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# Refining the Ethics of Leadership-as-Practice: A Counter-Case Analysis

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# Refining the Ethics of Leadership-as-Practice: A Counter-Case Analysis

## Abstract

The field of leadership-as-practice (L-A-P) is beginning to mature as a theory of leadership in direct opposition to standard leadership, which views the individual as the mainstay of leadership experience. Nor does it focus on the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers, which historically has been the starting point for any discussion of leadership. Rather, it is concerned with how leadership emerges and unfolds through day-to-day experience. In this ongoing and evolving activity, questions of ethics arise which challenge what appears to be a flat ontology circumscribing its ethical applications. Using a case analysis, which according to the author takes significant liberties with some of the fundamental ethical principles and practices of L-A-P, this essay seeks to refine and delineate what constitutes business ethics from a leadership-as-practice perspective.

**Keywords:** Business ethics, practice turn, genealogical ethics, leadership-as-practice, dialogue, ontology, epistemology

Joining such other approaches as strategy-as-practice or entrepreneurship-as-practice, leadership-as-practice or L-A-P applies the “practice turn” as a template for its view of the world.

According to Bourdieu (1977), rather than be subjected to conflicts or dualist rituals in social theory, such as between object and subject or between structure and agency, the practice turn proposes that we study practice as the fundamental social phenomenon. In the case of leadership, leadership would be viewed as a practice rather than located in the traits or behaviors of special individuals. A practice is considered an embodied collective set of practical accomplishments among people and their artifacts (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, and von Savigny,

2001). These practical accomplishments can be ethical in their character, process, and outcomes. When it comes to leadership, we focus on how social processes may change the trajectory of the flow of practices or change the turning points in the spaces between people. Any change in the treatment of ethical practices and decisions resulting from the flow of material and discursive processes may constitute an act of ethical leadership. These practices do not reside outside of leadership, but are very much embedded within it. To find ethical leadership, we must look to the practice within which it is occurring (Raelin, 2016).

Since practice is socially not individually constituted, leadership-as-practice is likewise socially constructed through shared know-how and entwinement with the world of others (Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009). Change in practices occurs most often as we interact with others and are molded by others and their interactive preferences and behavior. Other “plural” traditions in leadership, such as shared, distributed, and collective leadership (see, e.g., Pearce and Conger, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Friedrich et al., 2009; Denis, Langley, and Sergi, 2012; Raelin, 2020) also consider leadership practice as collective but they keep classic shibboleths, such as leadership requiring an influence relationship between entities, namely leaders and followers, intact. In a play on words, Simpson, Buchan, and Sillince (2018) suggest that in the case of leadership-as-practice, the compelling engine of activity would not be influence, but “in-flow-ence,” signifying movement constituted and emergent within the practices.

Along with the focus on the activities of leadership, it is important to distinguish whether there are values guiding the activities of L-A-P that affect the quality, relevance, and outcomes of its practices. L-A-P privileges the value of social interactions, but beyond that, an emancipatory phenomenological tradition would hold that its critically reflective processes would entail a challenge to taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings. In this tradition, a

practice approach to leadership would also advance critical dialogue to question any acts that bear the imprint of social domination (Spicer et al., 2009). Indeed, L-A-P potentially represents an alternative critical discourse to the mainstream personality approach to leadership, which tends to incarnate the individual leader as a beacon of moral rectitude. It focuses on collective leadership practices, encouraging the formation of community within which members through social critique may be able to resist oppression and other forms of inequitable social arrangements. Further, in double-loop tradition, it challenges the very assumption of follower dependency in the ontology of leadership (Argyris and Schön, 1974). Not requiring pre-specified outcomes, practice precedes agency while focusing on a process that can be inclusive of participants' own communal, shared, and exploratory discourses (Raelin, 2014).

