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Abstract
Consistent with views that see leadership emerging from social practices rather than from the external mind, this paper contributes to an emerging movement in leadership studies known as 'leadership-as-practice' (L-A-P). This movement looks for leadership in its music and activity rather than in the traits and heroics of individual actors. The article distinguishes L-A-P from the individualistic approach by explaining its intersection with its dualistic counterpart, theory; with the agency–structure problem; and with relationality and meaning in organizations. It calls for a modification in classic approaches to research methodology and to leadership development. L-A-P is advised to consider its natural affinity with democratic participation through leaderful practices that systematically privilege the co-creation of social organization.

Keywords
leadership, leadership-as-practice, leaderful practice, agency vs. structure, collective leadership, distributed leadership, leadership development

Introduction

After the long history in institutional thought and practice of considering leadership as an individual property, there has recently been some momentum in entertaining alternative perspectives. These perspectives are not meant to dethrone the individualistic paradigm for its own sake, but rather to affirm the value of detaching leadership from personality in order to allow leadership to focus on social interactions and behavioral change within organizational life (Crevani et al., 2010). Among these perspectives is the movement known as 'leadership-as-practice' (L-A-P), which focuses on the everyday practice of leadership including its moral, emotional, and relational aspects, rather than its rational, objective, and technical ones (Carroll et al., 2008). It looks for leadership in its activity rather than through the traits and heroics of individual actors under the longstanding 'great man' theory portrayed by Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle. Leadership-as-practice is concerned far

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more about *where*, *how*, and *why* leadership work is being organized and accomplished than about *who* is offering visions for others to do the work.

The primary advantage of L-A-P is that practitioners adopting this approach are better able to understand and reflect on their own actions and, consequently, better able to reconstruct their activity in light of their reflections and on behalf of their mutual interests. Although L-A-P does not take an ideological stance that leadership be democratic in character, it is often depicted as a shared process that has collaborative tendencies. For leadership-as-practice to become a 'leaderful practice', it is important that practitioners and writers, as I shall plainly advise, systematically privilege the co-creation of a community by those who are involved in its development through their free expression and shared engagement.

In this article, I seek to develop the leadership-as-practice movement and its contrasting approach to the dominant individualistic paradigm, focusing in particular on how practice is treated in conjunction with theory and how L-A-P may be positioned within the role of agency in altering historical structures of organization now and in the future. Specific reference to extant organizational structures will be reviewed as a basis for entertaining a fresh outlook on leadership to be followed by the impetus for a change in our leadership conceptions arising from new perspectives on relationality and meaning in organizations. I will also at this point pause to consider how an L-A-P orientation would inevitably lead to a modification of conventional views about research and methodology. From this point, I will expand the L-A-P model which currently stands as value free in respect of the nature of participation within the leadership community. A focus on the value of true democratic participation in leadership would have us incorporate, as noted earlier, the contribution of a leaderful practice (Raelin, 2003). I will finish with a reference to change agency through leadership development – call it *leaderful* development – under the norms of the democratic tradition.

The leadership-as-practice movement

Rather than refer to leadership as occurring through the traits or behaviors of particular individuals, the leadership-as-practice movement looks to leadership as occurring as a practice. A practice is a cooperative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome.[1] The practitioners to any practice come to learn the key distinctions that constitute their practice usually through active engagement in the practice world (Schatzki, 2005; Wenger, 1998; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009). The practice being referred to may be mundane or may be extraordinary, and there is acceptance, as noted earlier, of its emotional and relational character (Chia and Holt, 2006). In this sense, leadership-as-practice is less about what one person thinks or does and more about what people may accomplish together. It is thus concerned with how leadership emerges and unfolds through coping in day-to-day experience (Heidegger, 1927, 1962). The exogenous conditions of leadership are often thought to constitute leadership rather than to predict it. The social and material contingencies, for example, impacting the leadership cadre – the people who are effecting leadership at any given time – do not reside outside of leadership but are very much embedded within it. To find leadership, then, we must look to the practice within which it is occurring.

