



# Dialogue and deliberation as expressions of democratic leadership in participatory organizational change

Dialogue and  
deliberation

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to make the case, firstly, that democratic leadership, referred to as “leaderful practice,” should be the fundamental form of leadership that characterizes participatory organizational change. The parties affected by change are those engaged who seek to reflect upon their own tacit collective practices. Their mode of communication is a dialogue or deliberation that involves the responsible parties to decision making without privileging particular stakeholders because of their status or authority. Thus, it is purported, secondly, that the three practice elements of democratic leadership, dialogue, and deliberation should be included among the bedrock principles of participatory organizational change.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A critical conceptual examination is undertaken of the contribution of three alternative literature streams – leaderful practice, dialogue, deliberation – to participatory organizational change.

**Findings** – Dialogue, an authentic exchange between people, and its decision-making cousin, deliberation, can become the communication modes associated with participatory organizational change. They are each characterized by equality of participation; thus they are inherently democratic processes that should substitute for top-down or monologic discourses, which are inimical to participatory practice.

**Practical implications** – If organization development and comparable participatory change processes claim at their core to be democratic processes, their exponents would endorse a leadership and communication that would preferably match their value system. There would be a shared communication by all those who are involved in the change activity, wherever they may sit within the organizational bureaucracy. The communication would become a multiple-party reflective conversation that is captured in the mode called dialogue.

**Originality/value** – By focusing on critical reflection, the dialogic perspective with its emancipatory interest challenges common sense assumptions that are likely to be historical and cultural as psychological. Ultimately, dialogue supports democratic leadership at a core interpersonal level in which participants learn to engage through a reflective practice that allows them to observe and experiment with their own collective tacit processes in action.

**Keywords** Organizational change, Leaderful practice, Democratic leadership, Dialogue, Deliberation, Change agent, Leadership

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

In the annals of organizational change, there are many methods used to promote change, and they may range ideologically from an extreme of autocracy, where change is commanded, to one of pure democracy in which change is produced through full participation by those affected by the change. For example, the method of organization development (OD) certainly falls along the democratic end, and it has been axiomatic that democratic and humanistic values remain at the core of OD change (Church *et al.*,



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1993; McArdle and Reason, 2008). These values are expressed as a concern for individual empowerment, participatory managerial processes, and care for the individual's development alongside organizational change (Cooke, 1998). Certainly one of the grandfathers in the world of change management, Kurt Lewin, believed that it would be only by strengthening our democratic institutions, not only in organizations but within all phases of life, that the scourge of authoritarianism and racism could be effectively countered (Burnes, 2004).

Lewin's seminal work (1951) led to the development of the field of action research, which, in spite of vying approaches, at its core, espouses collaborative involvement between researcher and practitioner in the solution of practical problems, in the development of theory, and in change in practice (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). Subsequent participatory approaches, such as organization development (OD), total quality management (TQM), or management-by-objectives (MBO) have comparably maintained a democratic ideology; however, their identity with democratic *leadership* in practice is more ambivalent. The standard approach is to consider the principal of the organization, e.g. the CEO, to be sufficiently foresighted to instigate participatory change and, even better, to be involved in such change. This leader, however, is thought to be someone in the role of sponsor who permits and endorses and even funds the change effort (Argyris and Kaplan, 1994). French and Bell (1984) in their definition of OD refer to it as a *top-management supported*, long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes. The leader is considered to be the person in authority who mobilizes the change activity. In fact, it can be said that the leader directs the change. In discussing the leadership role, Warner Burke (2004) acknowledged that he or she can be directional and even unilateral in assigning change goals; participative leadership behavior comes more into play during implementation, that is, in determining "how to reach the goals" (p. 3).

Given this focus on top-down mobilization, the natural communication device to instigate any change effort would typically be a downward directive to the responsible parties who would be placed in charge of the change regime. Often, the assignment would be handed over to a human resource or training department.

If OD and comparable participatory change processes claim at their core to be democratic processes, their communication would match their value system and, thus, they would not resort to a top-down process. Rather, it would be a shared communication by all those who are involved in the change activity, wherever they may sit within the organizational bureaucracy. The communication would become a multiple-party reflective conversation that is captured in the mode called dialogue.

