustrated. Leadership development is framed in particular ways. ‘Human thought processes are largely metaphorical’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 6) with many metaphors used to explain leadership (Hatch et al, 2006; Amernic et al, 2007; Spicer and Alvesson, 2011). Leadership development’s master and simplifying frames are that leaders can and that leaders should be developed. Other simplifying frames include leadership competencies and psychometric tests which reduce leadership to quantitative scores. In terms of gain and loss frames, Ford and Harding (2007) highlighted leadership rather than management being advocated as the key to effective organizational performance. Leadership development flourishing in recent years (Day, 2011) may have been at the expense of management development losses. The frame analysis of Bass (1985) and Kotter (1996) highlighted a variety of believability frames being used, to give legitimacy to what was being prescribed. Leadership developers need to reflect upon the believability frames which they apply and those they need to apply. Equally leadership development needs to address the way other stakeholders in an organizational change may use such framing to counter a change/transformation.

***Leadership development persuades leaders that they and others are doing leadership (the design problem)*** Leadership almost disappears in more critical accounts of social constructionism as invoked earlier (see Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003), for further discussion of disappearance in the context of leadership). However, leaders are very real in practically orientated accounts of framing (Fairhurst, 2011). It may well be that leadership development plays an essential role with regards to the design problem in that interventions, tools and techniques persuade leaders and others that they are doing leadership. The transformational leadership and change leadership of leaders becomes more real through engagement with leadership developers. In this sense leaders need leadership developers, as

much as, leadership developers need leaders with these mutual interests providing leadership development's master frame.

## Conclusions

The analysis reported here was based upon Bass's (1985) *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* and Kotter's (1996) *Leading Change*. The implication was not that these authors consciously used frames, but that as leadership writers they constructed accounts of reality providing influential and enduring methodologies informing the development of leaders. Three conclusions may be drawn from the analysis reported here.

Firstly, in addition to leaders co-constructing reality (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010), leadership writers co-construct realities of transformational leadership and leading change with this framing potentially informing the development of leaders and how they are developed. This framing may be unconsciously/intuitively already included within leadership development activities relating to transformation and change, but acknowledgement of framing reality construction makes explicit what is happening and responsibilities attached to such framing (see third conclusion). The genesis of this paper was the writing of *The Leadership of Organizational Change* (Hughes, 2015a) encountering the disproportionate influence of Bernard Bass and John Kotter upon this sub-field of leadership studies.

A plausible explanation of the 'Matthew Effect' was explored, with particular reference to the frequency of citations to these authors. Podsakoff et al (2008) favoured citation counts as a measure of influence citing Robert Merton's (1968, 1988) work on the diffusion of ideas through scientific communities. Merton identified the distribution of citations being skewed towards a small number of scholars, with these scholars accounting for the majority of citations, a phenomenon labelled the 'Matthew Effect'. Bass and Kotter's influence upon the sub-field may be explained in terms of the Matthew Effect. However, a suspicion remained that there was another explanation for why such emphasis was placed upon Bass and Kotter and this paper has offered a second explanation in terms of the reality construction of transformational leadership and leading change. Leadership development undertaken with specific reference to transformation and change has to acknowledge the socially constructed reality of transformational leadership and/or leading change. In this acknowledgement it is necessary to remember that leadership reality is contested (Fairhurst, 2011) as well as, strategic change being contested and the subject of multiple interpretations (Cornelissen et al, 2011; Buchanan and Dawson, 2007).

Secondly, whilst Bass (1985) and Kotter (1996) probably did not consciously use framing tools and techniques which appear to have gained prominence after their books were published, revisiting their books through a framing perspective offers new insights into how their writing potentially constructs competing accounts of reality and how their writing persuades. Acknowledgment of intangible framing processes informing leadership development offers potential practical benefits, as featured in the discussion section (see Box 4, for a summary):

Leadership developers need to locate leadership development within relevant cultural discourses

Leadership developers need to ensure that leadership development framing addresses followers – why, where, what and who questions

Leadership developers need to thoroughly understand the mental models being disseminated and anticipate their reception

Leadership developers need to address how leaders frame their operating contexts

Leadership development would benefit from employing metaphorical, master, simplifying, gain and loss and believability frames

Leadership development persuades leaders that they and others are doing leadership (the design problem)

#### **Box 4 – Framing transformation and change orientated leadership development**

Fairhurst (2005) found varying degrees of engagement with framing amongst practicing managers and those who embraced the concept of framing placed a premium on communication especially with regards to framing organizational change. Practical leadership development suggestions (see Box 4) appear to be particularly applicable for those working on organizational change agenda.