The idea of considering practice as the core unit of analysis may originate from sociocultural theories that call attention to the intersection between the material world and

human consciousness (Vygotksy, 1962, 1978). Rather than separate our views of the world from the world, as correspondence theories would have us do (Russell, 1912), the practice approach is constructed as an activity with its own structure and development (Leont'ev, 1978, 1981). Practice is not understood, then, as the physical or mental capacity of any one individual because it is embedded within the situation in which it takes place (Resnick, 1991; Spillane and Sherer, 2004). Practices are social sites in which temporary clusters of events, people, and meaning compose one another (Schatzki, 2005).

The practice view may upend our traditional views of leadership because it does not rely on the attributes of individuals nor need it focus on the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers, which historically has been the starting point for any discussion of leadership. Indeed, using an elegant Durkheimian analysis, Grint (2010) goes so far as to suggest that leadership requires followership in its essence because leaders are necessary to displace the existential anxiety of those who are followers. Leaders make a pact with followers that accords the former power and privilege in exchange for the assumption of the weight of responsibility in an increasingly ominous world.

Leaving aside notions of leader–follower separation for a moment, a familiar approach to leadership would have us consider a functional analysis based on the work of another classic sociological writer, Talcott Parson (and his colleagues). The functional approach stipulates that leadership occurs based on four critical processes: setting a mission, actualizing goals, sustaining commitment, and responding to changes (Parsons et al., 1953). Although our devotion to heroic imagery compels us to isolate the one person who performs these functions on behalf of followers, it is advanced here that the study of leadership should focus as much on how and to what extent these functions are performed as much as by who performs them. Once we decide to focus on the 'who', we may be prepared to identify others besides the position leader as those contributing to the accomplishment of these key functions.

Let us consider two underlying themes that can help us distinguish what we might call the leadership-as-individual paradigm from the emerging leadership-as-practice movement: dualistic thought and the agency problem.

Dualisms

L-A-P does not center 'knowing' within the mind of the 'knower' as in traditional leadership models, which separate objects from subjects in a classic Cartesian dualism pervading modernist epistemology. Cartesian logic placed control in the mind of the individual who becomes the mastermind of events, both present and future. Some individuals are thought to be more adept in organizing others and consequently have been accorded such titles as 'leaders'. The study of leadership, then, has become a matter of trying to understand the motives and resulting behaviors of such individuals and their ensuing influence over others (Dachler and Hosking, 1995). This positioning of the individual, however, can lead to a methodological individualism which would not allow sufficient examination of the 'witnessable' intersubjective processes through which people produce practical actions (Chia and MacKay, 2007; Garfinkel, 2002; Llewellyn and Spence, 2009).

If the assumption that reality can be distinguished and sorted by the human mind is relaxed, the dualist epistemology can be supplanted by a practice epistemology that conceives of practice as an ongoing recursive encounter among parties to a social interaction (Raelin, 2007). Leadership arises from this social interaction as a contestation among mutual inquirers who share their intersubjective meanings. It is, therefore, a process of social

construction that focuses not on the *makers of processes* but on the *processes made* within the concurrent undertaking (Hosking, 2000). Accordingly, leadership is constituted within both coordinated and random conversations and other communicative acts that convey the collective consciousness of the community.

Practice is considered epistemologically to be entirely distinct from theory. For one, as Kierkegaard reminded us (Gardiner, 1988), practice is lived forward whereas theory tends to be understood backwards. So, theory has time to create a level of order and clarity that is seldom experienced when living forward, which tends to be unpredictable and dynamic. Theory can enlighten practice, however, especially when we choose to reflect on our actions to improve them in which case we may rely on theory as a way to predict the consequences of our next actions.

Leadership studies using a leadership-as-practice perspective may be able to help intersect theory and practice that have been often kept apart. When faced with a new problem or even with a crisis, we can choose one of two modes of response. We can react using our long-established, albeit usually tacit, coping skills or we can stop and reflect often relying on conscious, intentional analysis and planning of the appropriate response (Carroll et al., 2008). The challenge in these circumstances may be not so much a matter of choosing one type over the other, but rather to link these response modes so that tacit knowledge may be surfaced or that explicit theories be made more accessible in moments when their recall may be compromised.

Agency and social change

The processes of leadership in L-A-P are not centrally based on influence and motivation, which have become the cornerstones of most contemporary Western leadership theory. For example, the GLOBE (global leadership and organizational behavior effectiveness) research project, focusing on culture and leadership across 61 nations, began with a purported universal definition of leadership as 'the ability [. . .] to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members' (House et al., 2002).

