

Raelin, Joseph A.

Article — Accepted Manuscript (Postprint)

Leadership-as-Practice: Its Past History, Present Emergence, and Future Potential

Academy of Management Collections

Suggested Citation: Raelin, Joseph A. (2023) : Leadership-as-Practice: Its Past History, Present Emergence, and Future Potential, Academy of Management Collections, Academy of Management, Briarcliff Manor, NY, USA, Vol. 2, Iss. 2, pp. 19-30,
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amc.2021.0005> ,
<https://journals.aom.org/doi/abs/10.5465/amc.2021.0005>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/274026>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.

Leadership-as-Practice: Its Past History, Present Emergence, and Future Potential

By

Joseph A. Raelin

Donald Gordon Visiting Professor of Leadership
University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business
The Knowles Chair Emeritus
Northeastern University D'Amore-McKim School of Business
j.raelin@neu.edu

The final definitive version of this paper has been published in the
Academy of Management Collections
Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 19–30, 2023

by the Academy of Management
<https://journals.aom.org/doi/abs/10.5465/amc.2021.0005>

Leadership-as-Practice: Its Past History, Present Emergence, and Future Potential

ABSTRACT

In this essay the author through a curation of articles drawn largely from the archives of the Academy of Management guides readers through the early foundations, principles, and theory of the new field of leadership-as-practice or L-A-P. The field is shown to have evolved through a history of leadership research culminating in a plural tradition with which the practice perspective is allied. Some of the critical issues in the present and unfolding state of L-A-P are exemplified along with their implications for ongoing leadership practice. The essay ends with some recommendations for future research in the field along with the opportunities for advancing theory and application that such study might afford.

Keywords: leadership-as-practice, practice theory, collective leadership, pragmatism, agency, leadership development, collective identity, reflexivity, dialogue

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

A new approach has emerged to potentially contribute to the story of leadership. It is called: leadership-as-practice or L-A-P. By its nature, it challenges our traditional views of leadership because it does not rely on the personality of individuals nor does it focus on the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers, which historically has been the starting point for any discussion of leadership. By turning to practices rather than to traits, behaviors, or attributions, L-A-P has sought to release historical attention to what might be called the individual model of leadership that has at times dampened the energy and creativity of people in our organizations and communities. In the case of L-A-P, we will see that in not requiring pre-specified outcomes, practice can precede agency and focus on processes-in-action inclusive of participants' communal, shared, and exploratory discourses. Further, if participants are dissatisfied with leadership in their everyday activities, the L-A-P model favors the parties committed to a practice entering an authentic dialogue to reproduce or transform it. And, in so doing, they can re-create leadership.

Accordingly, L-A-P is an approach to leadership that occurs when unfolding social processes change the trajectory of the flow of practices among parties to an activity or change the turning points in the spaces between these participants. Its social nature thus points to a social construction occurring within the company of others. The practices referred to are embodied and situated and thus are shaped by the participants and their collective activities, discourses, surroundings, and artifacts that can enhance or detract from what they are attempting to accomplish. So, leadership occurs in practice as people engage with and are molded by others and by their material arrangements.

In this essay, the author will show how leadership-as-practice evolved first from the confines of practice theory or what we might call the practice perspective. Academy of Management

publications have been particularly instrumental in setting the stage for the emergence of the practice approach within social theory and, in particular, by offering a means to understand organizing and leading as they happen. The Collection will then turn to the derivation of L-A-P within the leadership literature, showing in particular its evolution within the domain of collective leadership as an *in situ* intersubjective practice. Although L-A-P is still emergent as a theory, there are a number of critical themes that have been addressed but that need further development, in particular, agency, power, methodology leadership development, ethics, and identity. These themes will be explored along with the practicalities of invoking leadership as a collective interdependent process. Before coming to a close, the Collection will review new areas, ripe for study, for possible theoretical and empirical broadening. We invite readers of this Collection to contribute to this emerging literature that sees agency in a new light - as a collaborative endeavor mobilized by social interaction.

Prior to continuing this overview, readers are encouraged to review Table 1 below in which the Academy of Management publications are highlighted. The articles are listed in chronological order featuring their authors, title, and journal. In addition, the publications' role in developing the L-A-P field is organized into five categories corresponding to the aforementioned brief: (1) those which have played an instrumental role in advancing practice theory, (2) those which have spearheaded specific substantive applications of practice theory, 3) those which have played a critical role in the history of leadership research leading up to the practice domain, (4) those which have enriched the core field of collective leadership from which L-A-P has been associated, and (5) those which have developed some of the principal contemporary themes of leadership-as-practice.

--- Insert **TABLE 1** about here ---

The Turn to Practice

Concurrent with growing ambivalence surrounding the individual perspective in leadership, there has been corresponding interest in the theory of practice perspective. Oddly enough, the source of this world view has been around for some time in the hands of American pragmatism, most distinctively represented by John Dewey (Simpson & den Hond, 2022). Curiously, American social research developed more on classical positivist and realist lines, leaving pragmatism and its allied philosophies of phenomenology and hermeneutics to evolve and contribute to leadership research more prominently in continental and postmodern philosophies. However, had we listened to Dewey, we might have surfaced some of the limits to social scientific inquiry – that it cannot be a purely rational or algorithmic property and that knowledge is not permanent but can be fluid as we interact with the world through our experience. Dewey (1929) referred to our penchant to develop mind-independent theories apart from our observations as the “spectator theory of knowledge.” He countered that a preferred way to acknowledge a reality is by sharing our understanding of it. Consequently, rather than seeking to understand a phenomenon such as leadership through our theories and measures of human behavior, a pragmatic approach would seek to trace its flows through embodied and material engagements in practice.