Dialogue is the medium through which people seek shared meaning and understanding (McArdle and Reason, 2008). As a manifestation of the use of language in promoting productive human interactions, dialogue expands our knowledge through intersubjective transformation (Habermas, 1984, 1987). People join a dialogue provided they are interested in listening to one another, in reflecting upon perspectives different from their own, and in entertaining the prospect of being changed by what they learn. It often leads to collaborative action.

Deliberation is closely related to dialogue but focuses more on decision making through a collective process that could very well be dialogic. In other words, the trust and mutual understanding that are built through dialogue can serve as a basis for

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reaching reasoned, informed, and public-spirited decisions of common concern (Benhabib, 1996; Hicks, 2002; Klosko, 2000). People from all walks of life rely on dialogue and deliberation, but these processes have come into play most visibly in the public sector to tackle such volatile policy issues as race relations, nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation, school improvement, or fair housing (National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD), 2010).

Dialogue and deliberation in their essence rely upon a collaborative form of discourse in which wisdom is sought not just through one's eyes but through others. Accordingly, dialoguers embody a different form of leadership than the familiar command-and-control individualistic form of leadership. Rather, they rely upon a leadership that is egalitarian, that acknowledges that any one viewpoint is one among many and is no more than a hypothesis to be examined.

When acting as an agent of change, a position leader can be as much a servant as a director. An organization is always in motion. So an agent of change does not need to force the organization where he or she wants to go; rather, this agent may serve as a conduit for where it wishes to go. In addition, the leader or agent can serve as a model of changeability, someone willing to face his or her own vulnerability on behalf of constructive change. Such a leader tends to be predisposed to creating a psychologically safe environment for other organization members. Such a leader also recognizes that as members of an organization, it is our choice to remake it to cherish our human inclination to work together in harmony while achieving our personal potential. Ultimately, leaders of this nature develop an affinity for dialogic practice. In dialogic vs monologic practice, according to Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), our communication is composed of and recursively assimilates the discourse of others. Leading change invites a "polyphony," by which the utterance of any one participant has meaning only in relation to the utterances of others (Jabri *et al.*, 2008; Tsoukas, 2009).

What shall we call this form of change leadership? What is being characterized here is a condition where a community (a setting where people congregate to accomplish work together) is full of leadership; everyone is participating in leadership not only collectively but concurrently – that is, all together and at the same time. It is not a leaderless community deprived of leadership; rather it is leaderful. So the goal of this paper is to reform both the leadership and the communication patterns within participatory organizational change to be more in keeping with the purported value system of democracy.

First, I will advocate that the leadership underlying democratic change movements, such as OD, endorse a collective approach based on practices rather than on individual personality. Ultimately, a change involving all the parties to an activity should involve these parties fully in the cognition and behavior attending to the social interactions preceding, during, and after the change. The social activity inheres the leadership necessary to carry out the prospective intervention (or to resist it). We refer to this form of leadership as "leadership-as-practice" (L-A-P), in contrast to the more familiar "leadership-as-individual" approach (Carroll *et al.*, 2008; Raelin, 2011). Yet, this L-A-P need not be agnostic in respect of its ideology. Involving participants in an activity in which they have a stake is perhaps the most critical tenet of humanism; and allowing them equal access to the fundamental decisions of the entity is associated with democracy and public engagement. The leadership form that corresponds to these

democratic leanings is democratic leadership, and, as noted, I will be using the label, leaderful practice.

Once I have established the value of constructing leadership as a democratic activity, I will turn to the communication formats that concurrently rely upon democracy as their natural mainspring. Dialogue and deliberation, as authentic exchanges between people, are not based on competitive accomplishment but rather on genuine yet challenging conversations that often lead to new personal and social learning. They are characterized by equality of participation; thus they are inherently democratic processes. I will conclude by proposing that these elements – leaderful practice, dialogue, and deliberation – should weave their way into the ideology of participatory organizational change.

Let us begin, then, by examining the domain of democratic leadership and the approach known as “leaderful practice.” I would first like to explain its location in leadership space, which means turning to the leadership-as-practice movement.

### **The leadership-as-practice movement**

Historically, leadership has been defined as occurring through the traits or behaviors of particular individuals. An alternative approach is to consider leadership occurring as a practice. A practice is a cooperative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome. The practitioners to any practice come to learn the key distinctions that constitute their practice usually through active engagement in the practice world (Schatzki, 2005; Wenger, 1998; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009). The practice being referred to may be mundane or it may be extraordinary, and the focus is as much on its moral, emotional, and relational aspects as its rational, objective, and technical aspects (Chia and Holt, 2006). 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 coping in day-to-day experience (Heidegger, 1962).