In L-A-P the relational bonds among individuals within a community need not stem from dependencies of one upon another; action and decision may also derive from mutual and collective interactions. The ties that form can be viewed as constructive or negative, strong or weak, enabling or constraining, and such bonds can become a focus of study (Granovetter, 1973; Uhl-Bien and Maslyn, 2003). For example, a particular group may either intentionally or unwittingly form a splinter group working in contrary ways from the presumed mission of a community. This could lead to a disruption in the status quo that could become in its own right the subject of subsequent conversations involving a constellation of sympathizers and non-adherents to the new agenda. The social interactions continue to percolate among an ever-evolving set of actors who are either encouraged or discouraged from bringing their points of view, values, and interests to the table. Those who participate in this leadership-as-practice may advance or restrict the effort, which in turn could produce either continuity or change in the original mission.

Leadership, then, is constituted of social interactions that lead to particular pragmatic outcomes (Drath et al., 2008). We are often quite interested in these outcomes but are just as concerned about the range of processes that realize these outcomes, such as how the work is organized and resourced among organizational members. As we attend to the work of the

organization, we encounter the concept of agency – the manner in which we make a difference in the world by mobilizing social actions (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Agency can be seen as a process of influence in the sense that one person may help others see their potential to actualize their own agency. In this view, leadership in the organization can become a process of agentic collaboration in which one harnesses the agentic capabilities of others to serve goals that lie beyond any one individual (Spender, 2008).

In L-A-P, however, we do not necessarily focus on the initiator or even on the recipient of the agentic relationship. We are just as concerned with the resulting fragmentation of behavior that ensues not only between them but involving a range of stakeholders who become party to the project at hand. By focusing only on the initiator, we engage in a fallacy that one party is active and the other – the recipient – passive, waiting for the 'word' to thrust them into action. But we know that people tend to be already in motion and are not necessarily static until mobilized by others. Agency can thus be an intersubjective collaborative process that can reproduce and transform our social realities (Bhaskar, 1978; Lopez and Potter, 2001; Reed, 2005).

Structure

Recapping my delineation of L-A-P, it is seen as an alternative to the dominant Western tradition of centering leadership within the individual, replacing this orientation with a focus on practice including the social interactions among the practitioners to the activity in question. L-A-P resolves some of the inherent dualisms in leadership, such as those between object and subject and between theory and practice, and accepts the role of agency in contributing to the reproduction of generative structures.

We consider in this section the depiction of current structuration that involves a more adaptive focus for leadership. The classic bureaucracy in the industrial age called for fixed and ordered roles within the organization controlled through tightly defined rules, compartmentalized functions, and hierarchical structure. It made sense in that era that the managerial role would be supervisory and evaluative. But our work structures have changed. Indeed, as far back as 1980, Henry Mintzberg (1980) saw the shift and coined the term 'adhocracy' to refer to some of the newer structures. Rather than rely on classic managerial control, Mintzberg asserted that adhocracy coordinates by mutual adjustment primarily among well-trained professional specialists who are often found working in multidisciplinary teams. Mutual adjustment, in the form of shared sense-making or collective learning, substitutes for asymmetrical influence processes associated with bureaucratic organization.

The dominant organizing vehicle in the adhocracy is the project, which as a self-governing entity obviates the need for rule-making from the top. Team- and project-based structures tend to organize laterally often across a wide value chain of interdependent stakeholders. Social capital, wherever available, is viewed in these structures as critical to knowledge creation, so practitioners, including managers, are as likely to be as involved in interorganizational as intraorganizational social networks (Brass, 2000; Schneider, 2002). In these settings, management is unlikely to possess conventional managerial authority that relies upon hierarchical control (Borgatti and Foster, 2003). Managers are no longer the self-appointed hubs of information, and their insistence on controlling the transfer of knowledge can only impede the work flow. What is required from management is the support services and tools necessary to help those on the front line of service do their jobs more

effectively. Accordingly, managers and supervisors take on such new roles as consultants, facilitators, coaches, team builders, and coordinators (Porter-O'Grady, 1997).