### **An Ethical Case**

Having briefly reviewed the main principles of leadership-as-practice and its chief ethical considerations, we now are ready to view a major challenge to the aforementioned synopsis from a case in an article called, "Leadership Learning, Power and Practice in Laos: A Leadership-as-Practice Perspective," published by Peter Case and Martyna Śliwa in the journal, *Management Learning*. The article argues that a L-A-P lens can be used to help managers gain individual influence and thus assume leadership within a controlled directive setting. The authors further argue that through L-A-P, a key Western official using, in their words, "collective ethical criteria within a means-ends calculus" and corresponding leadership "moves," was able to build sufficient influence to consummate a critical farming project. The project, furthermore, would sustain ethical ends, contributing as it did to the alleviation of poverty and the development of sustainable livelihoods for those nationals involved.

The case starts out depicting a project, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, aimed at improving agricultural productivity within the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The key official in the case, whom I will refer to as the "protagonist," is an organization studies scholar, who with his team of Western researchers, assumed the task of collaborating with department staff from the Laotian government to modify and enhance the professional services offered to smallholder farmers. The particular focus of the project was to implement government policy to commercialize aspects of smallholder production.

The article featuring the case in question focuses not so much on the rural policymaking involved in the case but on the protagonist's challenge as a non-Lao speaking foreigner to learn about and participate in leadership practice in this specialized Laotian setting. With the participation of the second author, the authors co-constructed an autoethnographical account using leadership-as-practice concepts such as knowledge about the sociomaterial and political context in which leadership emerged to allow the protagonist to influence leadership in a Lao professional context. In particular, he used his growing political knowledge about local hierarchies and power dynamics to build his influence within the formal meetings of civil servants within the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office. He also documented his leadership not just from the verbal statements of the Lao hierarchy, but from such material and spatial elements as seating position, speech order, and other routine protocols that exposed how power was distributed in this formal setting.

In documenting the protagonist's leadership development, the authors affirmatively make use of a number of practice perspectives to bolster his emerging and effective leadership. For example, citing Crevani and Endrissat (2016), the authors highlight how individual self-consciousness, experimentation, and reflexivity in learning can help an individual confront the

unexplored issue of power within L-A-P in order to effectuate a “reorientation” in the flow of leadership practice. From Carroll and Smolović Jones (2018), the protagonist notes that leadership was constructed through embodiment, positioning, movement, and other gestures, all of which contributed to his agency in this formal setting. From Raelin (2016), they refer to how the protagonist resultingly oriented the “flow of practice,” so that others in the room began to “build on [his] moves.” Further, amplifying the work of Raelin (2014), Simpson (2016), and Crevani (2019), the authors focus on how the protagonist used leadership learning to scrutinize who the human and non-human participants were, how agency emerged in sociomaterial interactions, and how it became distributed among fellow participants.

The authors in their conclusion acknowledge the “democratic roots” of leadership-as-practice, as put forward by Woods (2016). Nevertheless, they also submit that the practice perspective is not always about “noble means” nor about “fair dialogical exchange among those committed to a practice” (Raelin, 2014: 137). In the case, the authors conclude that the protagonist’s achievement of influence enabled the Lao farmers to better adapt to imposed conditions from the Laotian government that were threatening their traditional ways of life. The success of the program, namely the development and implementation of an Extension Management System (EMS), achieved the critical ethical objective of helping the farmers not only stave off the threats to their culture but also to significantly improve their household incomes.

### **An Axiological Analysis of Leadership-as-Practice**

The authors recognize some ethical dilemmas inherent in their case analysis. They point out that the case raises the so-called “Hitler problem” in leadership studies whereby questionably ethical

means, such as manipulation, can lead to socially justifiable and ethical ends. The setting is also uniquely cross-cultural and they take pains to sensitize their readers to the contingent ethical interpretations emanating from this context.

Nevertheless, I would like to argue in this essay that the use of L-A-P reasoning is often misplaced in the article because of its ontology, which I base on a number of on-the-ground conditions, its epistemology, in which I look to sociality as the essential bedrock of L-A-P knowledge, and its practice view, which views ethics as contingent on the particular practices from which they emerge. Let's consider each of these in more depth. The perspective of ontology helps us discern the reality in front of us and how entities not only exist but how they interrelate. The connection to ethics from an ontology tradition acknowledges that since humans are entwined with one another, there are always interactions that have ethical significance. From Danish philosopher Løgstrup (1997), we surmise that ethics may be formulated in the moment and intuitively rather than being reliant on rules.