Some leaders disparage communication as something they just do automatically. They may also label communication ‘mere rhetoric’, ‘window dressing’ or ‘just words’ because it cannot change the hard cold facts of a situation. (Fairhurst, 2011:5)

However, framing encourages a far more sophisticated engagement with communications in general and discourse in particular which raises considerable opportunities for leadership developers to move beyond ‘mere rhetoric’ of communication, towards understanding and informing leadership as a co-constructed reality.

Thirdly, ethical issues of leadership framing are increasingly raised (Fairhurst, 2011). Deetz et al (2000) warned about potential dangers of framing including managers/leaders not always having direct control over discursive tools used and losing credibility if they exaggerate. A leader framing reality in a particular way may be mutually beneficial for everyone, but this will always be at the expense of alternative and competing conceptualisations of reality. As, Fairhurst (2011) acknowledged reality is often contested and framing involves persuasion by leaders, requiring ethical choices. Leadership developers utilizing framing have to make similar ethical choices. For example a leadership developer may frame an anxiety provoking yet disingenuous rapidly changing and turbulent operating environment, creating opportunities for further leadership development work, which is simultaneously unethical in its reality construction.

The National Communication Association's (NCA) *Credo for Ethical Communication* is cited by Fairhurst (2011) which includes 'we accept responsibility for the short-and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.' The morality of transformational leadership (Tourish, 2013) and Kotter's (1996) account of leading change (Hughes, 2015b) have recently been critically questioned. However, in an early exposition of transformational leadership as featured in this paper, Bass (1985:183) frequently engaged with the morality of his emerging model of transformational leadership.

The well-being of organizational life is better served in the long run by moral leadership. That is, transformations that result in the fulfilment of real needs will prove more beneficial to the organization than transformations that deal with manufactured needs and group delusions.

Bass (1985: 183) encouraged a need for caution with regards to 'inventing and encouraging group delusions – a favourite of demagogues – is transformational leadership at its worst'. Bass's concerns about unethically framing group delusions are apparent. In contrast, Kotter (1996:46) explains his first leading change step emphasising 'establishing a sense of urgency'.

Real leaders often create these sort of artificial crises rather than waiting for something to happen...Even though transformations start more easily with a natural financial crisis, given a choice, it is clearly smarter not to wait for one to happen. Better to create the problem yourself.

Whilst, group delusions of artificial crises Kotter encourages appear unethical to this reader, we are left with a paradox. Reality construction through framing is never neutral 'morality is not objectively real but subjectively constructed' (Fairhurst, 2011:155). Framing as well as making a valuable contribution to leading and leadership studies, as this paper has suggested potentially informs leadership development, the dilemma remains why should my framing of reality as reported here be privileged over yours or yours over mine?

### **Acknowledgement**

I acknowledge and appreciated the encouraging comments relating to the extended abstract which have informed the development of this paper.

## References

- Alvesson, M., and S. Sveningsson. (2003) The great disappearing act: Difficulties in doing 'leadership'. *The Leadership Quarterly* 14 (3): 359-381.
- Amernic, J., Craig, R. and D. Tourish. (2007) The transformational leader as pedagogue, physician, architect, commander, and saint: Five root metaphors in Jack Welch's letters to stockholders of General Electric. *Human Relations* 60 (12): 1839-1872.
- Armenakis, A.A., Harris, S.G. and H.S. Field. (1999) Making change permanent: A model for institutionalizing change. In Pasmore, W. and Woodman, R. (eds), *Research in Organization Change and Development*, Volume XII, 97-128. JAI Press: Greenwich, CT.
- Balogun, J. and V. Hope Hailey. (2008) *Exploring strategic change*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Harlow: FT Prentice Hall.
- Bass, B.M. (1985) *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press.
- Bass, B.M., and R.E. Riggio. (2006) *Transformational leadership*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc/Psychology Press.
- Bateson, G. (1955/1972) *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine.
- Beer, M., Eisenstat, R.A. and B. Spector. (1990) Why change programs don't produce Change. *Harvard Business Review* 68 (6): 158-166.
- Berger, P.L., and T. Luckmann. (1966) *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City (NY): Anchor Books.
- Buchanan, D., and P. Dawson. (2007) Discourse and audience: Organizational change as a multi-story process. *Journal of Management Studies* 44 (5):669-686.
- Burns, J.M. (1978) *Leadership*. New York: Harper Row Publishers.
- Bryman, A. (2004) Qualitative research on leadership: A critical but appreciative review. *The Leadership Quarterly* 15 (6): 729-769.
- Collinson, D. (2012) Prozac leadership and the limits of positive thinking. *Leadership* 8 (2): 87-107.
- Cornelissen, J.P., Holt, R. and M. Zundel. (2011) The role of analogy and metaphor in the framing and legitimization of strategic change. *Organization Studies* 32 (12) 1701-1716.
- Day, D.V. (2011) Leadership development. In *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership*, eds. A. Bryman., D. Collinson, K. Grint, B. Jackson and M. Uhl-Bien, 53-70. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Day, D.V., J.W. Fleenor., L.E. Atwater., R.E. Sturm and R.A. Mckee. (2014) Advances in leader and leadership development: A review of 25 years of research and theory. *The Leadership Quarterly* 25 (1): 63-82.