The turn to practice has made an impressive impact on social theory not only philosophically, by contributing to our understanding of embodied knowledge and the nature of reality and the

social order, but practically, by offering us a means to understand organizing and leading as they happen. Academy of Management publications have made an important contribution to this evolution with articles that have set the stage for the development of L-A-P theory. They have focused on the practice perspective in the social science and management fields as a whole (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011; Feldman & Worline, 2016) as well as in its applications in other related fields, such as strategy (Vaara & Whittington, 2012), discourse (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001), action research (Coghlan, 2011), diversity (Janssens & Steyaert, 2019), knowledge and epistemology (Raelin, 2007; Waddock, 2007), and ontology (Thompson, 2011). Accordingly, the studies suggest that although the practice perspective poses an important challenge to a paradigmatically psychological orientation to leadership, it has obtained increasing consideration among management scholars. In this Collection, I will turn next to a depiction of the history of the emerging L-A-P field to be followed by a delineation of its current and future state. These sections will precipitate potential applications within research and within practice. I'll conclude with some remarks on the chance for L-A-P to gain traction in the field of leadership.

DERIVATION OF THE TOPIC: LEADERSHIP-AS-PRACTICE

Leadership-as-practice surfaced from a history that foreshadowed its emergence. Let's take a glimpse into that history of leadership research. The earliest studies evolved from the so-called "great man" theories of the 19th Century, later given the name, the Trait approach, because it presumably differentiated leaders on the basis of their personality characteristics (e.g., Day & Zaccaro, 2007). Having not found a consistent set of traits that made for good leadership (Stogdill, 1948), leadership scholars turned to the identification of behaviors, such as Blake and Mouton's (1964) focus on task and people and their intersection. Disrupting the standing of the Behavioral approach, Contingency theorists subsequently argued that no single set of behaviors would apply across all situations; in other words, leadership styles should vary (e.g., Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1996).

As Contingency theories were gaining ground, another set of theories were emerging that brought followers into the equation – as part of a "social exchange." In Transactional leadership, leaders would motivate followers to higher achievement by rewarding them with tangible incentives, whereas in Transformational leadership, followers would benefit from a compelling vision, intellectual stimulation, and team commitment (Bass, 1985). In a subsequent relational approach, Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) focused on the quality of the relationship between leader and follower (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Remaining focused on followers, Lord and associates' (Engle & Lord, 1997), Implicit Leadership theory proposed that followers possess and look to confirm pre-conceived notions of their leaders, while Meindl's Romance theory (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987) added that followers' positive attributions can contribute to an acquiescence to and reinforcement of a leader's prowess.

In the models depicted above, as well as in other contemporary models based on particular value characteristics, such as Spiritual, Ethical, and Authentic models of leadership (Hernandez et al., 2011), the focus is about what leaders and followers do and how it gets done. Hence, the perspective is entitative, based on the activities of named leaders, rather than based on the dynamic social processes involved in leadership. Although pre-ordained by earlier overlooked pioneers, in particular Mary Parker Follett (Parker, 1984), the latter studies see leadership as a

co-construction and dynamic process by those involved in the practice at hand (e.g., Raelin, 2018). Referred to as Collective leadership, studies have proliferated under a range of labels, each with a different view of what constitutes leadership in its collective or plural form (Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001). Often, a constellation of individuals emerges to contribute knowledge and skills to complete the task. Nicole Alexy (2020) has offered a “metatheoretic” framework (see [Figure 1](#)) that categorizes these different models of collective leadership. By meta-theoretic, she refers to underlying assumptions that can organize our conceptual explanations and empirical observations. The headings of her model are the nature or ontology of collective leadership and its varying loci or epicenters where it is seen to be enacted. Five categories are depicted in the model and each incorporates some of the prominent fields of study.

--- Insert **FIGURE 1** about here ---

The first metatheory sees collective leadership as a team capability in which multiple members share leadership roles (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007). Accordingly, the leadership can be Shared, Distributed, or Leaderful based on the degree of empowerment accorded to group members, with the shared approach representing a lesser degree of empowerment compared to the leaderful, professing the most (Raelin, 2018). The second metatheory explains collective leadership as a system capability that enables enterprises to dynamically adjust to shifting internal and external pressures. Under the rubrics of Adaptive, Entrepreneurial, or Administrative, these models employ Complex systems to generate structural, informational, and operational responses to unpredictable environmental conditions (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

In the third metatheory, collective leadership is viewed as a discursive practice in which conversations between people create their social identities in the process of coordinating their present and future actions and interactions. Under the headings of Discursive or Relational leadership, these models consider leadership as arising from the objective meanings that conversants derive in their everyday relational discourse (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). In the fourth model, it is not micro discourses which shape collective leadership but macro cultural norms and rules that guide and give structure to members of a society. It is through critique and deconstruction that Critical leadership studies have emerged to surface and combat the particularly asymmetric discourses of power and domination that have come to placate and colonize workers and communities (Collinson, 2014).

The fifth and last metatheory of collective leadership is conceived as an *in situ* intersubjective practice in which people and material reorient the flow of practice towards new meanings and directions. The conceptual roots of this approach lie in practice theory in which as an embodied collective set of practical accomplishments, practice becomes a core unit of analysis (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). The relationship to collective leadership is established through its social rather than individual constitution; in particular, practices are constructed through embodied, practical, coordinated accomplishments of shared know-how and material interactions as people work together on mutual activities (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). Hence, Leadership-as-Practice focuses on how social processes change the

trajectory of the flow of practice. An example would be any instance when participants of an activity ostensibly change its course perhaps because of a new condition, a novel or better idea, a contextual event, or a unique solution (Raelin, 2016b).