The practice view, which we have been referring to as “leadership-as-practice,” or L-A-P, upends our traditional views of leadership because it does not rely on the attributes of individuals nor need it focus on the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers, which historically has been the starting point for any discussion of leadership. Nevertheless, L-A-P accomplishes a functional set of requirements for leadership, a view in which leadership is defined as the accomplishment of four critical processes: setting a mission, actualizing goals, sustaining commitment, and responding to changes (Parsons *et al.*, 1953). Although our devotion to heroic imagery compels us to see these functions performed by one person, it is advanced here that leadership occurs *when* these functions are performed, not by *who* performs them.

### **The contribution of leaderful practice**

Having differentiated the leadership-as-practice movement from conventional leadership, let us now consider its democratic form, “leaderful” practice. We have already surmised that if leadership is connected to a practice rather than to the intersecting influence between individuals, namely between a leader and a group of followers, then the negotiation of shared understanding among a group of interacting individuals can become a source of leadership. Leadership becomes a social process that is as much lateral across a range of individuals connected with each other in

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practice as it is vertical from top managers to a cadre of followers (Pearce and Conger, 2003). Once the sacred relationship between top and bottom is allowed to moderate, we become aware of many alternative ways to exhibit leadership, that can be as much spontaneous and intuitive as planned and conscientious (Gronn, 2002).

The movement to a democratic lateral form of leadership has a long history, minimally in its writing dating back to the accounts of Mary Parker Follett (1924), who submitted that an individual's knowledge of the task at hand would be a better source for leadership than the designated authority in the unit. Many designations and models have since been proposed, from shared leadership (e.g. Avolio *et al.*, 1996; Pearce and Conger, 2003) to stewardship (Block, 1993), to collective leadership (Bolden *et al.*, 2008), to distributed leadership (e.g. Gibb, 1954; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006), to empowering leadership (Vecchio *et al.*, 2010), and to leaderful practice (Raelin, 2003; 2011). Echoing a socio-economic approach originally suggested by Henri Savall (1981), empirical work in this domain has found ties between this type of leadership and both economic and social performance (see, e.g. Carson *et al.*, 2007; Ensley *et al.*, 2006; Sivasubramaniam *et al.*, 2002). These studies, however, continue to use familiar categories of leadership that depict leaders as individuals in positions of authority. Their tendency is to overplay influence, linearity, and agreement instead of divergence, recursive and expanding relationships, and unresolved conflicts and ambiguities (Crevani *et al.*, 2010). For example, if surveyed as a leader, the respondent is likely to view himself or herself within a script of "being in charge" and participating in a discourse attending to this honorific role. Those surveyed as followers are likewise scripted to associate their role – in reverse – with dependence and compliance. By focusing on a focal person as a "leader," rather than referring to leadership as emerging form the dynamics of a leadership constellation (Hodgson *et al.*, 1965), studies may bypass some of the collective dynamics that produce leadership when observers relax their fixation on the person in charge.

It would make sense, then, that empirical examination of leadership as a practice take advantage of more narrative forms of inquiry, such as narrative text and other ethnographic methods using thick description, that carefully capture the dialogical activity concurrently in process (Weick, 1989). In these settings, the role of the researcher would be to provide the necessary tools to encourage the observed to become inquirers of their own activity (Clot, 1999; Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008).

If the leadership-as-practice approach were to focus on empirical processes without considering its inherent ideology, it could leave an impression of espousing a form of ontological agnosticism. However, we cannot talk about a practice ontology without privileging the value of social interactions that may also rely upon reflective emancipatory processes in which taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings become subject to scrutiny. In its emphasis on democratic processes, leaderful practice is forthcoming in its articulation of four inter-related tenets that seek to democratize leadership-as-practice. These tenets are referred to as the "four c's", and can also be studied empirically: collectiveness, concurrency, collaboration, and compassion (Raelin, 2003). Collectiveness refers to the extent to which everyone in the entity can serve as a leader. Concurrency considers the extent to which members of the unit or organization are serving as leaders at the same time. Collaboration considers the extent to which members are co-creating their enterprise. It also considers the nature of the

dialogue in which members determine together what needs to be done and how to do it. Finally, in compassion, there is interest in the extent to which members commit to preserving the dignity of every single member of the entity regardless of background, status, or point of view.

