

Raelin, Joseph A.

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# Hierarchy's Subordination of Democracy and How to Outrank It

A Paper by

Joseph A Raelin  
Donald Gordon Visiting Professor of Leadership  
University of Cape Town  
The Knowles Chair Emeritus  
Northeastern University|

(contact: [j.raelin@neu.edu](mailto:j.raelin@neu.edu))

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# Hierarchy's Subordination of Democracy and How to Outrank It

## Abstract

We hear much about the “democratic ideal” as if it were unreachable within the walls of the organization. Of late, apologists have begun suggesting that there is no need to worry; democracy exists; it’s just that it is often hidden from view right within the requisite hierarchical structure. Top managers are sharing their leadership roles with others in the organization. This provocation will take the opposite position that hierarchy and democratic leadership are predominantly incommensurate and that closer inspection would show that hierarchical conditions largely persist and that when democratic leadership occurs, it does so only with the conditional permission of those in control. The essay goes into detail regarding the plural models of leadership, shows where they fall on the hierarchy-democracy continuum, and outlines how leaderful development might be able to prepare learners for real democratic experience.

**Keywords:** Hierarchy, democracy, democratic leadership, collective leadership, plural leadership, shared leadership, distributed leadership, leaderful practice, leadership development, change agency, dialogue

What’s transformational about democratic organizations is that it’s not someone else telling you what to do. It’s not national staff deciding strategy cut off from people with their bodies on the line.  
- Chris Borte and Julia Steele Allen

There is an emerging view in leadership circles, from both the academic and professional communities, that hierarchical leadership and democratic leadership are largely compatible and peacefully co-exist. Although there are many facets to this view, which I will expand upon in this essay, the principal argument is that top leaders are increasingly sharing their leadership roles with others in the organization and taking advantage of shared expertise as a way to enhance organizational performance.

Although this “shared” approach sounds promising and is perhaps long overdue, I will argue in this provocation that deeper scrutiny would show that hierarchical conditions largely persist and that when democratic leadership occurs, it does so only with the conditional permission of those in control. Empowerment, in other words, does not occur without the “empowering” by those at the top. Thus, I will also contend that hierarchy and democratic leadership are NOT commensurate and that the only way to produce democratic leadership is to start that way or to democratize (thus eliminating) the hierarchy. The latter approach is a learning opportunity, which can be referred to as *leaderful* development. In a truly collective leaderful world, no one is dependent upon any one person to

mobilize action for all. Members participate equally and co-construct their community through open dialogue, even including questions of direction and values (such as inclusion) as well as the airing of dissensus (Rancière, 1999).

My plan for this essay is to start by providing a glimpse into both the “commensurate” and “non-commensurate” arguments regarding hierarchical and democratic leadership. Thereafter, I will review three of the contemporary plural leadership models to propose where they may fall on a hierarchy-democracy continuum. This will set the stage for an examination of the learning implications of taking the critical “incommensurate” approach. How might an organization prepare its members to adopt a democratic approach to leadership?

### **The “Commensurate” Argument**

To talk about commensurability is to make a paternalistic argument by those who attest that hierarchy and democracy co-exist because the argument is closer to one of necessity than co-existence. In other words, hierarchy exponents would claim that hierarchy serves democracy or creates the conditions for democracy to both exist and thrive (see, e.g., Angle et al, 2017). This necessity argument rests on two principal assumptions; protection and expertise. Hierarchy because of its capacity or potential to use power to enforce regulations protects the minority from abuse by the majority. In a form of “noblesse oblige” (Crouch, 2008), hierarchy can ferret out abuse by those who use unfair advantage to hold sway over those less protected. Likewise, it can ensure a degree of harmony in the institution especially in preserving such fundamental values as the rule of law and social equality. As for expertise, hierarchy ensures that those who have a higher level of skill are in place to serve the organization and its products and services. Furthermore, those with such skill are ensured of advancing to serve a greater number of stakeholders, thus upholding the integrity of the enterprise.