THE CURRENT AND UNFOLDING STATE OF LEADERSHIP-AS-PRACTICE

The field of leadership-as-practice has begun to lay out an agenda that speaks to its potential value to the practice of leadership within both the academic and practitioner communities. Among the themes that have been distinguished that are already suggesting a reconstruction of the field of leadership are agency, power, methodology, leadership development, ethics, and identity. I will comment first on agency, power, and methodology as ongoing topics of interest to scholars and then next on leadership development, ethics, and identity of particular interest to practitioners.

A critical change in the subject of agency is whether any kind of mobilization of social action can be as much collective as individualized. Conceiving of leadership as a practice allows those disposed and enfranchised to participate in leadership as they engage in agentic activity. Practice accounts for collective agency. Participants (to an activity) constitute but are also constituted by the material and discursive practices of the groups of which they are members (Davies, 1991). Thus, a relational interdependence is formed as the self incorporates its life experience into the immediate social experience. Although individuals retain their sense of self, their identity and potential agency are often socially constructed by behavioral expectations and situational cues, such as may be represented by roles, incentives, uniforms, feedback, or symbolic references (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Of course, individuals may choose to incorporate or ignore the cues from others, thus individual agency cannot be reducible to social agency. Rather any interdependence may be an “intra-action,” in which a conversation is not necessarily just between actors but ensues as a dynamic emerging relation shaped by the parties in response to each other in their given contexts. Thus, practice can be transformed and remade in uneven and unpredictable ways. It may begin as a dialogue and become “trans-subjective” when it leads to a transformation of relations in which the actors transcend their own embeddedness (Robinson & Renshaw, 2022).

Consider cases of technology transfer in which individuals may initially experiment with new technologies or methods on their own but ultimately introduce them to those with whom they work. Colleagues may then respond to these initiatives and add their own approaches and initiatives. To distinguish each micro-move in this process as an individual agency or combination of individual agencies seems to distort its intra-active nature. The recipients of the initial communication are seldom passive, as would be classified in followership. Rather, the process is usually unpredictable and impervious to who did what first, second, or beyond. In the end, the practice may be changed from what it was or what was intended by any one of the colleagues. The process was collaboratively and intersubjectively agentic (Raelin, 2016a).

Turning to the theme of power, it can only activate when it has an effect on another. We can then say that it is embedded within social relations and thus is reproduced through practices. It is practices as well as techniques and procedures which give power its effect. Consequently, objects, such as people, under the constraints of power, may be rendered amenable to regulation by being

referred to or compartmentalized in particular ways (Townley, 1993). We know, for example, who a better performer is on the job by a ranking afforded by forced-choice performance appraisals.

In L-A-P studies, there is a need to distinguish between two forms of power: hard and soft. Hard power texts seek to identify the forces which deprive substantive identities (based on gender, ethnicity, sexuality and the like) of their full participation in society, whereas the soft power literature probes into ambiguous spaces and moments to construct emergent individual and group identities. When focusing on soft power, L-A-P examines how social power forms and re-forms throughout the levels of the organization. People in vying for influence use power in the sense of “authoring,” meaning that in the struggle for identifying instigators of activity, they seek to inscribe their name onto the critical issues and decisions taking place (Taylor & Van Every, 2014). Researchers thus look to formal and informal roles not just to those in executive positions to find leadership. In addition, studies examine the impact of networks or coalitions on decisions to proceed with or upend projects. The practice perspective also incorporates the impact of material-discursive practices on project continuation or termination. Perhaps Carroll (2018) put it best in characterizing the impact of soft power on practices:

It [power] exists in a ceaseless series of mostly conversational choices and openings that present fleeting possibilities to shape, move, or confirm a trajectory. We must concede there is nothing asymmetrical or structural in such power. It is the equivalent of tiny drops of emancipatory choice and not the tsunami of domination (p. 378).

Hard power, as noted above, presents itself when particular forces seek to deprive impacted groups of equitable benefits due to systematic stratification and exclusion. An important critique of some L-A-P studies is that in its effort to report on the historical practices occurring *in situ*, it may unwittingly ignore power differentials and continue to privilege institutionalized norms (Simpson, 2016). Further, some practices may have their roots within classic conditions of deprivation, such as, racism, sexism, and the like (Willmott, 2013). There is no guarantee that leadership arising from these ongoing practices will not continue to overlook cases of power asymmetry. Meanwhile, at the corporate level, leadership has been criticized as a form of manipulation steering subordinates into a false sense of consent to the goals and values of the hierarchy. L-A-P writers have responded to these conditions by promoting critical dialogue as a basis for worker consciousness and enlightenment and as a challenge to practices that bear the imprint of social domination (Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009). On the other hand, marginalized groups may not find their voice in rational dialogue, which has been implicated in enforcing a subtle compliance with an organizational ideology, leading to further disillusionment and cynicism. In this latter instance, any form of enlightenment would be rejected in favor of class struggle and structural reform.

Change agents and L-A-P writers would naturally eschew conditions of monolithic control and instead turn their attention to the need to interrogate the taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings that sustain “...the defensive routines that maintain hierarchical hegemony” (Raelin, 2008). They might accordingly seek to develop an emancipatory learning from the data of direct experience and from practice interventions that incorporate the perceptions and world view of those exploited or victimized (Fairclough, 2005).