Epistemology and ethics are often linked since both can be thought of as systems of evaluation - of knowledge and beliefs in the case of epistemology and of conduct in the case of ethics. When inter-connected, we think of them as a unity in moral knowledge, although there is disagreement about whether the latter can exist other than to the social group in which moral sensibility is formed. Finally, the practice perspective, reviewed at the start of this essay as the practice "turn," seeks to understand and explain social phenomena by analyzing both existential and knowledge-based practices to explain the internalization of the social order, including moral judgments (Bourdieu, 1977).

Although L-A-P theory is by its nature a practice perspective, its approach to ethics relies as well on an ethical architecture constituted of the principal metaphysical infrastructures of



ontology and epistemology. By critiquing the case in its reliance on L-A-P theory to justify its ethical posture, I am able to clarify the boundaries and extensions of ethical theory in a plural leadership tradition – in this instance, as it relates to the ethical parameters of leadership-as-practice.

### **The Ontology View**

To begin with the ontology argument, I admittedly start on somewhat weak grounds given that as party to a practice theory, L-A-P could be considered to have a flat ontology with limited or no special axiological foundations. Although having bounded cognitive access to the world and delimited by the arrangement of material objects, humans and their interactions can nevertheless produce causality in social affairs (Schatzki, 2001). If this is the case, then shouldn't the authors of the case be warranted in choosing to analyze whatever practices are going on and to whom they are of benefit? In other words, are any practices which disrupt the flow of meaning in an inter-subjection transaction acceptable in L-A-P?

The autoethnographic account in the case highlights this interrogation. The protagonist reasoned that in order to be able to exercise power within the leadership of the project to implement the noble objectives of the Extension Management System, he needed to (1) learn about and gain experience of participating in leadership practice in the local context and (2) within the “leadership configuration” (Gronn, 2009; Raelin, 2014) of the project, become recognized by the local project partners, that is, the other participants in those practices, as a participant whose position is comparable with that of a local *phu nam*. This term is used exclusively to designate individual leaders of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) since formal “leadership roles” are exclusively occupied by LPRP members and ordered according to

strict hierarchical positions (Case et al., 2017). Acquiring comparable power as the *phu nam* would help him exercise power to produce a “leadership effect” (Kempster and Parry, 2019), which in the cited authors’ words means: “through influencing the direction of leadership emergence and unfolding” (p. 3).

Most L-A-P scholars, however, would not find resonance in focusing for the most part on the individual, and in this case, his attempt to acquire power to produce an individual effect within the group without other group members being party to his motives. From an ontological perspective, practices in achieving leadership are thought to produce a range of outcomes that are achieved collectively rather than individually and the outcomes are thought to be of value to the group in the immediate setting. Actors recognize themselves in others and take their perspective toward the self (Mead, 1934)). They engage in a critical dialogue to question their language and practice. Rather than usurp power from the group, they are interested in deconstructing any discourse to reveal schemes of domination and dependence.

The reasonable objection by the authors to this ontological analysis is that the cultural setting would not allow any form of historical or genealogical inquiry. The protagonist needed to gain influence to produce an ethical end, in particular, teaching farmers how to adapt to government requirements to stave off orders that would have seriously threatened their livelihoods. In sum, the actions of the protagonist could be said to sacrifice procedural justice on behalf of distributive justice. The acquisition of influence was designed to obtain a means of soft power, not necessarily of authorship of a temporary direction (Taylor, 2014), but as a means of individual performance. Compare this form of influence with what I earlier referred to as “in-flow-ence” in L-A-P in which leadership is understood as a movement constituted in, and emergent from, socially interactive inquiry.

Another phrase referred to by the authors that misapplies the idea of collective agency in L-A-P is that they say in the case that “people built on each other’s moves” (Raelin, 2016: 5). The example they use to exemplify the practice of moves is the observation by the protagonist that during the meeting, participants were busily scribbling notes after his remarks were translated. The moves referred to in L-A-P, however, are not meant to be static, one-way, or representative of a simple subject-object interaction nor are moves in L-A-P meant to show deference to a superior’s suggestions. They are rather meant to point out how social inquiry and action are recursive within the flow of practice. All parties are committed to affecting this flow through a commitment to collaboration. To be linked with others in leadership means to be collaborative and dialogic in the search for a common purpose.