The commensurate argument is bolstered by the claim that hierarchy permits the concurrent emergence of democratic practices. Top managers are more than ever inclined to accept bottom-up leadership and allow trusted workers to substitute for hierarchical leadership (Spillane et al., 2007; Bolden et al. 2009). The commensurate argument has also been taken up by contingency specialists who recommend either hierarchical or collective leadership based on conditions on the ground. The contingencies (such as employee capabilities, administrative commitment, or product variation) specify

when management would resort to one or the other leadership format. For example, task complexity would normally call for collective action whereas task simplicity would rely on standard hierarchical operations. The contingency approach, however, calls minimally for initial directive activity by management to set democratic leadership into motion. In particular, top managers would need to select those who would ultimately be leading together, specify their vision, clarify their tasks, secure their resources, serve as a role model or facilitator, and pay heed to sustaining an ongoing culture of leadership sharing (Pearce, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2007). The exception to this approach would be in cases where individuals formed a spontaneous collaboration to pool their expertise or planfully agreed to work together in groups or projects to share their expertise due to their interdependence and mutual trust (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Denis et al., 2012). In this latter instance, management might not necessarily know about these informal leadership groupings, may turn a “blind eye” towards their operation as long as it seems to be functioning well, may express some curiosity, or may even support the endeavor and the initiative of the actors. However, some managers may quell such activity as a defiance of their authority or may intervene if the collective effort is deemed misaligned with the organizational mission or is seen as a waste of resources (Leithwood et al., 2007).

### **The “Incommensurate” Argument**

We begin the argument against commensurability by claiming that hierarchy is in its nature inimical to freedom and thus not consistent with democratic ideals. This argument, of course, runs up against the more common view that hierarchy as a set of arrangements is within the natural order of human experience, mapping as it does the physical structures of living organisms, the human body, or even divine law. Moving to institutional economics, hierarchy has again been claimed to be natural, perhaps best captured in Michels’ “Iron Law of Oligarchy” [1915] (1958), which forecasts that eventually and inevitably organizations will turn to oligarchic properties, thus making democracy no more than a utopian dream.

The argument about hierarchy’s natural order can be said to be ontologically based on *a priori* reasoning. It is true because it exists as such. However, a social constructionist view would counter that any truth can become encrusted or institutionalized and survive apart from experience. Moreover, knowledge about the phenomenon in question could become reified. Consider Bookchin’s example of the queen bee (1982). Should we view her as the apex of the hierarchy, as it is commonly thought, or as

the member most dependent upon the hive? Perhaps Ricardo Blaug's pithy conclusion about hierarchy along these lines puts it most succinctly: the one most critical explanation for its prevalence in the present is "because we had so much of it in our past" (Blaug, 2009: 95).

Turning to the economic argument, a case can be made that hierarchy and its accompanying division of labor were a ruse to ensure that industrial elites retained possession of private capital (Marglin, 1978). Then once in place, hierarchical ingredients, such as power and status, led them to act in ways that allowed them to acquire and retain their power. Even if hierarchy were to have been precipitated by the material and economic requirements of the industrial age, its effectiveness in the post-industrial, digitalized age of the current era can be questioned. Are there not alternatives in an era of complexity for organizing principles other than the "visible hand" of management (Chandler, 1962)? Indeed, if hierarchy serves to bolster the power of elites as a privileged social construction, can it not be replaced by options that seek both effectiveness *and* self-determined well-being (Blaug, 2009)?

Nor can we be comfortable with assertions that hierarchy represents the natural human construction for organizing and coordinating large groups of people. There is evidence across civilization and time, through accounts of a variety of egalitarian, communitarian, utopian, social movement, self-managing, workplace democratic, and network communities as well as of some practices, such as employee stock ownership and open-book management, pointing to the ability of humans to self-organize with limited hierarchical structure (Kanter, 1972; Woodburn, 1982; Delanty, 2002; Girard and Stark, 2002; Osterman, 2006). Archeological discoveries have proposed that Upper Paleolithic hunter-gatherers displayed egalitarian tendencies, a claim leading some anthropologists to put forward an "ambivalence model" of human nature (Boehm, 1999).

