Leadership

Toward a methodology for studying leadership-as-practice

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Abstract
This article is intended as a conceptual and practical foundation for those who wish to conduct research in the area of leadership-as-practice. Rather than offer a single methodology for studying how social and leadership activity is carried out in everyday life, it details a pluralistic set of methods and presents a series of theoretical guidelines through its phenomenological form of inquiry. In particular, it endorses discursive, narrative, ethnographic, aesthetic, and multimodal methods to attempt to capture concurrent, collective, and dialogical social practices. After providing an overview of praxis-oriented research as the methodological basis of leadership-as-practice, the article turns to the conceptual building blocks that can provide some guidance in selecting an appropriate methodology for study. These building blocks incorporate issues of agency, identity, materiality, context, power, and dialogue. The author hopes that researchers will take up the challenge of examining leadership dynamics "from within" to co-participate in working with actors engaged in projects of significance advance their mutual endeavors.

Keywords
Action research, ethnography, leadership-as-practice, methodology, phenomenology, praxis-oriented research, qualitative research

Overview

The underlying belief of the leadership-as-practice (L-A-P) approach is that leadership occurs as a practice rather than reside in the traits or behaviors of individuals. A practice is a coordinative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a

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distinctive outcome. L-A-P has a markedly collective orientation because it is less about what one person thinks or does and more about what people may accomplish together. It is thus concerned with how leadership emerges and unfolds through day-to-day experience. The material-discursive processes emergent from multiple actors at times produces a change in the trajectory of the flow of practices. In those instances, leadership is taking place. To find leadership, then, we must look to the practice within which it is occurring (Raelin, 2017).

Leadership would thus be viewed as an ongoing collective practical accomplishment that is produced in a particular social setting. The actors in the historical/cultural setting in question inter-subjectively negotiate a shared understanding which may reflect leadership in that setting, while not in another (Dachler and Hosking, 1995; Iszatt-White, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Other "plural" traditions in leadership, such as shared, distributed, and collective leadership (see, e.g. Denis et al., 2012; Friedrich et al., 2009; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Spillane, 2005), also consider leadership as collective, but they keep such classic shibboleths as leadership requiring an influence relationship between entities, namely leaders and followers, intact. In a play on words, Simpson et al. (2018) suggest that in the case of L-A-P, the prevailing property would not be influence, but "in-flow-ence," signifying movement constituted and emergent within the practices. L-A-P differs from classic leadership in other conceptual domains, to wit, instead of linearity characterizing relations, it is more typified by recursiveness; instead of being concerned with expertise, it focuses on meaning making; or instead of studying decision-making models, it is concerned with collaborative learning.

In considering the methods available to study L-A-P, researchers generally prefer to focus on praxis-oriented processes that are rich in power dynamics and human relations, and that privilege emergence and ambiguity over control and rationality. They consequently need to consider cultural, historical, and political conditions embedded within the leadership relationship and resist closure on the familiar categories of leadership that are often individualistic and directive (Crevani et al., 2010; Wood, 2005). By stipulating a praxis-oriented approach,[1] I refer to praxis' learning, liberatory, reflexive, and collective connotations (Bernstein, 1985; Freire, 1970; Heydebrand, 1983). Researchers observe or participate in action sufficiently to study discernible practices as well as associated beliefs and co-constructions that at times give rise to subsequent individual and collective action and change.

In this paper, my plan in this introductory section is to provide an overview of praxis-oriented research, which serves as the methodological basis of L-A-P. This will require situating this form of research within a philosophical tradition and within contemporary research practices. A section will follow with a brief examination of the historical roots of praxis-oriented research. The role of the researcher vis-à-vis the "participant" within his or her practice will also be carefully reviewed along with a comparison to two clearly aligned approaches, namely, qualitative research and action research. Since praxis-oriented *research* of leadership-as-practice (but not L-A-P per se) has an arms-length relationship to theory, I will need to take up the question of the generalizability of L-A-P research, if not toward theory, then toward history, contexts, and levels of study. Thereafter, I will address the question of what leadership-as-practice can specifically add to leadership research.

Let us begin by considering how this paper will approach the subject of methodology. I will not be focusing exclusively on methods, or on the tools or techniques that are advised in the study of L-A-P. Rather, in the spirit of philosophy, I am interested in *methodology*, which is focused on the theoretical ideas that guide the selection of methods. Methodology,

then, is as much a design as a set of instruments to carry out the research needed. In the case of studying practice, and in particular, for studying how social and leadership action is carried out in everyday life, we might wish to know if a preferred methodology can be offered. We would be on more stable ground doing so were there to be a unifying practice theory. Unfortunately, there is not. So, it is unlikely that a common methodology for L-A-P can be specified; rather, praxis-oriented researchers tend to be pluralistic with a leaning toward idiographic methods (e.g. studying the individual case).

It also is incumbent upon the researcher to refer to the particular branch of practice studies or the philosophical traditions upon which he or she is relying. For example, there is debate in practice research whether researchers are referring to practices or practice. Practices, as per Pickering's definition (1995), refer to specific sequences of activities that may repeatedly recur, whereas practice refers to in-the-moment entanglements that tend to extend or transform meaning. Simpson (2016) links practices to an inter-actional mode of activity in which pre-formed entities—be they people or discourses or institutions—vie for influence over other "inter-actors." Practice, on the other hand, is associated with a more trans-actional mode characterized by a continual flow of processes where material-discursive engagements produce emergent meaning.

My own take is from the phenomenological tradition in which the intersubjective production and re-production of meaning arise through social interaction and from knowledge emanating from our social reality. Accordingly, we see practice as continually unfolding in what appears to be a constantly shifting and evolving dynamic. As we continue our exploration, patterns may arise that suggest a more recurrent feature in which practices repeat as they form interconnections to other mental and bodily activities. These engagements may be coordinated by knowledge and processes that may be explicit or tacit, physical or mental, and material or immaterial (Reckwitz, 2002). Furthermore, although the practices are often historically situated, they are consistently open to contemporary contestation. L-A-P research does not look for peace or harmony or consensus, let alone truth. It seeks an inquiry that is lived or that is true to those who are living it. Accordingly, the inquiry is open to a diversity of views, discourse, and sentiments. It would be appropriate to therefore consider such collective practices as criticism, dissent, dialogue, deliberation, and collaborative learning.

The research of leadership under a praxis-oriented lens, therefore, would take advantage of interpretive forms of inquiry, applying discursive, narrative, ethnographic, and/or aesthetic approaches using thick description and diverse modes that attempt to capture the dialogical and practice activity concurrently in process in all its complexity and ambiguity (Parry et al., 2014). The role of the researcher would not so much be to inquire from outside the activity but to provide tools to encourage the observed to become inquirers themselves (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008). Minimally, participants would be invited to offer their interpretation of their interactions rather than rely exclusively on the researchers to draw on their knowledge of the community, its norms, and the meanings inferred from the observed conversations (Vine et al., 2008).