Among the most challenging issues attending to theory development in L-A-P would be an appropriate methodology in which to study especially emergent practices. Such a methodology would need to incorporate cultural, historical, and political conditions embedded within the leadership relationship. Research questions would broaden beyond such classic axioms as leadership requiring an influence relationship. L-A-P is interested in other constructs such as mutual adjustment, shared sense-making, dialogue, and collaborative learning. So, any emergent research orientation would resist closure on the familiar categories of leadership that are often individualistic and controlling in their characterizations. Accordingly, there is a home for phenomenological accounts in which the researcher allies with respondents as a fellow learner, seeking to describe and ultimately to interpret their lived experience. In addition, L-A-P would be receptive to non-textual and embodied descriptions incorporating multimodal or sensory ethnographic methods deploying symbolic data, artistic images, and music and sound.

As an example, Kempster & Gregory (2017) deployed a co-constructed autoethnography to explore everyday middle management work in a case of moral disengagement. The study in its aesthetic narrative sought a verisimilitude through the flow of activity characterizing leadership as emergent in social historic contexts and practices. In accordance with L-A-P phenomenological methodology, it also depicted a partnership between respondent and researcher as co-respondents walking aside one another through a mutual and active embodied performance.

Turning to the practitioner point of view, leadership-as-practice could alter the foci of leadership development. Rather than locating it away from the office at pristine offsites, leadership development would take place in the very setting where the practices are going on. So, rather than learn best practices, skills, or competencies using case examples – other than their own “case” – participants would concentrate on addressing and solving their problems in their settings, such as via action learning (Raelin, 2007). Further, they would need to confront these problems, often including real-life practices immersed within power relations, with those who are already directly engaged with them. Leadership development thus requires an acute immersion into the lived experiences of all the actors involved in mutual activity. The engagement also introduces novel forms of conversation that would be aimed at enhancing collective reflection on their experience so as to expand and even create knowledge while at the same time serving to improve their practice. Denyer and Turnbull James (2016) in their account of “leadership-as-practice development” (LaPD) make liberal use of both action learning and executive coaching to achieve learning in practice. In comparison to action learning, however, where the focus is more on an organizational project and the needed personal and collective learning to overcome the challenge, in LaPD, the focus is on shared and collaborative leadership practices.

The discussion of ethics in L-A-P can be a fertile ground for inquiry because it has been linked to genealogy as its ethical base, as compared to encyclopaedia and tradition, composing the oft-cited three rival version of moral inquiry per Alasdair MacIntyre (1994). Accordingly, L-A-P would reject any adherence to authoritative views or transcendental truths because it would see such texts as contingent on historical-political processes that reveal only the knowledge represented by one point in time and by one tradition (Calás & Smircich, 1999). Rather, it sees the world through multiple lenses based on concurrent relational discourses. Genealogical inquiry probes beyond the representing author(s) to uncover given truths which, at times, are dependent upon institutional norms of complicity and conformity. Resisting such a turn, in L-A-P the parties would rely on diverse, changing, and even conflicting perspectives and co-construct

and negotiate ethical meaning in their everyday practices. L-A-P thus depends more upon a principled pragmatism rather than a set of universal principles that guide people in their ethical decision making.

A L-A-P ethics thus seeks a view consisting of a creative interaction among multiple and contradictory voices that is inclusive and appreciative. A frame provided by Calàs and Smircich (1999: 664) points out that no matter what our position, be it in the domain of corporate communications, or mergers, or environmental, social, and governance (ESG) accountability, we need to be aware that we are:

picking and choosing [what] to pay attention to and ignore.....favoring some people, some topics, some questions, some values. Can we do our writing in a way that is "self-conscious" of our "choices," and, at the same time, can we recognize that we do not even exist as independent autonomous selves—that we are only products of multiple and competing discourses?

Finally, identity is a fascinating topic to explore from a leadership-as-practice perspective because contemporary project work no longer requires a central authority to manage the activity. It can evolve as a collective property based on the linguistic and performative practices of team members – rather than on their individual cognitive beliefs – and the effect of those practices on their subsequent social relationships (Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005). Collective meaning thus ensues as members confront their ongoing challenges through an emerging set of material-discursive practices.

As an example of this collective and embodied conception of leadership identity, Brigid Carroll (2016) describes an IT team meeting at which the titular group leader takes out a koosh ball from his desk and intently moves some post-it notes on a board. The koosh ball is passed around as other members recount what they are working on. At times the post-it notes are re-arranged. The meeting formally ends when the koosh ball is put away, though people hang around and talk more. Collective leadership identity emerges (or not) from the collective encounter, in which those involved play a contributor role, and from the material artifacts, the technologies, the movements, the rituals, not to mention time and space, all of which potentially shape leadership as it is occurring.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Although I am using practice in a different sense than its usage denoting the setting where practitioners work, its consideration as the principal unit of analysis in conceptualizing leadership can change the very way we operationalize the practice of leadership. In the first instance, leadership would not be viewed as a permanent entitative fixture on the organizational scene that plays out within an enduring structure (Thompson, 2011). Rather, the focus in leadership would be on processes whereby humans and their agency and their socio-material elements would co-constitute as an unfolding set of fluid emergent practices (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008).

As noted earlier, the study of leadership would move progressively to the practice world where we would inquire about the lived experience of working people creating opportunities for leadership. Our interest is in their performativity, referring not to their productivity, but to their deep involvement in practice and to their discourses which help shape their identity. The practice view also refers to their “sayings” and “doings” and how these activities come together

in particular sites to make particular practices more or less possible and effective as they are reproduced and renewed (Simpson, Buchan, & Sillince, 2018).