So, those who have authority in the leaderful community are not interested in subtly forcing members into dependence; they are interested in having everyone participate in leadership. When members of such a community lead together in this fashion, that is, when they collectively reflect on their problems and possibilities and collectively choose and implement effective solutions and initiatives, they have the makings of a democracy in action – the essence of leaderful practice. In Tom Atlee’s words, they participate together in determining their collective fate (Atlee, 2009a).

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

### **Leaderful practice and dialogue**

A critical differentiator between leadership-as-practice and leaderful practice as its democratic offshoot is the latter’s preoccupation with dialogue on the very means of practice, including its humanistic dimensions. Change derives from an authentic social exchange among those who are engaged in the activity at hand. Thus, managers in a leaderful organization are not inclined to accept, without civil discourse, performance rules and standards proposed by a top administration, nor would senior managers merely comply with targets established by a board. All decisions can be subject to consideration as to their responsiveness to those affected by them. Not that every decision is questioned; only those that require due consideration. Indeed, in leaderful organizations, decisions are often made speedily because they are claimed by those whom the community has agreed are responsible for them (Raelin, 2003).

People also join a dialogue provided they are interested in listening to one another, in reflecting upon perspectives different from their own, and in entertaining the prospect of being changed by what they learn. Consequently, dialogue can also be thought of as the DNA of democracy or the critical means by which intersubjective capacities essential to build a culture of democracy can be mobilized (Pruitt and Thomas, 2007).

There is nevertheless a concern that the appeal to “openness” and participatory exchange can be illusory and subject to a performative regime under the guise of freedom. In our neo-capitalist economy, calls for worker empowerment may be no more than the creation of a false consciousness about one’s presumed participation in a managerial culture (Knights and Wilmott, 1987; Raelin, 2008). Even soft emotions, such as love and despair, can become commoditized through their exemplification through emotional labor in which seriousness of purpose is play-acted in order to conform to

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expectations about what is proper or useful (Diefendorff and Gosserand, 2003; Grandey *et al.*, 2002). In a post-bureaucratic “Brave New World” à la Huxley (1932), worker insecurity can be exploited by the marketing of a corporate image that ameliorates our fears by conjoining worker goals with the company’s superordinate performative goals.

Critical theorists from the Frankfurt School (see, e.g. Horkheimer, 1976) identified this practice and sought to establish a free society, not by a Marxist historical analysis as by a critical theory that would seek human emancipation by allowing praxis to inform theory as much as by theory informing praxis. The question for modernist philosophers was whether such a theory involving rational action could free itself from the scourge of rational domination (Morris, 1996). Does not the exercise of thought itself attempt to devour the object in its own striving for identity? Might thought become the accomplice of domination?

In his reformulation of the Frankfurt School’s project, Jürgen Habermas (1984; 1987) strove to move the locus of rationality from the autonomous subject to the exchange or interaction between subjects. He was interested in the procedures necessary to create a condition of equal power in which decisions in society would be based upon mutual consent rather than on tradition, greed, dogma, or coercion. He referred to this kind of discourse as argumentation, an intersubjective exchange that can occur under an ideal speech situation – in which no single individual nor point of view would be privileged or free from challenge. The basis for this communicative action would be linguistic, in which the parties would themselves rationally cooperate in asserting their claims to validity by agreeing to what they see as the truth, to the normative rightness of their positions, and to their personal truthfulness (Habermas, 1998). Conversants would be encouraged to challenge not only the statements they and others make, but the assumptions they rely upon in producing the statements. Although recently attacked for its focus on process at the exclusion of meaningful social and political outcomes (see, e.g. Kompridis, 2005), communicative action was nevertheless thought to be emancipatory in its ultimate concern for achieving mutual understanding about a shared world and its quest to free people from institutional forces that limit their authentic control over their own lives (Mezirow, 1981).