Researchers would not enter a context searching to prove or elaborate on a theory. Theory is not the initial guide for the research though it may result from it or used to help make sense of the lived practices (Sewchurran and Brown, 2011). Researchers would be interested in seeing what emerges in the interplay between actors, their activities, and material arrangements. In a study of Australian primary schools, Wilkinson and Kemmis

(2015) described how they moved from a largely spectator position into a practice mode that they depicted as their adopting:

> a first-person "participant" role through engaging with participants as they/we researched their/ our practices.... It was a means of contributing to the self-reflective transformation of the practices we were studying, including those of our co-researchers and our own practices as researchers and academics.

The foregoing suggests that for a L-A-P analysis, it is preferable that observations do not just serve as windows for "looking in" to an activity but actually constitute the activity in all its rich dialogic interaction.

Origins of a praxis-oriented methodology

With the practice turn in social theory should come an emphasis on a praxis-oriented methodology that shifts us from individual psychological research toward instances of intra-active social practices—that is, as per Barad (2003), toward practices that are immanent in practical action. What comes first, then, is the experience followed retrospectively by language that attempts to make sense of what has transpired. As Wittgenstein (1980) tellingly uttered, "language is a refinement..., in the beginning was the deed (p. 31)."

Acquiring a lesson from ethnomethodological study, the researchers in praxis-oriented research are not searching for recognized patterns in which to categorize the practices of those under observation, although they may find them. The first task is to search for how participants understand themselves and their relations. As Garfinkel (1967) contended, researchers acknowledge that participants are making sense to one another in situ and in real time. We come to know what they mean by their situational and time-bound utterances and bodily movements within their local contexts (Iszatt-White, 2011). Their practices in these settings may suggest some general patterns to be found in other settings and at other times.

If we are to search for accounts of a praxis-oriented methodology, we would profitably look back to the ancient Greeks and, in particular, to Aristotle and his conceptualizations of the two forms of knowledge and the three primary intellectual virtues. Whereas *theoria* was coined to denote truth through established knowledge, *praxis* was achieved through ongoing action. A more up-to-date conception would be Ryle's (1949) distinction between declarative and procedural knowledge, or between knowing *that* and knowing *how*. Praxis-oriented scholarship looks not to historically located truths established through declarative knowledge, often subdivided into propositional bits of theory, but to evolving, embodied, everyday activities and accomplishments. It derives not from representation standing from a distance but from direct material engagement with the world (Barad, 2007).

Likewise, Aristotle's view of *phronesis* is most relevant to praxis. It focuses on that which is variable and which cannot be encapsulated by universal rules. *Episteme*, on the other hand, pertains to the production of knowledge that is invariable in time and space. It is most associated with contemporary scientific rationality. *Techne*, meanwhile, looks to the application of technical knowledge and skills based on pragmatic instrumental rationality (Flyvbjerg, 2003). From this conceptual architecture, it is apparent that praxis-oriented research can take its cue from phronesis in relying on deliberation, skepticism, and human understanding from experience to engage with the world. As such, praxis-oriented research may lead to "future-forming" discovery, using Gergen's (2015) terminology,

opening the way to new practices and deliberations. In this sense, it is exegetic rather than nomothetic. It looks not to prove or reaffirm existing theory but to explore new possibilities and clarify the inter-subjective circumstances surrounding current action.

Co-participation

As a general rule, praxis-oriented research would be seeking not a representation of some kind of truth but rather an understanding of the practices of people as they collectively search for the truth. In the journey to understand a local world, we may call those who engage with researchers as fellow participants (Carroll and Simpson, 2012). Researchers would accordingly walk aside the participants as learners—as co-respondents (DeFehr, 2017)—whose interest is in engaging the participants and in understanding their practice dynamics. In this way, researchers continue the activity through an "active" embodied response (Bakhtin, [1935] 1981) that is produced in our, albeit temporary, living with the other (Schwandt, 2000). The research process would incorporate affect, including such tacit data as the pitch of the voices, the crescendo in verbal interactions, or the *doxa* or taken-for-granted, unquestioned "truths" (Bourdieu, 1977; de Souza Bispo and Gherardi, 2019). The researcher's observations, however, are as tentative as the participants' activities and reports. This re-characterization of methodology in qualitative and ethnographic inquiry is often referred to as the "reflexive turn," in which there is critique of the presumed fit between the observer's description of the world and the world as a reality independent of their description (Foley, 2002; Rosiek and Pratt, 2013). The contrast is a focus on performative social science in which communities of inquiry re-present the objects of inquiry (Denzin, 2003; Spivak, 1996).

In the relationship characterized here between researcher and participant, the researchers make themselves vulnerable by, as recommended by Hibbert et al. (2014), questioning their own biases, acknowledging their own limits to knowledge, and embracing the situated nature of their relationship with the participants. Rhodes and Carlsen (2018), relying on the relational ethics of Levinas (1969), go even further suggesting that the researchers give up their own frameworks so that they can be open to the "teaching of the other." Shotter (2006) describes this form of inquiry as constituting "withness"-thinking and Giorgi (1970) talks about "dwelling with the data," both of which dispel the need for control but rather asks that we "jump into the same river" with our respondents to acquire a generative, close-up understanding (Katz et al., 2004).

The relationship is thus one of mutual support. The researcher may act as a coach to encourage the participant to engage in discovery and self-reflection, while the participant can also serve as a coach to encourage more subtle observation and understanding by the researcher (Balogun et al., 2003). Corresponding to the democratic inclinations of L-A-P (Woods, 2016), the parties through their mutual responsivity in the inquiry process become partners in the project, collectively and concurrently co-producing the manifestations of practice. In a form of the "double-hermeneutic" of Giddens (1984), the researcher and the participant co-enter and co-interpret each other's worlds. Rather than limiting the inquiry, this approach, in which both parties co-construct the story of the embedded practices, allows a far more in-depth aesthetic insight into the researched world.

Comparison to qualitative methods

Praxis-oriented studies, it should be noted, are not equivalent to qualitative methodology, but a post-positivist variant of it. Although L-A-P researchers could "induce" from the data of practice some new theories of experience, they are more likely to be inquisitive about occurrences that are new or anomalous requiring abduction more than induction (Peirce, 1958 [1931]). Combining intuition with reasoning, they advisedly approach phenomena with curiosity and hunches, bracketing any preconceptions, in order to remain open to the experiences of the participants (Giorgi, 2009).

To capture a practice is to stay involved with the practitioner. In standard qualitative methodology, although the researcher and respondent are in touch with one another, there is usually a time of separation when the researcher removes to the office to code and classify the respondent's words. Typically, this involves a reclassification into themes. In the process, however, the respondent's expressions (except for occasional quotes), unique meanings, and contexts may be lost. Compare this approach to a more praxis-based and dialogic one in which the researcher is not narrowly chasing a pre-existing "problem" but rather wishes to experience a set of encounters as they are happening to and from the frame of reference of the practitioner.