- Deetz, S.A., Tracy, S.J. and J.L. Simpson. (2000) *Leading organizations through transition: Communication and cultural change*. In cooperation with Setonworldwide, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Diaz-Saenz, H.R. (2011) Transformational leadership. In *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership*, eds. Bryman, A., D. Collinson. K. Grint. B. Jackson and M. Uhl-Bien, 299-310. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Fairhurst, G.T. (2005) Reframing the art of framing: Problems and prospects for leadership. *Leadership* 1(2): 165-185.
- Fairhurst, G.T. (2008) Discursive leadership: A communication alternative to leadership psychology". *Management Communication Quarterly* 21 (4): 510-521.
- Fairhurst, G.T. (2011) *The power of framing: Creating the language of leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, Wiley Imprint.
- Fairhurst, G.T. and D. Grant. (2010) The social construction of leadership: A sailing guide. *Management Communication Quarterly* 24 (2): 171-210.
- Fairhurst, G.T. and R.A. Sarr. (1996) *The art of framing: Managing the language of leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Inc.
- Ford, J. and N. Harding. (2007) Move over management: We are all leaders now. *Management Learning* 38 (5): 475-493.
- Grint, K. (2005) Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of 'leadership'. *Human Relations* 58 (11): 1467-1494.
- Guest, D. (1990) Human resource management and the American dream. *Journal of Management Studies* 27 (4): 377-397.
- Haslam, S.A., S.D. Reicher, and M.J. Platow. (2011) *The new psychology of leadership: Identity, influence and power*. Hove: Psychology Press.
- Hatch, M.J., Kostera, M. and Kozminski, A. (2006) The three faces of leadership: Manager, artist and priest. *Organizational Dynamics* 35(1): 49-68.
- Hughes, M. (2015a) *The leadership of organizational change*. London: Routledge (forthcoming).
- Hughes, M. (2015b) Leading changes: Why transformation explanations fail. *Leadership* (forthcoming).
- Kotter J.P. (1988) *The leadership factor*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kotter J.P. (1990) *A force for change: How leadership differs from management*. New York: Free Press.
- Kotter J.P. (1995) Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review* 73 (2): 259-67.

- Kotter, J. P. (1996 and 2012) *Leading change*. Boston MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Ladkin, D., Wood, M., and J. Pillay. (2010) How do leaders lead change? In Ladkin, D. (2010) *Rethinking leadership: A new look at old leadership questions*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Lakoff, G, and M. Johnson. (1980) *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mabey, C. (2013) Leadership development in organizations: Multiple discourses and diverse practice. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 15 (4): 359-380
- Merton, R. (1968) The Matthew effect in science. *Science* 159:56-63.
- Merton, R. (1988) The Matthew effect in science, II: Cumulative advantage and the symbolism of intellectual property. *ISIS* 79: 606-623.
- Peters, T.J. and R.H. Waterman. (1982) *In search of excellence: Lessons from America's best run companies*. New York: Harper Row.
- Podsakoff, P.M., Mackenzie, S.B., Podsakoff, N.P. and D.G. Bachrach. (2008) Scholarly influence in the field of management: A bibliometric analysis of the determinants of university and author impact in the management literature of the past quarter of a century. *Journal of Management* 34 (4): 641-720.
- Pondy, L.R. (1978) Leadership is a language game. In Leavitt, H.J., Pondy, L.R. and D.M. Boje. (eds) (1989) *Readings in Managerial Psychology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rost, J.C. (1993) *Leadership for the twenty-first century*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Smircich, L. and G. Morgan. (1982) Leadership: The management of meaning. *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* 18 (3): 257-273.
- Sonenshein, S. (2010) We're changing - or are we? Untangling the role of progressive, regressive, and stability narratives during strategic change implementation. *Academy of Management Journal* 53 (3): 477-512.
- Spicer, A. and M. Alvesson. (2011) Metaphors for leadership. In Alvesson, M. and A. Spicer. (eds). *Metaphors we lead by: Understanding leadership in the real world*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- TIME (2014) The 25 most influential business management books. <http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,2086680,00.html> Accessed 13/10/14.
- Tourish, D. (2013) *The dark side of transformational leadership*. London: Routledge.

Yukl, G. (1999) An evaluation of conceptual weaknesses in transformational and charismatic leadership theories. *The Leadership Quarterly* 10 (2): 285-305.