Nevertheless, as the basis for deliberative democracy, dialogue has been criticized for not sufficiently handling the issues of power and politics. On the latter front, viewing politics as the formal institutionalization of practices that seek to establish a social order for human co-existence, critics such as Žižek (De Cock and Böhm, 2007; Žižek, 2004) contend that in spite of liberal attempts to be open to competing values, the rationality proposed by dialogue can become legitimated and subsumed by hegemonic social forces. Recalling the era of corporate culturism, participants to the new practice – dialogue in this case – might be subject to an imprinting of core values that can mold or script personal identities in conformity with the prevailing culture (Morgaine, 1994; Willmott, 1993). The winners in this game might be those who possess superior communication skills, have the ability to maintain a dispassionate demeanor rather than reveal raw uncivil emotions, speak and even interrupt more than listen, have profound insights, or be undaunted by the need to reveal their innermost secrets within the company of strangers (hooks, 2003; Vince, 2002; Young, 2000). In a Durkheimian sense, there may be employees unwilling to engage in any form of leadership because of an arrangement with managers to help ease their existential anxiety. Grint (2010)

sees the arrangement as a psychological contract in which leaders make a pact with followers that accords the former increasing power and privilege in exchange for the assumption of the weight of responsibility in an increasingly ominous world.

Any attempt to achieve rational consensus through dialogue can also be criticized as no more than a fantasy and certainly as a discourse that Chantal Mouffe (1999) asserts has been incapable of accommodating adversarial voices. Even worse, dialogic applications and tools can be viewed as fads that must not only appear rational but also progressive so that stakeholders of any organization will feel confident that their management is seen as using the latest state-of-the-art techniques (Abrahamson, 1996).

Countering these criticisms, proponents, especially of emancipatory dialogue, argue that it is not interested in eliminating adversarial expression. Once a dialogue begins, any assumptions underlying even taken-for-granted constructions become “fair game” because the conversants, who are stakeholders to the problem, are willing to have their even sacred beliefs incur serious scrutiny. By demonstrating a passionate humility in the face of surprise and contradiction, dialogue institutionalizes the practice of doubt (Carroll and Levy, 2009; Schön, 1983; Yanow, 2009). While a community in order to function may not require constant assessment of each of its organizing propositions, its membership must be vigilant such that no single proposition become so sacrosanct as to be undiscussable. Nor should any mode of conversation necessarily take precedence. Akin to Bakhtin’s concept of carnival laughter, such forms as parody, syncretism, inversion of official values, and ridicule of dogma would be permitted (Lachmann *et al.*, 1988-1989). Dialogue can thus be a creative interaction of contradictory and multiple voices (Lyotard, 1984) that attempts to come to terms with adversarial differences.

When dialogue is applied as a leadership intervention, it serves as a form of deconstruction that can question so-called “truths” from the very conditions of their production (Derrida, 1992). It can thereby open up space for new perceptions that might lead to new ways of looking at the same phenomenon under scrutiny (Rorty, 1996). Consider that our individual mental models and shared meanings are socially constructed through linguistic social interactions. Accordingly, dialogue, as a reflective conversational mode, can enable us to alter these meanings (Jacobs and Heracleous, 2005). Knowledge is thus an endpoint of a process of dialogue and engagement rather than the starting point (Tsoukas, 2009).

Emancipatory dialogue, therefore, can open the cracks in the “iron cage” of bureaucracy, portended by Max Weber (Hamilton, 1991), by exposing participants to an enhanced consciousness about the human condition, including their own. There would be an apprehension of the servitude that can result from collaborating in the instrumental rationalities that characterize non-democratic corporate structures. A critical leaderful stance would thus be reflexive in recognizing when those in authority (including oneself) use knowledge, power, privilege, and voice to exert axiomatic influence and to suppress dissent (Freire, 1989; Giroux, 1981; Gooden, 2002). Leaderful practice would also be inherently emergent in its concern for the recursive co-creation of the means of practice. Underlying the four principles cited earlier of concurrency, collectiveness, collaboration, and compassion, there is a sense of civility in which self-interest is sacrificed for the common good. Borrowing from John Dewey (1958), a dedication to the common good does not evolve from altruism; thus it is not an extension of self for others, but rather with others. So, a moral democratic society

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would achieve fulfillment for its citizens precisely because of their critical involvement with one another.