In her work on relational practice, McNamee (2014) has asserted that some qualitative methods are just as interested in looking for truth out there (rather than mutual understanding in here) as quantitative methods. In praxis-oriented research, we are interested in what happens to be unfolding in the material-discursive practices in front of us. We need, consequently, to engage the participants in a mutual inquiry, and to encourage their doing so in their own voice, tone, and tempo. Among qualitative methods, Glaserian (Alammar et al., 2018; Glaser, 1992) and constructivist (Charmaz, 2014) grounded theory offer an avenue to focus on the practices prior to a precipitous search for themes, although the capture of participants' actions may not be in their everyday local idiom. Using dialogic inquiry, we engage in methods that bring multiple voices into the research process incorporating the polyvocal meaning making of both the participant and the researcher (Gergen and Gergen, 2000). Instead of just checking back with participants to confirm the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), participants would be invited into the project through their own voices (Harvey, 2015). Akin to the concept of *dialogism* by Bakhtin ([1935], 1981), dialogic inquiry does not take any participant's utterances at face value without bringing in the utterances that come before it and those that are said or interpreted in reply.

Comparison to action research

The field of action research is, in many ways, a methodology that explores solutions to the problems of practice. Along with its several companion "action modalities," such as action learning, action science, action inquiry, activity theory, appreciative inquiry, cooperative inquiry, and participatory (critical) research, it seeks knowledge in the midst of and in service of action. These action modalities also share in a view that planned engagements and collective reflection on those experiences can expand and even create knowledge at the same time as they are engaged in improving practice. Their emphasis is on the interplay between enactment and feedback in real time with the purpose of developing more valid social knowledge, more effective social action, and greater alignment among self-knowledge, action, and knowledge-of-other (Raelin, 1999).

The action modalities springing from action research are thus inherently participatory. They are also committed to practices that are useful to the participants, but consistent with most qualitative research, there is also a commitment to theory. Action researchers are typically more interested than praxis-oriented researchers in intervening in the practice field and conceptualizing their experiences in a way that is meaningful and valuable to the members of their research community as well as to other third persons who might be interested in the results of their research endeavors (Eden and Huxham, 1996). The emphasis of action research on documenting changes in the span of activities thus differs from ethnographic and ethnomethodological methods because participants and researchers are both committed to change their state of affairs, not merely record them as they are (van Marrewijk et al., 2010).

Although praxis-oriented research, then, tends to be more expressly idiographic and thus more interested in the sequences under observation as they are, it, like action research, incorporates the value of context as critical to research. The researcher, unlike the case in positivist science, is not detached from the setting and consequently is viewed as a companion not a contaminant to the experience. As for the participants, their reports are thought to have reliability and validity because the data are rooted in real action, in circumstances that really matter to them (Coghlan, 2011). Finally, both sustain a commitment to an inquiry that seeks to release their assumptions underlying their actions. In Argyris and Schön's terms (1974), researchers and practitioners are thus more able to study their mutual "theories-in-use," not just their "espoused theories."

Generalizability

Based on the reasoning above, praxis-oriented methods are less reliant on theory validation to evaluate research contributions compared to positivist methods. Criteria of evaluation in praxis-oriented research would need to consider some non-traditional standards, such as credibility, dependability, and coherence (Dodge et al., 2005). Credibility is established through extensive documentation, thick description, and triangulation, using diverse data sources and multiple ways of knowing. Dependability asks whether the research process and its products can be judged as fair and unbiased. Coherence ensures that the ways in which participants constructed meaning and analyzed how it materialized are honored.

L-A-P research would additionally benefit from applications that generalize across time and levels as well as context, thus enriching our criteria of evaluation to include contributing to understanding within the field in question and linking to existing and historical discourses to enhance the field. Adopting the canon of methodological reflexivity, it seeks a pragmatic assessment that, in keeping with current traditions in the L-A-P field, is also willing to critically reflect on the means and outcomes of the research in question, the researcher's role and relationship with the research context and with the participants, and the reports produced from the study (Corlett and Mavin, 2018; Johnson and Duberly, 2003). The critical reflection needs to additionally probe into the ideological and political consequences of the research practices.

We nevertheless limit the search for universal theories in L-A-P research. In particular, the articulation of common themes, and beyond that, the clustering and interconnection of such themes to produce a general theory, is problematic. We would not 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 (Kempster et al., 2016; Youngs, 2017). As Mol (2003) noted in her case of study of the disease known as atherosclerosis, it is viewed and referred to differently by the technician in the pathology lab than by the vascular surgeon in the operating room. 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 researcher. Nevertheless, we can seek to identify particular influences on practice emergence in specific situations, and though difficult to isolate common themes, we can start minimally by comparing processes and outcomes within specific contextual frames, such as teams, organizations, sectors, and nations. Similarly, we can isolate particular settings by industry, by organizational type, or by individual role or occupation. We can also compare across levels, such as between micro, meso, and macro, or between institutional and local.

Frames, as referred to above, can also represent assumptional structures or symbols that can serve to produce shared meaning within particular contexts (Goffman, 1974; Schön and Rein, 1994). What makes frames different from themes is their mutable quality; in other words, they can mutate or be renegotiated as meanings shift over time. In keeping with G. H. Mead's pragmatic and process philosophy (Mead, 1934), symbols such as frames and gestures help us not only learn about ourselves, but help us stand in the shoes of others with whom we are in relational contact. In the area of leadership, Carroll and Simpson (2012) in a study of 20 senior managers enrolled in a leadership development program sponsored by their utility company, identified not only significant frames but three framing movements that characterized a shift across frames, thus holding the potential for emergent leadership practice. These were labeled: kindling—creating new frames; stretching—expanding existing frames; and spanning—bridging current frames. Frame and movement identification, as referred to here, would be a promising avenue for future research.

L-A-P and its research

The emergent research orientation of L-A-P challenges the familiar categories of leadership that are often individualistic and controlling in their account. The individualistic perspective associates leadership with individual leaders who have particular traits, skills, and abilities that position them as special individuals who are accorded varying levels of power and authority within the organization. Studying leadership, therefore, is a matter of trying to objectively (through objective facts) identify particular psychological or physical properties in these individuals that have particular psychological and physical consequences to others. In the classic Cartesian dualism associated with modernist epistemology, the "knowing" leader is expected to control others because of his/her respective traits and skills. It is no surprise, then, that psychology, in particular personality theory, dominates most research regarding leadership.

If we detach leadership from personality and psychology and rather look to sociology to help us focus on the intersubjective processes through which people and material produce consequential practices, we begin an exploration of a very different paradigm for studying leadership (Chia and MacKay, 2007; Crevani et al., 2010; Llewellyn and Spence, 2009). It takes us into a realm where it is not an ontological given but an evolving series of material-social actions and interactions that result in the realization of what we can call leadership.