From the point of view of learning, in concert with conventional research, organizational change has been long thought to occur through rational analysis which affords a diagnosis of problems in organizations to be resolved through reason and logic. Leadership-as-practice, on the other hand, is more committed to instances when reflexivity in the line of practice can lead to improvisations derived from real-time learning. This engagement process invites people in the workplace (or elsewhere) to consider themselves in relation not only to the instant problem, but to the self, to other stakeholders, and to the system in question. They acquire skills, habits, and attitudes that give rise to an appreciation of leadership as a collective practice. For example, they may learn to develop a deep and peripheral awareness of one another and anticipate the needs of their colleagues and stakeholders. They may see value in collaborating with a keen sense of humility, not necessarily looking for agreement or for truth among those participating in a venture, but rather for mutual understanding and consideration as their projects move forward.

The leadership activity depicted here would constitute a collective sensemaking often typified by concurrent reflection on each round of activity often producing new and creative ways of thinking and acting. An oft-used metaphor in the L-A-P field would be that of free jazz improvisation in which at any point a player can take the music in a new direction and trigger others to reflect and re-interpret what they just heard, achieving a shared and transcendent feel or groove (Barrett & Hatch, 2003). At the same time, the practice is shaped by the broader jazz community that underlies the cultural and historic shared background that produces jazz.

Consequently, L-A-P concentrates on particular activities that can extend or transform meaning and, in so doing, change trajectories. Although the practices can be recursive and approximate routines in their durability, the practice view endorsed by L-A-P tends to be more performative and dynamic. Leadership consequently can be characterized as a collective agency that can disrupt the regularity of routines. Simpson (2016) characterizes this mode of practice as a trans-action in which there is a continual flow of processes and engagements. In this mode engagements may transform the “trans-actors” as they incorporate new and unfolding meanings in their ongoing trans-actions.

In the end, changes in leadership-as-practice are not viewed as exceptional events that are spearheaded by people at the top. Changes occur where there is a shift in what I earlier referred to as the trajectory of the flow of practices within any given activity or project. It is normally unimportant and even difficult to point to any one person who is “leading” the charge. In L-A-P, leadership is not seen to be dependent on any one person to mobilize others; it is a collective interdependent process. Agency may be occurring in the midst of action rather than as a directive regulating the action.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

There is a wealth of opportunity for new scholars to initiate studies in the field of leadership-as-practice because so much has yet to be explored. It is an especially ripe area for study by doctoral students who may have more time at their disposal to engage the ethnographic and longitudinal methods required to study leadership when it is considered to be immersed in practices in turn embedded within social relations.

While much progress has been made delineating the conceptual apparatus of L-A-P, there is much work to be done to develop a full-fledged L-A-P theory, acknowledging that there are forces limiting the provision of a general theory of leadership-as-practice. We wouldn't expect,

for example, that two or more clusters of leadership practices would have the same histories, the same actors, the same materialities, or the same meanings resulting from being, doing, and knowing in a given context. Even in the same context, a common canon of reliability can be challenged since there will likely be variation because of time, changes in the action, and point of view of the participants. Nevertheless, we can seek to identify particular influences on practice emergence in specific situations, and though challenging to isolate common themes, we can start minimally by comparing processes and outcomes within specific contextual frames, such as individual roles, teams, organizations, and networks.

Here next are selected topics (and associated questions) that have been identified as areas of puzzlement and interest within the field and thus can afford far more development than what has heretofore been published:

- Phenomenological inquiries that draw nearer to lived reality, including data below the surface beyond the so-called “natural attitude”
 - L-A-P methods borrow from phenomenology in their attempt to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated, and thus researchers rely on bracketing in order to free themselves from prior experience and presumptions in order to truly listen to and concentrate on the participant in their environment. At what point, however, should L-A-P researchers suspend their bracketing in order to fully appreciate, interrogate, and interpret the practices and context of the participant?
- Process-oriented, longitudinal, and narrative approaches aimed at understanding leadership dynamics from within, such as using ethnographic and multimodal (e.g., photo and video technology) methods
 - L-A-P looks to capture how the actor sees their world from the subjective point of view. Researchers are thus patient, serving not so much as authors but as detectives probing into lived experience without imposing any artificial order, such as theory, on the subject matter at hand. Yet, if there are no theories to track in L-A-P inquiry, where does research begin and end? Is it sufficient to merely capture “small stories,” mindful of their locality in space and time?
- Material-discursive actions and interactions which shape leadership
 - Materiality plays an important role in social production because artifacts assume directing, shaping, and ordering roles. What is the relationship between objects and human actors?
- Implications of the co-constitution of practice and context
 - Objects and events are considered equivocal unless understood in their context. The meaning of a text is found within its cultural and historical context. Consequently, L-A-P researchers have tended to focus on specific contexts and, in particular, on practice-arrangement bundles underlying their depiction of leadership. What is the responsibility of the researcher to reveal the provenance of their own representation?
- Horizontal linkages with other fields to find common theoretical insights; such as with:
 - Action research, Glaserian grounded theory, dialogic inquiry, social network analysis
 - Shared leadership, distributed leadership, collective leadership, relational leadership
 - Organization development, communities of practice, communicative constitution of organizations, sensemaking