When faced with a contestation of what should be done in an ethically sensitive circumstance, Cottone (2001) refers to the needed ethical practice as *consensualizing*. If consensualizing fails, he suggest that the parties move on to a process of transparent interactive reflection after which, if the parties are still at cross purposes, they seek more formal means, such as by consulting valued colleagues, by using ethical standards, by negotiating, or as a last resort, by bringing in a third-party arbitrator.

The practices, furthermore, needs to be reciprocally intersubjective constituting both the individual and the social. The individual may retain his or her original meaning while adopting the current and forthcoming meanings of other subjects. Consequently, the confluence of the self, with all of our life experiences, and the immediate social experience, containing a full range of socially derived suggestions and enacted forms, constitute a negotiation that Billett (2008) refers to as a relational interdependence.

The ontological territory of the individual and the social has normative implications as explained by Philip Woods (2016). He believes that people's inter-connectedness requires a normative stance in practice because of the assumption that in sharing their know-how, they look to make sense of their world in order to achieve something of consequence. Unlike directive models of leadership, L-A-P cannot be based on a philosophy of dependence in which followers, without discretion, follow the "right" leader who is assumed to be the fount of moral righteousness. Rather L-A-P observes a philosophy of co-development in which people discover and unfold from within themselves. They engage in critical dialogue to question and learn from one another. Co-development arises from a tradition that recognizes an innate capacity for ethical agency beyond a reliance on rules toward a profound respect for others and a commitment to one's community.

In sum, the descriptive ethics of L-A-P processes become subject to normative accountability. L-A-P accordingly strives to achieve a collective wisdom where there would be joint learning based upon alternative frames of time and space, appreciation for the need to either make choices or transcend them in the deliberative decision-making process, and deep exploration of moral dilemmas from collective and concurrent reflection in practice.

In fairness to the authors of the case, they acknowledge that a key facet of dialogic collaboration is that there be a "fair dialogical exchange among those committed to a practice" (Raelin, 2014: 137). They go on to assert that such a tenet would be ideal and impractical in a cultural context characterized by top-down authority relations. This very condition is what poses the ethical dilemma in leadership about how to proceed with the ends in mind, be it a leadership-as-individual or leadership-as-practice arrangement. I will return to this dilemma in an ensuing section on the practice view.

## **The Epistemology View**

The protagonist in the case contended throughout that he used L-A-P reasoning as a basis of knowledge, especially his personal learning that leadership is a socio-material achievement. He learned how to exercise power within an unfolding leadership circumstance. In L-A-P, however, although learners may reflect privately to compare practices against their cognitive frames, they are prone to bring out their internal conversation with others once they become absorbed in practice (Archer, 2003). The framing of the event, in turn, becomes collective as we begin to negotiate a shared understanding with others about the meaning of the practice as we engage in it (Goffman, 1974; Wenger, 1999). Habermas (1984) reasons that this intersubjective recognition tends to be based on mutual understanding about disputed claims. It is through communicative action, as his theory is called, that we come to realize ourselves within a civic community. Dialogist, Bohm (1985), adds to this reasoning that reflective communities of this nature become increasingly collaborative through a dialogic process in which learners come to reason together.

Phenomenologists and pragmatists recognized this sociality among humans. Heidegger in his *Being and Time* (1962 [1927]: 121) explained: “Initially, ‘I am’ not in the sense of my own self but I am the others...and for the most part it remains so.” Heidegger’s view here is that we are essentially others because we can only develop a self by taking on others’ ways of being. G.H. Mead further warranted that as opposed to individual theories of the self, the self is social, as...”an object [to himself] on the basis of social relations and interactions, only by means of his experiential transactions with other individuals in an organized social environment” (Mead, 1934: 225). What this means is that the individual exists by virtue of serving as an object to his own conduct, using the process of social conduct to act as another toward the self. For Mead,

then, innovative perspective-taking flows from intentional dialogical exchange with others, animated by democratic participation and inclusion (Martin, Sokol, and Elfers, 2008). From this point, we can deduce Mead's axiological position that collective agency and ethical practices become reciprocally interactive between individuals and their colleagues as well as between them and successive third-parties within the social order.