The methodology attached to this alternative practice view of leadership is linked to a different worldview than the dominant modernist paradigm which in mainstream leadership research attempts to simplify and standardize complex phenomena through atemporal and

decontextualized appraisals of leader behavior (Parry et al., 2014; Woolgar, 1996). The standard self-report formats using pre-developed assessment tools often do not take into consideration the context and the activities in which leadership is taking place. The practice view, largely based on a constructionist paradigm, studies the world not so much through unbiased analysis by rational individuals, but as an evolving social process of people as they relate with each other, with material phenomena, and with the contextual environment (McNamee, 2014). It brings forth the idea of the performativity of people in action within their rich contexts, struggling as they might to make meaning together (Geertz, 1973). Through the idiom of performativity, language is not used to represent a reality; rather, actors and objects (including words) derive meaning through the continuous flow of practice (Austin, 1962; Barad, 2007; Gond et al., 2016). By flow of practice, Simpson et al. (2018) refer to the "real-time doings" of human and material agency during which there is no meaningful starting or ending points, only unfolding action.

L-A-P accordingly offers researchers the opportunity to study leadership at multiple interacting levels beyond the individual level of analysis, the latter referred to as methodological individualism or as agency constricted to individual action (see, e.g. Miller, 1978). Using such developmental approaches as Gherardi's (2009) spiral case study analysis, researchers can focus on observed microprocesses and practices that are interconnected across levels. These interconnections can be thought of as landscapes of practice when practitioners reach out beyond their boundaries and begin to learn and think together as they develop new ways of knowing (Gherardi, 2016; Pyrko et al., 2019; Wenger, 1998). The alternative would be to identify the level of study and its outcomes, such as at the transpersonal level, the L-A-P researcher might consider the impact of the embodied state, or at the societal level, the impact of macro institutional norms and policies. In the latter instance, leadership practices would be acknowledged to be socially embedded (Whittington, 2007) within such institutions as industrial protocols, government regulations, technology regimes, artificial intelligence, or consumer preferences. This acknowledgement prevents L-A-P research from what Seidl and Whittingon (2014) refer to as micro-isolationism, in which a local empirical instance could be interpreted wholly from what is ostensibly present, cut off from the macro phenomena that make it possible.

Another common practice that would be revised under a L-A-P lens would be the care needed in the etymological use of the construct. When surveyed or interviewed in standard research, respondents are often initially referred to as *leaders*, which predisposes them to cultural norms and scripts regarding the behavior of "being in charge." Their resulting commentary often incorporates a manner of discourse attending to this honorific role. The same could be said in turn of those considered followers, a role most often associated with dependence and compliance.

In L-A-P research, as has been reported earlier concerning praxis-oriented research, there is an emphasis on process-oriented and narrative methods aimed at understanding the dynamics from within as shaped by forces from without. Needless to say, such research would need to be longitudinal to capture the unfoldings within practices as they occur and recur over time. Accordingly, there is a home for phenomenological accounts in which the researcher walks aside the respondent as a fellow learner, engaged in collaborative dialogical inquiry. The researcher attempts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (referred to in phenomenological inquiry as the Epoché process or bracketing) in order to free oneself from prior experience and

presumptions to truly listen to and concentrate on the participant and his or her world (Jennings, 1986; Moustakas, 1994).

In addition, L-A-P would be receptive to non-textual and embodied processes including multimodal or sensory ethnographic methods (e.g. photo and video technology) (Bradford and Leberman, 2019; Pink, 2013). Oftentimes referred to as "performative research," the representation of the practice can be expressed in material, sensorial, and virtual forms that deploy symbolic data, still and moving images, and, of course, music and sound (Gergen and Gergen, 2012; Haseman, 2006). Given the focus on transpersonal practices, where does that leave such biographical tools as autoethnographies, diaries, or narratives of practice (Dodge et al., 2005; Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Rouleau, 2010)? Given that these methods acknowledge that actors are situated within a variety of individual and organizational roles and that their perceptions are anchored within social, political, and economic conditions (Hendry, 2000), their single voices can be beneficial to account for within a polyvocal leadership practice. Furthermore, these methods supplement personal narratives with accounts from multiple sources, such as from interactions with interviewers, from collaborations with other community members, from co-constructed narratives with other participants, or from the author's experience alongside traditional literature and data (Ellis et al., 2011). In sum, as a form of praxis-oriented research, L-A-P research needs to be inclusive of the artifacts, the technologies, the physical arrangements, the language, the emotions, and the rituals, each brought out to understand the meaning of the practice in question.

In Table 1 following, I characterize some of the technical distinctions heretofore described between L-A-P research and traditional leadership research derived from a positivist paradigm. Included in the second part of the table are some of the conceptual distinctions which I turn to next.

I make the case that there are building blocks that need to also be taken into consideration methodologically when mounting studies of L-A-P. These building blocks are conceptual rather than technical because there needs to be a foundation from which to build an appropriate set of methodologies. I will also supplement the coverage with a number of examples. Researchers might first consider the issue of agency since it captures a key theme in the annals of leadership. Since so much of L-A-P occurs in collective experience, the subject of agency leaves the role of the individual open to question—a subject that I will also touch on. Once one addresses the problematic of agency, the issue of structure or context, as I will refer to it here, comes into play to complicate the representation of practice, as purported earlier. To set the stage for a contextual discussion, I will first attend to the issues of identity and materiality. Both are intrinsic to practices at both individual and collective levels and play a role that is constitutive of rather than overlaying practices. A subsequent issue is that of power, especially in its "soft" as opposed to "hard" form. L-A-P has seemed more capable of concentrating on the former rather than the latter. Is this a reasonable differentiation? I finally take up the issue of dialogue which holds potentially the most promise in L-A-P research, because it may determine the value of discourse across the parties to a practice or a series of practices. How might dialogue serve not only as a mode of study but as an agent of change.

Finally, in the ensuing Discussion section, I will carefully examine the limitations of L-A-P research and how to prospectively overcome them. In the Conclusion section, I end with some summary observations about what can be gained from a consideration of L-A-P to both formal and informal research and the practice of leadership.

Table 1. Methodological distinctions between traditional and leadership-as-practice research.

	TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP RESEARCH POSITIVIST	LEADERSHIP-AS-PRACTICE RESEARCH PRAXIS-ORIENTED
Technical		
Ontology	Reality is objective	Reality is subjective
Epistemology	Researcher inquires independently from respondent	Researcher and participant inquire co-subjectively
Axiology	Researcher strives to be value-free	Researcher acknowledges that values are embedded in relationship with participant
Ethics	Dependent on leader	Co-developmental
Underlying discipline	Psychology	Sociology
Reasoning logic	Deduction and Induction	Abduction
Overall purpose	Uncover laws that govern human behavior	Gain insight into social reality
Objects of study	Individuals and their traits, skills, and abilities	Material-social action and interaction
Worldview	Discovering the world as it is	Discovering the world as it evolves
Theory of truth	Data can map truth	Seeks to understand participants and their practices as they search for their own truth
Role of language	Representing the activity	Constituting the activity
Generalization	Inferential to validate theory	Pragmatic to critically reflect on and compare means and outcomes
Research style	Researcher is formal and detached from respondent	Researcher is informal and is directly engaged with participant
Meaning	Researcher derives and confirms meaning from respondent	Participants and researchers make meaning through their dialogic practices
Conceptual		
Agency	Actors' actions can be explained by their background and norms	Participants can overturn their habitus through social consciousness
(Source of agency)	Mostly by individuals	Mostly collective and collaborative
Identity	Coherent and fixed from actions of leader	In formation through interactional activity
Materiality	Artifacts have object-like quality	Artifacts are non-human contributors to leadership
(Human connection)	Incidental	Objects and participants co-constitute
Context	Research is context-controlled	Research is context-bound and intrinsic
(As structure)	Context is a fixed structure within which actors behave	Context and participants are mutually engaged

Table 1. Continued

	Traditional Leadership Research Positivist	Leadership-as-Practice Research Praxis-Oriented
Power	Enacted through influence of top leaders	Emergent through enactment of participants' competing choices and practices
Dialogue	Used to convince the other of one's point of view	Used to focus on mutual learning, deep understanding and collaborative action

Agency

Rather than look for exchanges between entities, L-A-P researchers are interested in the turning points in the spaces between people or in emergent entangled intra-actions. It is in these spaces where agency may materialize as the realization of social choices as conditioned by structure (Simpson et al., 2018). Agency can be both individual and collective and is mobilized as a social interaction as people come together to coordinate their activities. The interactions will vary in expressiveness and power depending upon the sociocultural context (an evangelical worship or a boxing match) or the role of the parties (a CEO or a rank-and-file worker). Consequently, they welcome the consideration of movements, moments, memes, emergence, innovation, or turbulence through which leadership is experienced (Raelin, 2016).

There is opportunity for agency within practices from both non-deliberate and deliberate standpoints. At times during mundane relationships and activities, a trajectory of a given practice will be changed without the intention of the involved parties. It may arise from a spontaneous response to the developing situation at hand. During these occasions, the actors may not be paying explicit attention to their body's functioning but often what they are accomplishing is a form of practical coping unmediated by mental representation. Nevertheless, a change to a procedure from an accumulation of tacit improvisations may evolve or a series of conversations may produce a new language leading to a new emphasis or a change in a sequence of activities.

When practical coping is interrupted by a breakdown, however, according to Tsoukas (2010), two forms of intentional directedness take over: explicit awareness and thematic awareness. In explicit awareness, actors begin to perform deliberately to get themselves out of trouble. At this point, they become aware of their awareness and mentally prepare to address the problem at hand (Schatzki, 2000). Computer programers have encountered a glitch or the musical ensemble has detected what has to be an error in a phrase. Whereas explicit awareness is oriented toward practical ends, thematic awareness occurs when the actors detach themselves from the practical situation and reflect on it from a distance (Tsoukas, 2010). Unlike explicit awareness, the immediate practical concern is bracketed so as to reflect on the abstract properties of the situation.

Using thematic awareness, agents can at times overturn the historical contexts and expectations imposed on them. They may have limited freedom, but in their lived, practical, and provisional relations with the world, they may engage in an agency within a field that may shape or constrain its development (Coole, 2005; Raelin, 2016). L-A-P researchers need to be especially attentive to joint activity during these moments. Using such resources as

self-consciousness, heedful interrelating, norm interpretation and development, and collective reflexivity, agents may be able to upset institutional forces (Archer, 2000; Herepath, 2014; Weick and Roberts, 1993). In the metacognitive practice of collective reflexivity, for example, those dedicated to the practice would hold a collective reflection to challenge one another on their underlying assumptions in an attempt to facilitate learning and reach agreement about disputed claims (Kudesia, 2019). In a qualitative study of a university hospital in the throes of a new public management initiative, Endrissat and von Arx (2013) found that prior leadership practices were reproduced, in spite of change efforts to the contrary, due to the need to preserve professionals' balance of power, a strong hierarchy, critical symbolism, and ethical necessities and constraints. The authors concluded that change would have occurred only had the members collectively reflected upon their practices-in-use to understand their requirements and consequences.

The carrier of practice

There is a distinction in most praxis-oriented research regarding the role of the individual participant. Although the focus in such research is on the social practices per se, there is an appreciation of the individual as a carrier of practice. Furthermore, any one carrier is viewed as being inter-connected with others and their community's artifacts. As has been captured in the communities-of-practice literature, one assumes a "legitimate role" in a community by becoming increasingly central through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The individual can be an agent, but his or her actions are tempered by the context in terms of already constituted meanings, artifacts, signals and cues, and discourses (Kempster et al., 2016; Bäcklander, 2019). A surgeon intern, for example, learns surgery practice through interactions with senior surgeons, through interactions with patients and their incidents, through proper use of medical tools and equipment, and via embodied coordination with the activity, perhaps an operation, at hand (Benner et al., 1999; Tsoukas, 2010).

These multi-intersectional practices constitute a continuous dynamic in everyday life and often are not easily slotted into consistent patterns. Researchers need to examine practices as they are, entangled in webs of social reproductions and change. As examples, Halkier and Jensen (2011) in a nutritional study demonstrate how consumption researchers study a family member's food purchase decisions by tracking eating and cooking practices, such as whether to include vegetables in dinners or avoid biscuits at work. They also incorporate consumption dynamics in their study, such as how the entire supply side of food production and retailing, or how national and transnational public regulations, shape nutritional practices. Kempster and Gregory (2015) in an evocative ethnography (Anderson, 2006) recount how a middle manager engaged in an amoral collective practice by undertaking an agentic role within a flow of activity dedicated to the preservation of status and face.

Identity

I have asserted all along that L-A-P methodology is interested in focusing on the doing of leadership. Accordingly, when it comes to the issue of identity, some qualitative methods such as interviews are unlikely to record its complex and recursive nature. Researchers may unwittingly report on a coherent identity based on a post facto construction articulated by an interviewee. In effect, however, identity often arises from a struggle based on

contradictory expectations and fragmentation. In this sense, one's identity can be viewed as a bridge between the self and changing social structure (Ybema et al., 2009). Leadership identity, in particular, is established through the conversations, spatial configurations, and cultural-historical patterns and routines that actors rely upon in responding to and reacting to the choices they are making in accomplishing their work (Engeström and Blackler, 2005). Consequently, identity from a practice perspective is thought to be in formation, such as through dialogue, during which actors may assimilate available identities, complement those that are normally advised for prescribed roles, or reject those that have been associated with dominant discourses (Beech, 2008; Carroll and Levy, 2010; Thomas and Davies, 2005).