- L-A-P during times of crisis
In unfamiliar crisis conditions, leadership needs to emerge to improvise around the unfolding reality. Such improvisation rarely derives from one leader; no single person is thought to have the capacity to reconcile the complexity and uncertainty surrounding these conditions. Nevertheless, can the response to such conditions be hamstrung by a reliance on collective practices?
- Sociological and psychological conditions for the favorable emergence of L-A-P
Leadership in L-A-P proceeds whenever people connected to an endeavor seek its accomplishment without vertical orders. Further, these occurrences are more likely to occur under a participant-directed praxis in which the manager in charge encourages the dispersion of control. Are there structural formats where L-A-P might flourish as in sociocratic or organic-type organizations?
- Discovery of the ideology and ethics of L-A-P
The human being is not considered the center of all knowledge; rather, knowledge arises from a contested interaction among a community of inquirers rather than from a single source of expertise. Consequently, if moral acts are not reliant as a source of authority, what will take its place as a basis of ethical meaning?
- Implications for organizational development of leadership being viewed as a consequence of collective activity rather than a cause
When leadership is viewed as an outcome, the emphasis switches to the practices, namely, how can these practices be changed to improve the leadership of the given enterprise. The focus consequently moves from the adequacy of any given leader to the practices, artifacts, voices, physical arrangements, or time sequences of the group. How might participants change their interactions and reflective practices to learn new ways to achieve their purpose?
- Study of meaning making as a process of leadership rather than as an input through visioning
Rather than rely upon visions as coming from the mind of the “leader,” meaning comes from within the community and is thus co-created, though often articulated by the meaning-makers – those totally engaged in the team who can help make sense of what colleagues are doing when faced with uncertainty or with a contested terrain. What are the special talents of the meaning maker and the practices inherent in meaning making?

CONCLUSION

The field of leadership is at a time in history when it is ripe for new models and approaches. Leadership as an individual model hasn't solved the problem of a community's reliance at times on autocratic leaders and their demagogic practices in which people are conscripted to follow the “right” leader who is assumed to be the beacon of moral rectitude. There is an opportunity for models such as L-A-P in which subjects do not necessarily precede the practice. Rather, there would be endorsement of pragmatic solutions arising from a contested interaction among a community of inquirers, as opposed to a single source of expertise. Such new models would seek to engage people in critical dialogue in which they would seek to question the language and the practices that bear the imprint of social control. At the same time, a reliance on practice alone can subject leadership to its own institutional pressures, especially from power elites who may try to manipulate the discourse surrounding decisions and action. The counter to this legitimate concern is for practitioners to join together in social critique to resist oppression and other forms of

inequitable conditions. In recent years, it appears that the firm grasp on leadership theory and development from those espousing a pure entitative approach has been relaxed. We can now see that agency can at times be collective and collaborative and that change can be mobilized by social interaction and from knowledge emanating from that discourse.

It is my hope that this Collection will spur additional work considering leadership as a practice, the knowledge of which should help those engaged in projects of significance advance their mutual endeavors. In particular, there is a need for further exploration of some of the key themes already identified in L-A-P inquiry, such as issues of agency, power, ethics, identity, and leadership development. New researchers need to keep in mind that practice studies benefit especially from phenomenological, narrative, longitudinal, and multi-modal methodologies that require some commitment to and time in the field. Researchers are urged to think of themselves as detectives attempting to capture the lived experiences of people in interaction with their associates and artifacts in their everyday surroundings. Practitioners, meanwhile, are invited to look at practices in a new way, as an opportunity for exploring their improvement as a means to encourage leadership emergence. In the end, L-A-P can provide leadership researchers and practitioners with a chance to examine leadership at multiple interacting levels, to elucidate distinctions of time and space in their analyses, to serve as a co-participant in research experiments, and to uncover the tacit processes that contribute to leadership, all of which can get us closer to the bare realities of what people can accomplish when they put their minds and movements together to effectuate meaningful and sustainable change.

Acknowledgement

This Collection acknowledges the support and encouragement of James Bailey, who not only galvanized this work but also supported this author and many other colleagues who, like James, have chosen to at times defy and then reconstruct mainstream thought.

REFERENCES

- Alexy, N. 2020. A metatheoretic reconstruction of collective leadership studies. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, vol. 2020, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2020.267>
- Barrett, F. J., & Hatch, M. J. 2003. Planning on spontaneity: Lessons from jazz for a democratic theory of change. *Academy of Management Proceedings*. vol 2003, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2003.13792454>
- Bass, B. M. 1985. *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press.
- Blake, R. R., and Mouton, J. S. 1964. *The managerial grid*. Houston: Gulf.
- Calás, M. B., & Smircich, L. 1999. Past postmodernism? Reflections and tentative directions. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4): 649-671.
- Carroll, B. J. 2016. Leadership as identity: A practice-based exploration. In J. A. Raelin (Ed.) *Leadership-as-practice: Theory and application*, 91-109. New York: Routledge.