I had earlier pointed out that through *co-development*, people discover and unfold from within themselves. They take an inter-subjectivist view that constructs a collaborative understanding through the sharing and contesting of alternative views of themselves and of the world. They engage with one another in critical dialogue in which they seek to question their language and their practice, mindful that such activity may even unintentionally bear the imprint of social domination.

Learning thus arises from an interactive contention among a community of inquirers (Raelin, 2007). It is not to be used, contrary to the case's reference to reflexivity and self-consciousness, to gain an advantage to influence others and their unwitting endorsement of the handling of the project. The authors state (Case and Śliwa, 2020: 6):

Acknowledging that there is room for consideration of individual-level leadership learning within L-A-P, and highlighting the importance of individual self-consciousness, experimentation and reflexivity in this process, raises questions about how to understand a situation where an individual wants to exercise power within the flow of leadership practice, and to effectuate 'reorientation' (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016: 23) of this flow. In other words, if individuals are granted the ability to understand, interpret and reflect on what goes on around them and in what ways they affect and are affected by the context they are part of, then what happens if they decide consciously to influence the direction in which practice is unfolding?

The answer to this question from a pure L-A-P perspective is that isolated learning without the raw feedback of others can lead to an individual model of learning characterized by unilateral control and surface agreement (Argyris and Schön, 1978). L-A-P is more committed to a mutual learning model in the belief that all members of a community can search and learn together and

become mutually responsible for the decisions and actions of the community. Because models of this nature produce action strategies that are less defensive and more collaborative, they should also lead to virtuous and productive relationships and learning.

The knowledge acquired by active participants is also social as they seek to know in conjunction with others who are often concurrently inquiring about the problem at hand (von Glasersfeld, 1995). There are practical ways of constructing interactive knowing of this nature. Learning teams, derived from the pedagogical platform of action learning, along with sensitive facilitation, provide learners with a safe environment in which to experiment with others to accomplish diverse learning goals (Pedler, 2011). In such teams, collective reflection is emphasized to assist learners capture their tacit knowledge sometimes in conjunction with conceptualizations to help them use the lessons of experience to recognize patterns and make improvements.

### **The Practice View**

The practice view has long been associated with co-constructed unfolding activity that entails recurring processes and outcomes such as knowledge, action, identities, power relations, and, of course, values (Gherardi, 2003). In other words, these elements are not only an outcome of leadership but they are also a source. As for ethical values, we wish to know whether our motives in a leadership effort were “good” and whether the outcome was “right,” according to a range of ethical criteria. Has the leadership-as-practice produced well-being in others, for example?

In this case, the protagonist concluded that if he wanted to exercise power within the leadership of the project, he would need to begin purposefully (Kempster and Parry, 2019) by

embodying practices he would intentionally “in a self-reflexive, experimental and purposefully person-centric manner” draw on. Thereupon he would use the knowledge gained in the first year of participating in formal meeting contexts to exercise a more “decisive influence” (Sergi, 2016: 123) on the opportunities provided by the Extension Management System (EMS) project.

At a subsequent meeting focusing on EMS expansion, the protagonist used a forceful, authoritative tone of voice – devoid of humor – used by other Lao leaders and gave a rousing talk. He then took firm control of the turn-taking from the floor. The discussion followed an agenda that he had prepared first in English which was then translated by a bilingual in-country project team member. Since his position within the relational configuration of the meeting made it possible for him to both enable and suppress the expression of other voices (Stowell and Warren, 2018), he was also able to exert influence on the political dynamics of participation and secure his objectives. Further, in accordance with the concept of spacing leadership (Ropo and Salovaara, 2018), the protagonist purposefully occupied a prominent location within the meeting room and orchestrated turn-taking in speech delivery in order to mimic the way in which the local *phu nam* exercised leadership practices.