Identity in L-A-P is often applied to the team, not just to its members, and it has been argued that each level has its separate empirical reality (see, e.g. Haslam et al., 2003). In the new work of the 21st century, the direction of any project involving knowledge production is not often reliant on the whim and will of a centralized person to manage the project or apply the right model or prototype. Social identity can evolve as a team property that places leadership within the team's practices rather than toward a special identified individual with presumed influence. In effect, projects are often shaped by team members confronting ongoing complexities and ambiguities using a diverse set of material-discursive practices to guide collective meaning. Leadership in this context is often not fixed but fleeting, not extraordinary but mundane. Yet, it may require the enactment of recurrent interpersonal practices such as fierce advocating along with practical reflexivity, valuing of dissent, commitment to learning, and willingness to extend trust (Dovey et al., 2017). Smith et al. (2017) found in their study of an interorganizational research consortium that leadership revolved around the creation and enactment of a shared social identity. Colleagues achieved their goals unevenly through ongoing interactions that enhanced their sensemaking, reduced uncertainty, and led to both agreements and disagreements. Certain practices and beliefs would at times gain legitimacy and become accepted by others while others would not. A variety of dispersed practices (Schatzki, 1996) of leadership interest evolved, including organizing, shaping, inventing tools and tables, discussing, writing, presenting, and working alone and then in groups.

Materiality

In the study of L-A-P, artifacts as core elements of the material world hold far more meaning than their object-like quality and deserve equal attention as relations between people. Researchers might be advised to consider them as the non-human contributors to agency and as integral to the sociomateriality of practices (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). They can contribute to identity, as suggested above; signify meaning; confirm independence, dependence, or interdependence; or shape individual and collective trajectories (Swan et al., 2007). In other words, artifacts have the capacity to signify the occurrence of leadership. In Carroll's observation of an IT work environment (Carroll, 2016), the appearance of a koosh ball is used to signify a transition from individual work to "team time." The ball is then passed around to give members of the team the "floor" to contribute to the project. The koosh ball at that point becomes an object that in its own right occupies active leadership space (Ropo and Salovaara, 2018; Antonacopoulou and Fuller, 2019).

Sergi (2016) has attested that textual objects in particular are apt at conveying a high degree of detail when working through a project. They are what Latour (1986) has called, "immutable mobiles," in that they sustain themselves through time and space without

changing. At a given point in time, they stabilize the project by capturing what has been accomplished while indicating the potential paths of ongoing work. Sergi (2016) contends that these objects not only drive the continuation of action, but also have directing, shaping, and ordering effects on the endeavors in which the actors are involved. In her vivid account of a software development project, she identified a document—called Document 7—which provided details and figures linking the work already accomplished with the work yet needing to be done, including the gaps requiring attention and areas to be finalized. Document 7 contributed to leadership, according to Sergi, by directing, such as by warning of a critical element's absence; by shaping, such as in displaying screenshots of the predicted final results; and by ordering, such as by illustrating the relationships between various components.

The relationship between objects and human actors also needs to be accounted for in L-A-P methodology. Objects, whether material, conceptual, or symbolic, can play multiple roles in interaction with human actors in enabling or constraining practices (Carlile, 2002). Mailhot et al. (2016) found, for example, that members of a multi-stakeholder collaborative research project adapted their roles by decoding and accepting principles of action brought into being by particular objects, such as an electronic forum, a steering committee, a research design, or even an epistemic concept.

Context

L-A-P research is interested in context, which in turn lends meaning to the practices in which they are transacted. We think of context as the set of embedded circumstances—often tacitly incorporated by social traditions and norms into human conduct—in which a given practice is occurring (Cappelli and Scherer, 1991). According to Endrissat and von Arx (2013), it may be present in one of three levels: macro, meso, and micro. Macro-context is most associated with classic structure relying on such institutional forces as ideology, ideas, values, and design arrangements such as hierarchy. Meso-context tends to focus on mediated interaction settings that are based on standard operating procedures, performance indicators, and other rules and regulations. Micro-context refers to the content, authority, or perhaps persuasiveness of a given experience or expression. The authors advise researchers to consider these levels in their discriminating analyses of leadership practices.

In a study of an implementation of an electronic risk-placing support system in the London Insurance Market, Heracleous and Barrett (2001) used rhetorical-hermeneutic discourse analysis to explore how shifting leadership practices on the ground interacted with the higher level of "deep structures" as well as with the actors' own practical consciousnesses (Giddens, 1993) to scuttle the project. Among the structures which accounted for the perceived limitation of the electronic placing system were its technical limitations, its user unfriendliness, security misgivings, and its restrictions on trader autonomy.

In standard quantitative research, attempts are made to decontextualize findings so that they can more uniformly abide by universal laws *without* the contamination of context. In standard qualitative research, context is incorporated but is thought to be represented primarily by textual accounts that attempt to capture the situated reality. However, capturing the contextual background can be unstable since its elements are often in constant motion (Engeström, 2006). Furthermore, the observers of phenomena often unwittingly construct meaning within their *own* context, making any observation, without engaging self-reflexivity, unreliable. Minimally, researchers and sign-makers need to disclose the

provenance of their modes of representation so as to reveal their individual interests and the social-historical contexts affecting them (Hurdley and Dicks, 2011).

In L-A-P research, within the hermeneutic tradition, context matters a great deal because the meaning of a text is found within its cultural and historical context. Therefore, applications of activities and events may beneficially incorporate context in all its plural and fluid forms. But what form can rebuild experience so as to provide a plausible narrative account of the situation at hand? In the case of L-A-P, we ask the researcher to consider actively participating in the practice as it undergoes emergence and change. In Vygotsky's words, "...to study something means to study it in the process of change...for it is only in movement that a body shows what it is" (Vygotsky, 1978: 65).

In addition to representing practice through the natural process of change, we can also use collective dialogue that is mediated through symbolic instruments and other artifacts. In L-A-P, the research process is usually between people searching for "a better way." As we will see shortly in the discussion of dialogue, any utterance of a given speaker only makes sense and reaches its potential through another's response (Todorov, 1981). This form of inquiry also incorporates a plurality of voices, genres, and expressions of difference. In the construction of leadership, there is often controversy and dynamism preceding agreement, assuming one can reach an amicable end-point.

Feldman and Worline (2016) report on a case on the practices of city managers and residents in a medium-sized city as they wrestled with a government budget. Heretofore, the relationship between residents and the city government had been an adversarial "us vs. them" dynamic, and to make matters worse, a survey mounted by the city managers had led to a decision to close the swimming pools resulting in a huge public outcry. Rather than defending the survey, the city managers publicly apologized for using the survey and recruited their most vocal critics as citizen budget advisors. By valuing the residents' experience and encouraging their participation through the budgeting process, they were able to overturn a history of exclusion and create more inclusive participatory practices.