In the meantime, production workers and service providers are becoming more self-managed because they possess the knowledge and usually the judgment to handle most production and service demands. They decide themselves on a host of issues in their social interactions, such as the activities they work on, including their order and intensity, the frequency of their contacts, or the commitment to their responsibilities (Stryker and Serpe, 1982). No one knows the practice better than the practitioner who must in relation to others negotiate and arrange the objects of his or her own practice. Furthermore, many practitioners are located within teams that are interfunctional and interdisciplinary, yet not necessarily co-located. For example, in health care, clinical teams composed of nurses, physicians, therapists, technologists, and others in the allied health clinical and management fields need to coordinate their expertise, often through the electronic medical record, to provide point-of-contact service to the patient.

The adhocracy supports the empowerment of practitioners on the ground, who can develop shared conceptions of needed activity to accomplish their requisite tasks (Chia and Holt, 2006; Engeström et al., 1999). They maintain meaning through social interactions involving such everyday experiences as skilled improvisations, practical coping, and negotiation of shared understanding (Chia and Holt, 2006; Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Goffman, 1967; Mead, 1934; Raelin, 2008). Accompanying the adhocratic structure is the need to consider leadership as 'post-heroic', in which control – if its exists at all in its original sense – is no longer linear as much as it is widely distributed throughout the organization (Balogun, 2003; Raelin, 2003; Rouleau, 2005). This form of control could be called 'mutual control', and it devolves to those actors or sectional units which have a direct vested interest in the decision at hand. The conduct of leadership in this setting is one of concertive and collective action rather than a compilation of individual acts (Gronn, 2002). Leadership in this sense becomes a shared process focusing more on the collective capacity of people to accomplish their work together than on their individual achievements (Yukl, 1999).

Relationality and meaning

The orchestration of the dialectical process of public reflection is perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of leadership in a leadership-as-practice orientation. People learn to test their mental models, especially their inferences and assumptions about others and about their own behavior. Reflective discourse is relied upon to determine whether the premises for our understanding of others and ourselves are themselves valid.

The work of leadership is likely to be found, then, not in the plans for or in the evaluation of our managerial actions but in the day-to-day discourse of human exchange. Our inquiry of these practices should focus on the language used to convey these interactions, but not as a priori intentions in which the communication is analyzed as a means of establishing order. Rather, language and its ancillary semiotic manifestations would be viewed as the embodiment of these practices to shed light on the actual workings of practice (Law, 2009; Mulcahy and Perillo, 2011). So, a conversation analysis might find conversants engaging in an exchange of technical knowledge about a subject, in an affective discourse displaying their feelings, in a nonchalant exchange about routines, in a consideration of moral obligation, or in introspection about identities (Samra-Fredericks, 2003). In these exchanges, language is used to generate and sustain meaning, not just to communicate it (Gergen, 1994).

Relational approaches applied to leadership using classic exchange theory, especially leader–member exchange or LMX, tend to focus not on the leadership group but on the dyadic relationship between leader and subordinate. Leaders differentiate among subordinates based on role-making and contractual behaviors that lead to the development of these relationships (Brower et al., 2000; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). There is an assumption of asymmetry in the relationship between leader and subordinate although each party evaluates the ability, benevolence, and integrity of the other.

LMX is thus a model of individual perception that is initiated in the minds of actors rather than as a capturing of the social interactions among the parties without a privileging of any one single actor and his/her singular interpretation. Indeed, relational leadership theory allows for leadership to occur beyond hierarchical roles and positions. Similarly, by focusing on the 'interconnectedness' among social actors (Whitehead, 1967), L-A-P is a process model that cannot be reduced to an individual or even to discrete relations. Rather, it is a synchronous interpenetrating process which is irrevocably evolving. As Martin Wood (2005) points out, in leadership 'the relation is the thing itself'.

L-A-P does not privilege influence as the predominant mode of engagement because of its inclusion of doubt in the relationship that at times calls for a suspension of belief or advocacy in favor of a humble posture that can only be described as a 'being-in-the world'. At times, when we are embedded in practice, we participate together in the collective emergence of ideas and actions heretofore unplanned and unadvocated. L-A-P is concerned with the clustering and ordering of these ideas and actions and facilitates the emergence of any recurring patterns both in the moment and over time. In the school domain, Spillane et al. (2004) found in a study of 13 elementary schools in Chicago that it was the relational practices of interacting participants that constituted the most appropriate unit of analysis in understanding the exercise of leadership in behalf of school improvement, not the acts of individual leaders.