- Carroll, B.J. 2018. The problem of power in critical and L-A-P research. *Leadership*, 14(3): 376-378.
- Carson J. B., Tesluk, P. E. & Marrone, J. A. 2007. Shared leadership in teams: An investigation of antecedent conditions and performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(5): 1217–1234.
- Coghlan, D. 2011. Action research: Exploring perspectives on a philosophy of practical knowing. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 5(1): 53–87.
- Collinson, D. 2014. Dichotomies, dialectics and dilemmas: New directions for critical leadership studies? *Leadership*, 10(1): 36–55.
- Davies, B. 1991. The concept of agency: A feminist poststructuralist analysis. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, 30: 42-53.
- Day, D.V., & Zaccaro, S. J. 2007. Leadership: A critical historical analysis of the influence of leader traits. In L. L. Kopps (Ed.) **Historical perspectives in industrial and organizational psychology**, 383-405. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Denis J-L., Lamothe, L., & Langley, A. 2001. The dynamics of collective leadership and strategic change in pluralistic organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4): 809–837.
- Denyer, D., & Turnbull James, K. 2016. Doing leadership-as-practice development. In J. A. Raelin (Ed.) *Leadership-as-practice: Theory and application*, 262–283. New York: Routledge.
- Dewey, J. 1929. *The quest for certainty*. New York: Minton, Balch.
- Engle, E. M., & Lord, R. G. 1997. Implicit theories, self-schemas, and leader-member exchange. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(4): 988-1010.
- Fairclough, N. 2005. Discourse analysis in organization studies: The case for critical realism. *Organization Studies*, 26(6): 915-939.
- Feldman, M., & Worline, M. 2016. The practicality of practice theory. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 15(2): 304–324.
- Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. 1995. Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader–member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 6: 219–247.
- Hardy, C., Lawrence, T. B., & Grant, D. 2005. Discourse and collaboration: The role of conversations and collective identity. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(1): 58-77.
- Heracleous, L., & Barrett, M. 2001. Organizational change as discourse: Communicative actions and deep structures in the context of information technology implementation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4): 755–778.

Hernandez, M., Eberly, M. B., Avolio, B. J., & Johnson, M.D. 2011. The loci and mechanisms of leadership: Exploring a more comprehensive view of leadership theory. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22: 1165–1185.

Hughes, R. L., Ginnett, R. C., & Curphy, G. J. (1996). Contingency theories of leadership. In R. L. Hughes, R. C. Ginnett, & G. J. Curphy (Eds.) *Leadership: Enhancing the lessons of experience*, 101-121. Chicago: Irwin.

Janssens, M., & Steyaert, C. 2019. A practice-based theory of diversity: Respecifying (in)equality in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 44(3): 518–537.

Kempster, S., & Gregory, S. H. 2017. “Should I stay or should I go?” Exploring leadership-as-practice in the middle management role. *Leadership*, 13(4): 496-515.

MacIntyre, A. 1994. *Three rival versions of moral enquiry: Encyclopaedia, genealogy, and tradition*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Meindl, J. R., & Ehrlich, S. B. 1987. The romance of leadership and the evaluation of organizational performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 30(1): 91-109.

Orlikowski, W. J., & Scott, S. V. 2008. Sociomateriality: Challenging the separation of technology, work and organization. *Academy of Management Annals*, 2(1): 433–474.

Parker, L. D. 1984. Control in organizational life: The contribution of Mary Parker Follett. *The Academy of Management Review*, 9(4): 736-745.

Raelin, J.A. 2006. Does action learning promote collaborative leadership? *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 5(2): 152-168.

Raelin, J.A. 2007. Toward an epistemology of practice. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 6(4): 495–519.

Raelin, J.A. 2008. Emancipatory discourse and liberation. *Management Learning*, 39(5): 519-540.

Raelin, J.A. 2016a. Imagine there are no leaders: Reframing leadership as collaborative agency. *Leadership*, 12(2): 131-158.

Raelin, J.A. Ed. 2016b. *Leadership-as-practice: Theory and application*. New York: Routledge.

Raelin, J.A. 2018. What are you afraid of: Collective leadership and its learning implications. *Management Learning*, 49(1): 59–66.

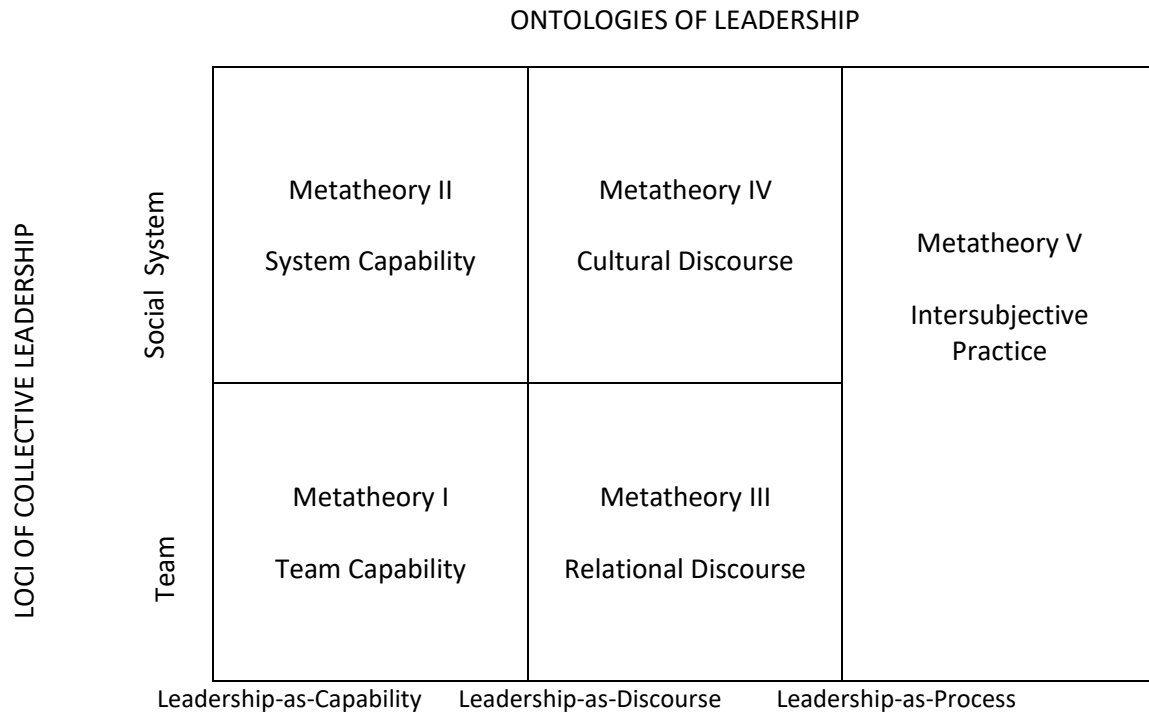
Robinson, J. L., & Renshaw, P. St.J. 2022. Place – The final frontier: Exploring the outer reaches of collaborative agency using the Japanese concept of Ba. *Leadership*, 18(1): 13-39.