Context is also shaped by time and space. Practitioners in their current work, often non-cognitively, bring past experience into the present, but then use current experience to anticipate potential deviations in the future (Willems, 2018). Prior conversations in a training workshop, for example, can serve as a historical resource that learners can draw on in successive lessons (Wells, 2009). Spatially, we can think of leadership work as produced from the ongoing interplay and co-construction of a number of related trajectories leading to reconfigurations in the relations between the parties (Crevani, 2018). In that sense, context may be composed of other practices going on while the instant practices are being observed and re-woven. Context is thus not something that lies outside the practices but is intrinsic to them.

Power

It is been understood for some time that in accounting for social change due to human action, practice theory is inherently about power, where power is understood as the capacity to act with an effect on another (Watson, 2017). Power is embedded as part of social relations and social relations, in turn, are reproduced through practices (Schatzki, 1996). In considering the issue of power in L-A-P, we need to distinguish between two forms of power available for study: hard and soft. Hard power seeks to identify the forces which

deprive substantive identities (via gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and the like) of their full participation in social systems, whereas soft power works within ambiguous spaces and moments to construct emergent individual and group identities. As Joseph Rouse explains, "…it expresses how one action affects the situation in which other actions occur so as to reconfigure what is at issue and at stake for the relevant actors" (Rouse, 2006: 533).

By focusing on soft power, L-A-P has the potential to examine the role of social power as it forms, reforms, and iterates through the organization. Power in this sense can be expressed as "authoring," referring to the practice of actors to inscribe or orchestrate their interests into the decisional framework of the entity (Alvehus, 2019; Kuhn, 2008; Schoeneborn et al., 2019; Taylor, 2014). The researcher is thus encouraged to look beyond the role of those in high leadership positions to find leadership, to consider the effects of networks or coalitions which may formalize or eschew the identification of leadership, to study how multiple actors within local settings through their enactment of competing practices can normalize or disrupt presumed decisions, and to consider the emergence of leadership even through non-deliberate material-discursive practices (Endres and Weibler, 2019; Ezzamel et al., 2001; Hardy and Thomas, 2014; Vaara and Tienari, 2011). As Carroll (2018) puts it: In L-A-P:

> 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).

A rich example of soft control is reported in Dovey Burdon and Simpson's case (2017) of a successful television show produced by a major broadcasting company. The production process became an improvisational struggle, but the authors reported that the practices on the set were characterized by an implicit "negotiated order." Although the broadcaster had control of the production through its commission apparatus, the power distributions were characterized as "soft." Accordingly, the three critical practices of writing, casting, and editing entered an arena of collective reflexivity. In the wider media industry, including publishing, managers and creative professionals increasingly need to "share inquiry" and absorb complex interactions of actors, emotions, technologies, and tools to better prepare for change and uncertainty in the industry (Horst et al., 2019; Virta and Malmelin, 2017).

Hard power comes into effect in cases of resource distribution when some practices lead to an unequal allocation of benefits due to systematic stratification on the basis of such identities as class, race, and gender. An important critique of L-A-P methodology 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). In this case, there is a concern that power asymmetries and embodied and material conditions may be overlooked (Ford, 2016). L-A-P accounts, on the other hand, have rejected notions of individual linear and monolithic control and, instead, called for collective engagement, divergence, intersubjectivity, and ambiguity. Of further significance in L-A-P debates is the crucial importance of interrogating the taken for granted assumptions and meanings that sustain "… the defensive routines that maintain hierarchical hegemony and stifle learning" (Raelin, 2008). Nevertheless, the material worlds, language, embodied experiences,

and intercultural identities of <u>all</u> practitioners need to be kept in the foreground of L-A-P research.

Dialogue

L-A-P research is associated with dialogue within a community that endorses a collective approach to leadership. In dialogue, people deeply concerned about a matter of critical interest come together in a process of genuine interaction through which they listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. I earlier pointed out the phenomenological roots underlying my view of L-A-P methodology. This brings to mind how one might "do phenomenology," referring epistemologically to the study of experience from the perspective of the participants, capturing the rich descriptions of their phenomena and their settings (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998; Hycner, 1999). We return to dialogic approaches since a phenomenological researcher would normally not be content to "run" with his or her own observations for fear that any description would not be legitimate or justified by one's own perceptions (Cosmescu, 2017). Phenomenologists are constrained by denoting what they see and only what they see. They do not wish to be embedded within their own subjectivity in the likelihood that their impressions may not reflect the physical and cerebral activities of the other. Accordingly, whatever mediation might be used to characterize a given ontology, the expectation is that the reality in front of us exceed such mediation (MacLure, 2011; Tuck, 2010).

Therefore, in dialogue, the research community would engage in a self-distanciation to free themselves to the extent possible from their own subjectivity. They would in a Bohmian sense (Bohm, 1996) use their time to think together as they talk together. In a term phenomenological historian Spiegelberg (1975) used in his phenomenological workshop approach, they would be *co-subjective*. They would come to recognize their limitations or the limitations of the "natural attitude," which is the enculturated way we normally view things. By opening ourselves up to how others see one another, we can occasionally overturn the habitus (Bourdieu's way (1990) of referring to how we are historically conditioned) that we inherit. This dialogic approach to leadership research extends our review of leadership practice beyond such approaches as discourse-mapping by delving into a full embodied understanding of the dynamics from within. So far ahead of her time, leadership pioneer, Mary Parker Follett (1930) once remarked: "We wish to do far more than observe experience, we wish to make it yield up for us its riches" (p. xi).

The dialogic approach characterized above has ethical and emancipatory implications to the extent that it incorporates 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 (hooks, 2003), the hope is that participants are 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 (Benhabib, 1996; Brookfield, 2001; Raelin, 2008).

Further regarding the role of dialogue in L-A-P research, researchers would need to decenter their focus on any one individual. They realize, as Bakhtin pointed out, that explanations of the world emerge in the zone of contact between multiple consciousnesses (Bakhtin, [1929] 1984). Individual participants to dialogue in conversational exchange are not primarily interested in convincing others of their point of view, though they may engage

in vigorous advocacy. Rather the focus is on mutual (rather than unilateral) learning, deep understanding and insight, and collaborative action.

Employing dialogic mediated inquiry in a work safety environment (Lorino et al., 2011), researchers employed a method referred to as "cross-self-confrontation" (Clot et al., 2001), while simultaneously relying upon collaborative film-elicitation (Skjælaen et al., 2018), to progressively bring successive actors into an inquiry. Notice that the use of video in this method is not only used to "zoom in" and to "zoom-out" to participants' live social interactions and their context (Nicolini, 2009), but to also "zoom with" them, which solicits their interpretations of their video-recorded exchange (Jarrett and Liu, 2018). The method incorporated four steps:

1. Production of a mediating artifact—the researcher films and edits work situations to show long clips of building conditions under scrutiny
2. Individual reflexivity—the researcher shows the scenes to an involved participant who in a subsequent video presents a discourse and interpretation of his/her own activity
3. Dialogic reflexivity—the researcher repeats the second step with another participant and then asks each participant to comment on the other's discourse
4. Dialogic inquiry in a broader community—the researcher shows the scenes to the original participants' peers and engages all in a full inter-subjective dialogue often resulting in changes in practices

Essential to the dialogic moment is one's initial stance of engaging in suspension of judgment (Isaacs, 1999). Participants acknowledge their positions and expressions of power such that no one individual is able to manipulate or force or dampen the expressions of others. People are invited to fervently advance their ideas but be open to the critical inquiry of others. Uncertainty would be welcomed in search of common ground and mutual understanding. In the same vein, the researcher suspends his or her preconceptions to make way for a nonjudgmental inquiry.