Research

Let's turn, now, to a consideration of whether and how practices in leadership can be captured both for the benefit of the current parties to leadership as well as to third parties interested in knowledge production. The leadership-as-practice approach offers a range of advantages in the realm of research over an individualistic approach, even if it omits some of the psychological parameters underlying individual motives and characteristics. For example, it offers students of leadership the opportunity to study leadership at multiple interacting levels beyond the individual level of analysis. L-A-P would be quite interested, for example, in understanding the interpersonal and intercultural relationships that produce varying leadership outcomes. Such a study would incorporate observation of actual practice in the making, to include the material artifacts, the language, the emotions, the technologies, the stories, the physical arrangements of work, the rituals – each brought to bear in understanding the meaning of the practice. Thus, L-A-P fills the gap in leadership research for more process-oriented studies, especially of its cultural, historical, and political conditions (Knights and Willmott, 1992; Wood, 2005). In the past, processes have been referred to as a 'black box' because, though they are known to influence outcomes, they are only assumed to exist (Priem et al., 1999).

The emphasis on processes, however, privileges emergence and ambiguity over control and rationality because of its interest in focusing on the dynamics of particular practices.

Leadership forms from actors making sense from their ongoing interactions. Discourse produces meaning in organizations as it also shapes managers' identities (Ford, 2006; Foucault, 1972). The meanings and identities, however, tend to be co-created, contextual, and locally achieved, adding richness to the discourse analysis which attempts to capture them (Bateson, 1972; Boden, 1994; Fairhurst, 2009). The emergent research orientation advanced here would resist closure on the familiar categories of leadership that are often individualistic and controlling in their account. When surveyed or interviewed, respondents are often initially referred to as leaders, which predisposes them to cultural norms and scripts regarding the behavior of 'being in charge'. Their resulting commentary often incorporates a manner of discourse attending to this honorific role. The same could be said – in reverse – of those considered followers, a role associated with dependence and compliance.

A process-oriented epistemology has more modest goals than the Cartesian view that seeks to explain phenomena from outside the observed system. It is a more pragmatic form of inquiry aimed at understanding the system from within (Dewey, 1938; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) through active participation in the situation at hand. From this engaged vantage point, researchers can focus not only on the 'doing' of leadership (Yanow, 2006), but also the 'undoing' or 'not doing'. We might ask, for example, what contextual conditions prevented people from serving as agents of change. Or we might ask how a dialogue among certain actors led to an overturn of a formerly stable policy.

Narrative studies by Larsson and Lundholm (2010) and Denis et al. (2010) demonstrate how everyday routines contain vital elements that upon review can open up the black box of leadership processes referred to earlier. However, the first study predisposes the researchers to look for influence processes between managers and subordinates, a pre-categorization that may miss other dynamics in leadership processes, such as goal formation, commitment, or adaptability. The second, though recognizing that leadership emerges from the dynamics of a leadership constellation (Hodgson et al., 1965), focuses on the focal person, the 'leader', which can unwittingly bypass some of the collective dynamics that produce leadership when observers relax their fixation on the person in charge.

It makes sense, then, that research of leadership, when viewed as a practice, would take advantage of more narrative forms of inquiry, such as narrative text and other ethnographic methods, using thick description that carefully captures the dialogical activity concurrently in process (Weick, 1989). In these settings, the role of the researcher is to provide tools to encourage the observed to become inquirers of their own activity (Clot, 1999; Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008). The tools used for inquiry would not merely serve as mirrors for 'looking in' to the activity but would also 'be' the activity in all its rich dialogic interaction (Todorov, 1984; Tsoukas, 1998).

Practice researchers are thus interested in the beliefs and co-constructions that arise to guide individual and collective action. The research questions broaden beyond questions of influence. L-A-P is interested in such constructs as mutual adjustment, shared sense-making, dialogue, and collaborative learning. As particular social processes such as these are identified and repeated in their local genre in the same and in comparable situations, we can learn to appreciate what makes a practice.

Recognizing practices may allow us a lens to view them in a way that, if not altogether generalizable, at least is sufficiently recurrent to help us identify a pattern. Patterns are as likely to be as familiar to the members of the context as to the analyst. A practice that is sufficiently unique to become a pattern is one that occurs through a large number of activities that are themselves observably uniform, familiar, reproducible, and repetitive

(Llewellyn and Spence, 2009). Once recognized, these situational patterns can become useful in understanding other contexts and even in constructing new theory (Johnson, 2008; Prus, 1996).