### **Leaderful practice and deliberative democracy**

The meaning of democracy in leaderful practice is broader than the constitutional format, which invites the political involvement of participants through representation and voting and other comparable organizational and political institutional practices. Democracy in leaderful practice refers to direct participation by involved parties through their own challenging, creative, and communal discourses (Starratt, 2001). Thus, it has properties that are very consistent with the deliberative democracy movement, also referred to as “public engagement.” Its *modus operandi* is the application of participatory decision-making processes that involve members of the public at large or ordinary citizens in any changes in public life that affect them (Dryzek, 2000).

Citizens require a degree of competence and efficacy in deliberative communication skills to be active participants in democratic decision making. This is especially needed in the United States, which has tended to emphasize, especially within the public sphere, adversarial skills or rhetoric that can be used to win an argument or persuade an audience rather than facilitate collaboration. Combine the lack of civic education with an emphasis in the media of focusing on politics as a game rather than as a collaborative problem-solving process, it is no wonder that citizens are cynical toward the overall contribution of governmental institutions to their public welfare. The entire enterprise of government under a leaderful perspective would be reframed such that citizens would not merely be considered consumers or observers of debates within the public interest but co-creators of the public good. Elected officials would correspondingly shift their attention from caretakers to facilitators of civic action and participation (see, i.e. Bingham and O’Leary, 2008; Boyte, 2005).

Civic experimentation in the domain of public engagement has taken hold in significant numbers since 1990 allowing thousands of citizens to address such issues as race, crime, education, corrections, immigration, urban sprawl, youth development, public finance, economic development, and community-police relations. The formats for these interactions have been varied but follow many reliable principles and practices of group dynamics and collaborative decision making (see, e.g. Sirianni and Friedland, 2001; Wright *et al.*, 2004). For example, in addition to building the public’s efficacy and capacity for engagement, multiple opportunities are provided for deliberation in terms of both settings (small and large group), style (face-to-face and on-line), and formats (e.g. citizen juries, stakeholder dialogues, national issues forums, citizen conferences, community conversations, study circles, world cafés, wisdom councils). Standards have also been carefully advanced to frame conversations and ensure the highest degree of involvement and creativity (Gramberger, 2001). Organizers and facilitators respond thoughtfully and conscientiously and see their most important skill as listening because of its inclination to build psychological safety and, in turn, trusting relationships and shared meaning (Barber, 1984; Frank, 2007).

As an example (given a recent proliferation of experiments), consider the project, spearheaded by the Arkansas School Boards Association that mobilized some 10,000 citizens in democratic small-group meetings on educational issues since 1998. In another case, the association sponsored a “Speak Up, Arkansas! On Education” series

in which six thousand Arkansans met simultaneously across the state to decide on educational priorities. Among the top three concerns that came out of the Speak Up sessions were teacher salaries, parental involvement, and early childhood care and education (Leighninger, 2009).

In another example at the *country* level and using a citizen's council approach, a dozen Canadians, reflecting the major sectors of public opinion in Canada, met over a weekend in June 1991 to dialogue about the major issues affecting Canadian public life. Though they held widely divergent positions and initially little trust among them, they developed a consensus vision for the entire country which was published in four pages of fine print in *Maclean's*, Canada's leading newsweekly. The report contained dozens of policy recommendations for Canadian institutions, in particular, its businesses, governments, and schools. Most importantly, it demonstrated the capacity of normal citizens to comment deeply about public policy matters when they are given a chance to hear and learn about each other (Atlee, 2009b).

A report on a study by the National Research Council called, *Public Participation in Environmental Assessment and Decision Making* (Dietz and Stern, 2008) concluded that when done well, public participation can improve the quality and legitimacy of public policymaking while building the capacity of all involved to engage in the policy process. A study by Everyday Democracy went even further by asserting that when supported by both elected officials and their constituencies, deliberative practices can even repair disabled democratic governance lost because of citizen mistrust and disenfranchisement. Moreover, when a community uses deliberation with some regularity, public participation can become embedded, in other words, it can become a regular practice involving many different segments of a community across multiple issues (Fagotto and Fund, 2009).

Nevertheless, there is concern among critics of the deliberative democracy movement that public engagement may be considered just a new form of decentralization in government or localism that historically has proved to foster divisive identity formation by diverting power from the central state to already powerful local interests (Hutchcroft, 2001). There is also the raw reality that local participation may not carry the scope or sweep to truly make a difference to policymaking on the national stage (Parkinson, 2007). In other words, local forums may end up deliberating on issues that are not sufficiently substantive and, in instances where the deliberation is substantive, their engagement may not lead to action.