- Sandberg, J., & Tsoukas, H. 2011. Grasping the logic of practice: Theorizing through practical rationality. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2): 338–360.
- Schatzki, T. R, Knorr Cetina, K., and von Savigny, E., Eds. 2001. *The practice turn in contemporary theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Simpson, B. 2016. Where's the agency in leadership-as-practice? In J. A. Raelin (Ed.) *Leadership-as-practice: Theory and application*, 159-177. New York: Routledge.
- Simpson, B., & den Hond, F. 2022. The contemporary resonances of classical pragmatism for studying organization and organizing. *Organization Studies*, 43(1): 127-146.
- Simpson, B., Buchan, L., & Sillince 2018. The performativity of leadership talk. *Leadership*, 14(6): 644-661.
- Sluss, D. M., & Ashforth, B. E. 2007. Relational identity and identification: Defining ourselves through work relationships. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(1): 9-32.
- Spicer, A., Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. 2009. Critical performativity: The unfinished business of critical management studies, *Human Relations*, 62(4): 537–560.
- Stogdill, R. M. 1948. Personal factors associated with leadership: A survey of the literature. *Journal of Psychology*, 25: 35–71.
- Taylor, J.R., & van Every, E.J. 2014. *When organization fails: Why authority matters*. New York: Routledge.
- Thompson, M. 2011. Ontological shift or ontological drift? Reality claims, epistemological frameworks, and theory generation in organization studies. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(4): 754-773.
- Townley, B. 1993. Foucault, power/knowledge, and its relevance for human resource management. *Academy of Management Review*, 18(3): 518-545.
- Uhl-Bien, M., & Ospina, S. M. Eds. 2012. *Advancing relational leadership research: A dialogue among perspectives*. Charlotte, NC: IAP.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Marion, R., & McKelvey, B. 2007. Complexity leadership theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. *Leadership Quarterly*, 18(4): 298–318.
- Vaara, E., & Whittington, R. 2012. Strategy-as-practice: Taking social practices seriously. *Academy of Management Annals*, 6: 285–336.
- Waddock, S. 2007. Leadership integrity in a fractured knowledge world. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 6(4): 543–557.
- Willmott, H. 2013. Reflections on the darker side of conventional power analytics. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 27(4): 281-286.

TABLE 1
Chronology and Role of Papers Included in the Collection

Year	Journal	Author(s)	Title	Role in Developing the L-A-P Field
1984	AMR	Parker	Control in organizational life: The contribution of Mary Parker Follett	Collective leadership
1987	AMJ	Meindl and Ehrlich	The romance of leadership and the evaluation of organizational performance	Leadership history
1993	AMR	Townley	Foucault, power/knowledge, and its relevance for human resource management	Thematic development
1997	AMJ	Engle and Lord	Implicit theories, self-schemas, and leader-member exchange	Leadership history
1999	AMR	Calás and Smircich	Past postmodernism? Reflections and tentative directions	Thematic development
2001	AMJ	Denis, Lamothe, and Langley	The dynamics of collective leadership and strategic change in pluralistic organizations	Collective leadership
2001	AMJ	Heracleous, and Barrett	Organizational change as discourse: Communicative actions and deep structures in the context of information technology implementation	Practice application
2005	AMR	Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant	Discourse and collaboration: The role of conversations and collective identity	Thematic development
2006	AMLE	Raelin	Does action learning promote collaborative leadership?	Collective leadership
2007	AMJ	Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone	Shared leadership in teams: An investigation of antecedent conditions and performance	Collective leadership
2007	AMLE	Raelin	Toward an epistemology of practice	Practice application
2007	AMR	Sluss, D. M. and Ashforth, B. E.	Relational identity and identification: Defining ourselves through work relationships	Thematic development
2007	AMLE	Waddock	Leadership integrity in a fractured knowledge world	Practice application
2008	Annals	Orlikowski and Scott	Sociomateriality: Challenging the separation of technology, work and organization	Practice advancement
2011	Annals	Coghlan	Action research: Exploring perspectives on a philosophy of practical knowing	Practice application
2011	AMR	Sandberg and Tsoukas	Grasping the logic of practice: Theorizing through practical rationality	Practice advancement
2011	AMR	Thompson	Ontological shift or ontological drift? Reality claims, epistemological frameworks, and theory generation in organization studies	Practice advancement
2012	Annals	Vaara and Whittington	Strategy-as-Practice: Taking social practices seriously	Practice application
2013	AMP	Willmott	Reflections on the darker side of conventional power analytics	Thematic development
2016	AMLE	Feldman and Worline	The practicality of practice theory	Practice advancement
2019	AMR	Janssens and Steyaert	A practice-based theory of diversity: Respecifying (in)equality in organizations	Practice application

FIGURE 1
Metatheoretic Framework for Collective Leadership*



*Adapted from Alexy (2020)