The contribution of leaderful practice

Having differentiated the leadership-as-practice movement from conventional leadership, let's now consider its relationship to the associated perspective known as 'leaderful' practice. We have already surmised that if leadership is connected to a practice rather than to the intersecting influence among individuals, namely between a leader and a group of followers, then the negotiation of shared understanding among a group of interacting individuals can become a source of leadership. Leadership becomes a social process that is as much lateral across a range of individuals connected with each other in practice as it is vertical from top managers to a cadre of followers (Pearce and Conger, 2002). Once the sacred relationship between top and bottom is allowed to moderate, we become aware of many alternative ways to exhibit leadership, that can be as much spontaneous and intuitive as planned and conscientious (Gronn, 2002).

Leadership, however, is not the same as practice, although L-A-P is based upon practice. Leadership is distinct, as I pointed out earlier, because of its focus on agentic relationships that produce pragmatic outcomes. We have also clarified that agency can be an intersubjective collaborative process that can reproduce and transform social realities. As a result, such authors as Gronn (2002) and Drath et al. (2008) have suggested ways to distinguish processes attached to useful social outcomes. Gronn (2002) focuses on concertive actions such as spontaneous collaborations which produce reciprocal influence whereas for Drath et al. (2008), processes produce the functional outcomes of direction, alignment, and commitment. These early attempts to characterize leadership practices may suffer from overplaying influence, linearity, and agreement instead of divergence, recursive and expanding relationships, and unresolved conflicts and ambiguities (Crevani et al., 2010). For example, not all influence may be associated with leadership if influence results in exclusive personal gain.

In fact, leadership-as-practice benefits from but may also suffer from a flat ideological position. The benefit is an agnostic approach, which can lead to flexibility in its methodological characterization. Detractors may insist that its agnosticism is only temporary and, in the long run, unrealistic. We cannot talk about a practice ontology without privileging the value of social interactions that, in turn, rely upon reflective emancipatory processes in which taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings become subject to scrutiny.

Leaderful practice is unrepentant in advocating distinctively democratic values. To explain its derivation, think of a time when a team was humming along almost like a single unit. Working together was a joy. Each team member had a specific functional role but seemed able implicitly to support each other when warranted. Any one of the team members could speak for the entire team. How would one characterize such a community? A common reference is that it is leader*less*, that there is no need for a leader (see, e.g., Costigan and Donahue, 2009). But it is hardly leaderless because it is not devoid of leadership, it is full of leadership; in other words, leader*ful*. Everyone is participating in the leadership of the entity both collectively and concurrently; in other words, not just sequentially, but all together and at the same time (Raelin, 2003). So, in the Twenty-First Century organization, we look for leaderful individuals who can affect the status quo, not by becoming a champion in from the

cold, but who can work with all contributors to identify the needs and wishes for their own community.

Leaderful practice further offers to L-A-P studies four distinct value propositions that are variable in their fulfillment and, accordingly, in their measurement. As tenets of the leaderful model, they are referred to as the 'four c's': collectiveness, concurrency, collaboration, and compassion (Raelin, 2003). Collectiveness refers to the extent to which everyone in the entity can serve as a leader. Concurrency considers the extent to which members of the unit of organization are serving as leaders at the same time. Collaboration considers the extent to which members are co-creating their enterprise. It also reviews the nature of the dialogue in which members determine together what needs to be done and how to do it. Finally, in compassion, there is interest in the extent to which members commit to preserving the dignity of every single member of the entity regardless of background, status, or point of view.

Distinct from leadership-as-practice, leaderful practice is based on a democratic ideology that calls for the co-creation of a community by all who are involved interdependently in its development. By referring to leadership as democratic, I signify its dispersive nature unreliant on any one single individual – qua leader – to mobilize action and make decisions on behalf of others – qua followers. It is democracy by direct participation by involved parties through their own exploratory, creative, and communal discourses (Starratt, 2001). It represents the free assembly of the commons, often with less formalness and rules than its 'representational' cousin, but one which promotes discovery through free expression and shared engagement (Woods, 2004).