This deployment of cultural artifacts and semiotics by the protagonist makes use of the expression, *power/knowledge*, as developed in particular by Foucault. For Foucault (1978), knowledge is historically contingent and can be used in its finer-grained form by authorities to continuously and pervasively control what people do, which in turn offers further possibilities for more intrusive inquiry and disclosure. He sought to uncover the role of power, breaking down human discourses to reveal the systems of intelligibility over which govern a “regime of truth.” Nevertheless, within the hurly-burly of everyday life, he believed that subjects could



problematize the world, speak for themselves, and make ethical choices. They do so in leadership within the flow of practice.

An ideological aspiration of L-A-P, then, would be to derive an ethical stance through a creative interaction among multiple and contradictory voices that would come to terms with adversarial differences (Lyotard, 1984). Although some actors within the practice might attempt to exploit their power through subtle or direct domestication and domination, the hope is that participants would be given an opportunity to find their own voice, develop their own identity, and discover their human dignity as part of their search for livelihood and meaning. Attempts to realign power distributions within a community would be made transparent and non-illusory. In addition, actors would take into full reflective consideration those stakeholders outside their immediate community who impact and are impacted by the actions of the community. Are the practices consistent with concerns about power, opportunity, and justice? Tsoukas (2018) argues that such a stance requires “values articulation” in order to overcome a tendency to become self-referential in evaluating the ongoing recurrent practices within one’s own community.

These thoughts on practice can address the means-ends issue raised earlier. How can one introduce challenging process issues, including ethical ones, in an autocratic environment which suppresses such discourse? Initially, consider that any deviation from standard processes in an autocracy would be viewed with a high degree of scrutiny, whereas in dialogue it would be subject to interested inquiry. Such dialogue would also entertain consideration of some of a culture’s deepest ethical quandaries, such as the rights of the current and future citizenry. These matters do not resolve easily; rather, they are mired in complexity and even mystery requiring deep thinking and profound sensitivity to our fundamental human connections.

In this case, even if resolutely impeded from introducing any inquiry into the proceedings, the protagonist would have benefitted from having assembled his own informal learning team so as to share his frames, plans, and actions with his colleagues. He might have brought up the problem of how to gain authorship of particular objectives and actions in an inclusive manner. He might even have broached the subject of how to proceed collaboratively in an environment where there is such obvious suppression of voices and self-muting.

Even participatory spaces are imbued with power relations that in some cases can cause self-censorship among those disenfranchised from the dominant discourse. Nevertheless, by joining together in community, participants in social critique tend to have a better chance to resist coercion and other forms of inequitable social conditions than attempting to intervene on their own. Using steady, respectful, and persistent learning strategies, might it be possible to generate resistance as an expression and act of human solidarity (Foucault, 1977; Haber, 1994)?

The protagonist also suggested that an alternative ethical choice would have been to refrain from trying to acquire power and influence and to have kept the engagement at a superficial level. But an inevitable consequence of such a choice would have been to forego any possibility of influencing leadership practice and effects. It is difficult to assess, in the abstract, what effects this might have had on the longer-term prospects of the project. Are there not other choices?

Discourses in authoritarian settings are typically closed off from meta-inquiry but not exclusively. There are exceptions when assigned managers may express some curiosity about employee involvement and its effect on decision making and goal achievement. In such cases, it might be possible to engage management in a learning conversation about the value of dialogue and participant engagement. They may even acquire the intellectual humility, empathy, and

courage to challenge standard ways of operating. They might learn to consider data beyond their personal taken-for-granted assumptions and begin to explore the historical and social processes that mold our world. Guided by such criteria as authenticity and fairness, they may ultimately see that their participatory efforts may have a real potential to make a difference, that it may be of benefit to challenge dominant discourses, and that any exchange be inclusive regardless of position, rank, background, and point of view (Raelin, 2012).

## **Discussion**

This counter-analysis of the case in question highlights a number of critical issues in ethics that distinguish leadership-as-practice from other heroic and post-heroic models of leadership that deviate from the association of leadership with special individuals. Foremost, we must pay heed that this new tradition in leadership, known as leadership-as-practice, is not equivalent to leadership practice. By using the connector “as,” we zoom in changes occurring in the flow of practice and focus in particular on the dynamics within practice that materialize in leadership. When leadership is conceptualized as a practice, it encompasses the special arrangements and accomplishments that change the turning points in the spaces between people in recursive social and material interaction. Thus, it is not an individual practice that occurs in isolation, especially as a mechanism of self-development.