Are there conditions that may encourage local participants to engage in change practices entailing leaderful dialogue and deliberation under a condition of trust – that their participation will make a difference and will not be co-opted for the benefit of power elites? Without authentic citizen voice, we risk having emancipatory discourse represent no more than a staged affectation. A number of criteria have been advanced to establish norms of inclusiveness in dialogue and deliberation (National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD), 2009; Raelin, 2008). Consider as prototypes the following:

- (1) Does the discourse invite deep listening of one another and exploration of new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes?
- (2) Does it provide a forum where all voices, even those heretofore unheard, can be recognized, understood, legitimized, and appreciated as equal?

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- (3) Does it allow challenge of dominant discourses, such as the interests being served, the source of any knowledge base, or the reason for work processes?
  - (4) Does it warrant that participatory efforts have a real potential to make a difference?
  - (5) Does it encourage an examination of one's needs and how to make free choices about meeting them?
  - (6) Is it inclusive of and does it value a diversity of race, gender, age, class, rank, and point of view?
  - (7) Does it bring together participants from all involved institutions, from government, from the community, from ordinary walks of life?
  - (8) Does the discourse incorporate coverage of social, political, and historical processes that may have naturalized taken-for-granted activities, such as leadership?
  - (9) Is it genuine and not a guise for subjugation, control, or exploitation?
  - (10) Does the discourse incorporate the legitimate and constructive voicing of emotions and other forms of expression?
  - (11) Does it accommodate oppositional argument or dissent containing deeply held convictions?

### **Discussion and conclusion**

In this paper, I have made the case for democratic leadership or leaderful practice as the most apt form of leadership in support of participatory organizational change based on democratic principles and values. I have further argued that dialogue and deliberation represent the communication modes that are most representative of democratic leadership because of their acceptance of critical reflection as the means to involve the responsible parties in decision making without privileging particular stakeholders because of their status or authority. In this sense, the account expands the consideration of power beyond micro interests of interest group politics or authority structures to that of socio-political and historical ideologies that surface concerns about social justice. Leaderful practice with a dialogic base accepts consideration of emancipatory projects that incorporate value-infused activities that willingly embrace questions about whose interests are being served during conditions of change. Where employees are encouraged to experience new empowerment over the conditions of their own work processes, leaderful practices seek to ensure that these conditions do not result in subordination of their core needs and identity at the expense of corporate performativity. By focusing on critical reflection, the dialogic perspective with its emancipatory interest can challenge common sense assumptions that are likely to be historical and cultural as psychological (Raelin, 2008; Voronov, 2005).

Ultimately, dialogue supports democratic leadership at the core interpersonal level in which contact occurs between human beings interested in mutual agency. Achieving mutuality requires an authenticity among the parties whereby they learn to both speak and listen from the heart. People come to appreciate that their contribution is often based on the contributions of others. Through dialogue they begin to learn how to observe their own experience and behavior through the eyes and utterances of the other. At a deeper level, they recognize the mental models guiding their participation

and determine if these models can lead to constructive involvement in collective endeavors. Suspending concerns about their own vulnerability, they come to engage in a humility that appreciates one another's intersubjective contributions, often leading to a collaborative generativity. In generative dialogue, new possibilities are envisioned, including practices never before imagined, because participants become open to tacit sources of collective and self-transcending knowledge (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 1999; Tsoukas, 2009).

The emphasis in this paper on democratic leadership and dialogic models suggests a bias in favor of discursive approaches to participatory organizational change (Bushe and Marshak, 2009). To the extent that the leaderful model presented supports a facilitation that exposes people to their own constructions and to their own realities, it appears to be supportive of a dialogic model that does not seek to change behavior directly. It is as much interested in changing the meanings and interpretations that people attach to their behaviors as in the behaviors themselves. It has also forecast the slippery slope whenever change consultants presume to know the interpersonal methodologies that are best for others, especially when they don't take into consideration the historical and political conditions that underlie people's actions (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Raelin, 2008). Nevertheless, most participatory organizational change has been guided by a common humanistic belief in releasing people to achieve their highest level of self-expression and personal freedom. Participants engage through a reflective practice that allows them to observe and experiment with their own collective tacit processes in action. They build a participatory structure that is inclusive of their intersubjective meanings. In this way, they learn to lead together.

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