Implications for leadership development

We have described now two leadership approaches. First is leadership-as-practice, which is not about individual characteristics as much as it is about embedded practices that are inherently social and relational. We have also presented an offshoot of L-A-P, *leaderful* practice, which while accepting the locus of leadership within practices, asserts the value of democratic involvement by the parties to leadership on a concurrent and collective basis. Clearly, if we are interested in developing leadership along practice and leaderful lines, leadership development will require a different approach from the more conventional classroom epistemology that pulls managers out of their workplace to attend classes that presume to teach leadership competencies. Indeed, it makes little sense to teach leadership to individuals in a public setting detached from the very site where leadership is occurring. The students will learn the competency lists but may not find them applicable to the real problems back in the home environment. We often find these same students having to unlearn what they were taught (Raelin, 2008; Salaman and Butler, 1990). Those involved in the practice are the ones who need to mobilize and determine together how their practice is to be changed, if at all.

So, we are not interested in teaching about leadership (Mintzberg, 2004) or teaching lists of traits to aspiring leaders. Rather, to the extent we teach at all, we teach what Shotter (2006) calls 'withness'-thinking or the meta-competencies to help us understand how to apprehend the immanent conditions when interacting and learning with others in the workplace (Raelin, 2007). So, rather than send managers away to learn their leadership, we need to bring leadership development back into the group where the lessons of experience can be truly accessed. The way forward has to at least in part rely upon such methods as action

learning, in which participants learn to stop and reflect on real-time conditions occurring in their work environments.

The leadership development process under leaderful conditions presents an intriguing case. A leaderful culture is not the accepted norm in the institutional environment conditioning most organizations. Pressures from all sides – internal normative as well as external economic and regulatory forces – converge to fortify a culture of dominance and control (Currie et al., 2009). Even when given the opportunity to direct an operation – and this includes such organizations as universities which are structured in their academics to be collegial and collaborative – managers by instinct await permission from the top of the hierarchy to assume responsibility and initiative (Bolden et al., 2009; Collinson and Collinson, 2009). Command-and-control leadership is seen in most of our cultures as clearer and more responsive to our anxiety regarding uncertainty and prospective failure (Grint, 2005). We tend to rely on concrete forms – leaders, followers, heroes – to give substantiality to our experience, while neglecting the more complex processual nature of most social phenomena (Wood, 2005). A gendered account based on sexual stereotypes would add that any form of leadership relinquishing power and control would be viewed as a display of femininity, a portrayal that has been devalued historically in leadership narratives (Fletcher, 2004).

Since leaderful practice is not typically the default option when people assemble to accomplish work together, its development requires agency. The *leaderful* development process thus needs to be mobilized by internal or external change agents who can encourage the endorsement of a culture of learning and participation within the system in question. Change agency also needs to occur at multiple levels of experience, namely at individual, interpersonal, team, organization, and network levels (Raelin, 2010). Although members of a team or institution may be at a stage of readiness to assume leaderful properties, they may not choose to or know how to act leaderfully without some instigation from those bold enough to take action (Armenakis et al., 1993; Friedrich et al., 2009).

What makes the change agent of leaderful development unique is his or her commitment to learning that is sufficiently participant-directed that learners comprehend, by the agent's practices, including his or her communication with them, that leadership can be a shared mutual phenomenon (Friedrich et al., 2009). This kind of agency is thus oriented to the development of independent and interdependent behavior that encourages increased autonomy among learners (Knowles, 1980). Hackman and Wageman (2005) referred to this kind of agency as entailing coaching behaviors intended to help team members 'make collective and task-appropriate use of their collective resources in accomplishing the team's task' (p. 269). Carson et al. (2007) subsequently found that coaching, along with shared purpose, social support, and voice, provided the antecedent conditions that can lead to shared leadership and to ultimate team effectiveness.

Discussion

There seems to be a shift underway in our thinking about leadership, though the movement toward practice and shared approaches is only modestly organized. Indeed, the movement has begun, not unlike other social movements, through disparate activities across multiple disciplines that have not yet been coordinated. Thus, there are traditions forming with a variety of labels and identities that are only loosely connected to leadership featuring a practice and democratic orientation. These traditions have been called: collective, connected,

critical, distributed, integrative, relational, responsible, and shared, among others. What is most critical is that they are comparable in their seeming dedication to replace the implicit standard linking leadership with the individual.