In its phenomenological tradition, L-A-P can be said to be searching for meaning through social and material interaction. Accordingly, practice is continually unfolding as a dynamic process. Traditionalist MacIntyre (1984) views ethical inquiry in the same light - as a socially established cooperative human activity, but he asserts that it can only be held together by adherence to virtues, such as prudence, courage, and honesty (Ladenson, 1986). The

genealogist, on the other hand, maintains that ethical inquiry is perspectival and emerges from contemporaneous processes (Lightbody, 2008), among which would be the discursive construction of dialogue. Through dialogue we may learn the meaning of particular social inquiries. Dialogue often brings in the nomination of particular values, but when it does, these values emerge from material-social interactions and their context rather than from individuals and their virtues. L-A-P thus rejects the idea of traditional and universal moral authority and the discovery of a teleological reality. Rather, as Mensch and Barge (2019: 4) have asserted in their genealogical review: "...multiple, changing, and even conflicting perspectives and meanings related to leadership are co-constructed and negotiated in dynamic organizational relationships."

In deconstructing the case we find that the protagonist has seemingly forsaken procedural justice in favor of distributive justice. L-A-P is concerned about both especially since it aligns with process theory in its ethical pursuits. It seeks a collective wisdom not at the expense of those in its social community but with and through them. It does not shy away from confrontation with moral practices, rather it seeks to deeply explore them from both a collective and concurrent reflection in practice. Since these two forms of justice are interrelated, we must find ways to incorporate both in any applications of practice theory on the ground. In a controlled autocracy, although there is minimal room for open dialogue, we must seek ways to create avenues for free exchange which might initially entail gathering one's own peer learning team to develop strategies for incremental change in an environment of oppression.

I have also emphasized that from an epistemological standpoint, learning in L-A-P is not to be used to gain an advantage over one's fellow colleagues or community members. Rather, in the tradition of sociality, as humans we use our reflective powers to change the self, not simply as an introspection but from a sense of mutual acknowledgement of each other created through

reciprocal exchanges (Mead, 1932, Rochat, 2009). Our perspective-taking extends to our mutual projects as we intentionally produce and reproduce practices through inclusive involvement leading at times to changes in the trajectory of those practices.

Finally, although the authors made an important contribution to the use of material and spatial elements, such as seating position, speech order, speech modulation, and the like, to acquire power over decision making within the setting, they seem to have skimmed over its relation to power/knowledge. Rather than use these artifacts to problematize the “regime of truth” extant within the cultural setting, the protagonist used them to gain influence and exploit that influence to convert officials to support his objectives, as noble as these objectives were in their support of the farmers’ subsistence and cultural conventions.

## **Conclusion**

The authors of the case, Case and Śliwa, have made an important contribution to leadership-as-practice theory, showing how some of the acute concepts of L-A-P can be used in cross-cultural settings. However, they have taken some liberties with L-A-P conceptual reasoning resulting in a variation from critical perspectives that are associated with practice theory. In particular, given its phenomenological and constructionist traditions, ethics in L-A-P are not based principally on any moral truths guiding the individual, rather they form through social interaction and from knowledge emanating from our social reality. Practice continually unfolds in a continuously shifting and evolving dynamic.

From Nietzsche’s genealogy (2005) and his culturally and historically contingent ethics, we learn that moral acts are irreducible. Our ethical values emerge from material-social interactions and their context rather than from individuals and their virtues. Once ensconced in

practice with other colleagues, community members, and stakeholders, we are sooner or later to be faced with ethical judgments that will arise from these material and social encounters. It is the aspiration of leadership-as-practice in theory and application that such encounters be deliberative and collaborative. Colleagues would acknowledge their own authority and sources of power such that no one dominant individual would come to manipulate or dampen the expression of others. All participants would be invited to advance their own ideas while being open to the critical inquiry of others. In finding their own voice, they would participate freely not as sanctioned by privileged social authorities but because of their self-identified interests and commitment to their community.

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