Discussion and limitations

The limitations of L-A-P research using praxis-oriented methodology are consistent with this form of research. It is worth repeating that its nature as an idiographic method makes it challenging to generalize findings for subsequent third-person research. On the other hand, I have also shown that explicit attention to context resulting in a presentation of a case revealing a set of practices may become relevant to others who may find such a presentation useful in understanding their own practices in their own contexts. Hence, even though L-A-P and the other "as-practice" movements may not be theory-driven in their methodology, they may develop theory as a guide for future researchers.

To develop theory in a praxis-oriented way may require building out our investigations to a point where authors can begin to compile synergistic accounts using techniques under what we might refer to as "meta-interpretation" (see, e.g. Weed, 2005). They may initially have to cast a wide net because research of a practice nature in leadership can be found without specific reference to L-A-P. Furthermore, there may be benefit in triangulating findings with quantitative studies or with other more conventional evidentiary approaches, especially those that consider leadership as a plural phenomenon. For example, although primarily nomothetic in their research orientation, shared leadership inquiries have used

social network analysis to model actor–partner interdependence and leadership structure (Fransen et al., 2015; Gockel and Werth, 2010; MacGillivray, 2018). L-A-P research might also develop its depth horizontally, namely by linking with other "as-practice" approaches to find common theoretical insights and by comparing findings with those using alternative but compatible theoretical lenses, such as relational leadership, organization development, communities of practice, communicative constitution of organization, distributed leadership, sensemaking, and so on.

As in the case of qualitative research, there is the ongoing problem of how to map tacit practices that are often not only unknown to the researcher but to the participant. Nevertheless, we have made the case that leadership occurs as much through implicit and inarticulate practices as through deliberate and declared activities. Tacit practices by their nature are difficult to characterize, though they are practical and thus critical in helping us understand the flow of leadership (Spender, 1994; Sternberg, 1994). Methodologies need to evolve to dig beneath the surface to uncover the world of L-A-P.

Ambrosini and Bowman (2001) have suggested the application of individual and cognitive maps, accompanied by the use of stories and metaphors, as powerful techniques to surface tacit skills. I have made the case for performative research using multimodal methods to capture textual, aural, linguistic, embodied, spatial, and visual forms of communication. Longitudinal research studying the unfolding nature of practices over time continues to be critical in depicting the recursive nature of the practices.

It needs to be acknowledged that there are limitations to the amount of time available to researchers to mount the phenomenological, dialogically reflexive methodologies that have been described in this article. There are also practicalities in terms of access to confidential information that need to be managed, bringing to mind issues of research ethics. On the other hand, L-A-P research, relying more on sociological than psychological roots, need not be overly long-term because the inner workings of any one participant are not as imperative as the social processes among the plural participants or between them and the material elements that contextualize these processes.

Although we have accounted for the special relationship between researchers and participants who as partners become co-respondents in research, it would be insincere to suggest that the relationship will heretofore become forever equal. In some cases, there may be inevitable differences, such as in social class or occupation, that separate the parties, or it may be just a question of roles, such as insider–outsider, that, no matter the authentic effort, make the relationship asymmetric. Furthermore, the methods that have been exemplified in this article call for researchers to release control of the research process, which could expose their own vulnerability and, at times, frustrate their expectations for the project.

In a similar vein, the progress of the research at times will reveal participants' ineffectiveness and project breakdowns due to personal relations that often border on crude power maneuvers. Therefore, the usual stipulations regarding treatment of human subjects and assurances of confidentiality need to be put into place to ensure freedom to engage freely in the research endeavor.

Conclusion

Any movement away from standard psychological studies of leadership is admittedly risk-laden in the current paradigm of positivist inquiry based on theoretical prediction and validation. Nevertheless, praxis-oriented inquiry holds some promise in expanding our

leadership understanding. Its principal contribution lies in accounting for leadership not only in its entitative characteristics, but in its consideration as a practice, the knowledge of which can help inform those engaged in projects of significance advance their mutual endeavors. Although there is always a chance that such study will assist those with nefarious goals, we subscribe to L-A-P's commitment to co-development, a property that Woods (2016) submits and Barad (2007) elucidates will produce ethical reflexivity as participants in their collaborative projects become entangled with one another in moment-by-moment actions that portray what the world will be. Nevertheless,exponents of L-A-P as an action form of research need to be vigilant regarding the outcomes that the field is both observing and engendering.

L-A-P research, even with its theoretical limits, can be potentially quite useful to the formal (and informal) research and practice of leadership. First of all, by identifying a history of a pattern of events unfolding in a change, L-A-P research could contribute to formal studies of dynamic processes (Van de Ven and Huber, 1990). Even quantitative longitudinal research could use L-A-P stories or ethnographies to begin to explain why and *when* an independent variable accounted for a particular outcome. L-A-P accounts might also be directly beneficial to research participants because these narratives might embellish on episodes within their practices that might open new light on underlying forces and dynamics. Furthermore, for those third parties who might find comparable frames and patterns in their own contexts, it could lend some insight in how to improve their own practices.

Regarding L-A-P's methodology, then, would that its arms-length association with theory not discourage new and established researchers from the challenge of mapping leadership activity for the reasons cited here. I hope to have denoted the wealth of opportunity in L-A-P praxis-oriented research. It gives researchers a chance to be a co-participant to examine leadership dynamics from within. It offers them the chance to study leadership at multiple interacting levels beyond the individual level, to incorporate distinctions of time and space in their analyses, to track the multi-intersectional webs that occur in everyday work, to uncover tacit processes that contribute, albeit at times unintentionally, to leadership, to trace the cultural-historical conventions that impact current practices, and to map material-discursive processes that get us closer to the lived reality that people do rather than what they say they do. L-A-P research can also avail itself of a variety of exciting discursive, narrative, ethnographic, aesthetic, and multimodal methods that can be performative in catching the rituals, language, materiality, and embodiments of practice. I have also captured in this article some building blocks to help aspirants build a L-A-P research project. Among these are issues of agency, identity, materiality, context, power, and dialogue. It is time, then, to get out there and see what we see.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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Note

1. I use the terms praxis-oriented rather than practice-oriented because the latter tends to refer to policy, organizational, stakeholder, or participatory research (see, e.g. Bleijenbergh et al., 2011) rather than the concurrent learning and emancipatory formats that I refer to in this article (see also Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Connor, 1998; Lather, 1986).

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