The individualistic account of leadership has not been developed immaterially from its cultural environment. In individualistic cultures, such as the United States, there is both consistency and comfort in deriving a view of leadership that honors the independent actions of individuals who exert themselves in relation to others. As long as the streak of independent action within such cultures remains strong, it is unlikely that the individualistic paradigm will be dethroned anytime soon. No national culture, however, is totally insular insofar as it allows for global influences, not to mention the impact of subcultures forming locally and regionally through a variety of social currents such as immigration. In the United States there are also counter political movements, such as the omnipresent call for public engagement and deliberative democracy that speaks to more collective forms of leadership.

Criticism of the individualistic account of leadership opens the door for relational approaches that are distinctive from the dominant view of the relation as constituting an influence relationship between leader and follower. A practice perspective sees the social interaction as a contestation among mutual inquirers sharing their intersubjective meanings. As has been suggested throughout this paper, the contingencies underlying these social interactions do not condition but rather constitute the actual practice of leadership.

A focus on social practices rather than on individual abilities requires an alternative methodology from our preoccupation with detached empirical inquiry. Although we might from time to time 'look in' on the practices as they are occurring, we need to let the practitioners and the practices speak for themselves. This would require an ethnographic methodology that entails thick description at the expense of parsimonious third-person generalization.

With any waning of influence as the basis of the relationship underlying leadership comes a corresponding de-emphasis on verticality in organizational and network structures. Relationships are formed to accomplish a span of work with acknowledged objectives. These relationships and the conversations that ensue are as likely to be lateral across a range of individuals connected with each other as they are to be vertical through the transmission of instructions. As people contribute to accomplish the work of the community, they exert a leadership that is not only collective but concurrent – they participate together at the same time. Accordingly, it is likely that leadership in the moment will have democratic inclinations that may, in turn, benefit from an open acknowledgement that useful outcomes can ensue from public engagement.

Nevertheless, hierarchy has not by any means universally broken down and with it may come an unwitting conformity to the dominant rationalities of the organization (Schroeder, 1991). Leadership-as-practice can become an accomplice to the dominant managerial order if the practice in question is governed by other authorities rather than by the parties to the practice who participate through their own self-conscious self-determination. Any account of leadership is likely to have normative implications. In this article, I have made the case for democracy, but it will be considered no more than a dream if people cannot exercise some degree of genuine interior authority or minimally author their own agency (Woods, 2004). The vehicle to mobilize the democratic impulse is genuine dialogue that has been depicted here as an invitation for participants to a practice to co-create their socio-political consciousness.

Conclusion

As we begin to recognize an epistemology conceiving of knowledge as a fluid rather than a permanent form, we need to turn to practice as a perfectly acceptable place to learn to lead. Learning is vital to leadership when we view leadership as a process and as a practice. Viewed in this way, leadership can become self-correcting. As practitioners in leadership engage in learning with each other, they commit to reflecting on their own actions and, consequently, are better able to reconstruct their activity on behalf of their mutual interests. Leadership in this sense is returned to the group doing the work rather than solidified around an individual who is making decisions for others.

In bringing leadership to the group, leadership-as-practice privileges the process of engagement as a basis for learning. But it is not only engagement that creates leadership; it is just as critical that there be both private and collective reflection on the experience. Participants learn to listen to each other and listen to themselves through others. They also learn to engage with the materials of the situation, the artifacts that contribute to the unfoldings occurring daily and over time.

So, we conclude that leadership is directly tied to the practices to which people are dedicated. Through their practices, they decide on what they hope to accomplish and organize the tasks that need to be performed to achieve their mission. They commit to one another as a working body dedicated to a useful outcome. And they learn to adapt to exogenous changes that may lead to healthy re-appraisals of their mission. It is through this leadership that we may find people talking together, acting together, and thinking together, all toward making the reality of their condition what it is.

Note

1. I am choosing to use the word 'practice' here in its bounded sense as the set of consequential activities among participants engaged primarily in work (Giddens, 1984). There are a number of other broader meanings attached to this ubiquitous expression, such as: the body of knowledge at the base of professional expertise, a learning method based on repetition, a strategy susceptible to diffusion within the innovation process, or even the sense of how something is done (see, e.g., Ansari et al., 2010; Corradi et al., 2008).

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