The commensurate argument, as pointed out earlier, associates merit with hierarchy, but expertise is not the sole possession of those in management or professional ranks. In the contemporary organization, expertise needs to be exploited wherever and whenever it emerges. In fact, a contrarian view of professionals suggests that their licensing and standards may be merely a way for them to hoard their knowledge in limited supply. Professional "mystification" can be deconstructed as the strategem that it is, leading to a sharing of expertise and technology with the working classes (Freidson, 1986; Rothschild and Whitt, 1986; Raelin, 1991). Furthermore, dividing up tasks into specialized bureaucratic functions need not result in centralization or status stratification; everyone doing his or her job can be

accorded personal and technical autonomy and dignity apart from elite control (Diefenbach, 2019). As David Marquet (2012) found out, based on his experience captaining a highly decorated nuclear-powered submarine, people will rise to the occasion, even during times of change, when control and decision-making are pushed down the organization. For example, during drills, instead of ordering his crew to perform a task, he would say what he “intended” to do and invite them to do the same, leading to an informed dialogue about the practice in question.

Bureaucratic structure is normally associated with hierarchy because lower levels of management are layered so that those subordinate are answerable to those at higher levels. According to authors Paul du Gay (2000) or Elliott Jaques (1989), this arrangement ensures accountability, which in turn is considered critical to establish boundaries, locate errors, and determine performance. However, as in the case of task distribution, accountability can be collective when workers watch out for each other and assume moral responsibility rather than look to find fault and avoid blame (Levinas, 1969; Bauman, 1993).

While doing their job, moreover, workers can pay heed to the governance of their unit or organization to ensure its integrity and democratic order. Rank and file are not incapable of collective ability and affinity. Vigilance is required to ward off the ever-present danger of the power-hungry looking for capital accumulation and self-aggrandizement. But misbehavior does not necessitate the establishment of hierarchical control; there are protections in participative organizations to prevent corporate abuse, such as replacement of self-serving managers with high-moral authentic colleagues committed to trust-based cultures (Shapria, 2019). Likewise, there are protections to be accorded to those accused of misbehavior, such as due process, to prevent clan or social control (Ouchi, 1979), another bane to democratic enterprise.

### **Democracy and the Plural Models**

Historically, democracy is thought to be a system of governance in which power is lodged in people normally through a system of representation in which each member participates freely through a one-vote entitlement. Representation, however, has come under attack as not having sufficiently “democratized” participation in enterprises of all kinds because representatives are thought to not have captured the social, economic and even moral interests of their constituents (Dryzek, 1990; Bloomfield

et al., 2001). Accordingly, participative forums, under such rubriques as deliberative democracy or civic engagement, have been advanced, claiming that decisions should be the product of fair and reasonable deliberation among citizens or those involved in the decisions, actions, and policies at hand (Fishkin, 2002). These formats have in turn been criticized on a number of grounds such as their impracticality, time consumption, and discriminatory control by special interests.

In this essay, I am interested in the latter form of democracy, particularly to the extent that it can overcome power disparities through the provision of democratic rights to those within the pertained society or community. In many accounts, democracy encompasses the two principal rights of equality (to have access and voice) and freedom (to speak one's mind without retribution) (Schostak, 2016). The right of equality has been incarnated through countless tracts in political philosophy, but it was perhaps best established in Robert Dahl's *Preface to Economic Democracy* (1985) in his pronouncement, paraphrased here, that equals should be treated equally, and if members of a group are indeed equal in all relevant respects, then each is entitled as a matter of distributed justice to an equal share of power. As for the right of liberty, it has always had a tenuous relationship with equality and with democracy itself because being part of a democracy usually entails limiting certain personal liberties at the expense of democratic principles, such as equality (Spragens, Jr., 1999). Perhaps T. H. Green best resolved the contradiction between liberty and equality within democracy in his premise that liberty as expressed through individual self-determination must be coupled with a recognition of the mutual dependency relationship between individuals and the community (Nesbitt and Trott, 2006). When it comes to the specific instance of organizations, we might add the additional right to participate in establishing not only one's own but the organization's agenda free from coercion.

Within the plural leadership literature, three models have received the bulk of attention in spreading decision making throughout the organization. Let's see where they stand, however, on an ideological continuum of hierarchy-democracy.

*Shared Leadership:* The notion of shared leadership extends leadership to individuals in the organization at all levels. It is characterized by social interactions in which leaders and followers acquire leadership through a reciprocal influence process (Fitzsimons and James, 2011). Most of this form of leadership occurs in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the accomplishment of group and organizational goals (Pearce and Conger, 2003).



Although there are many examples of the achievements of shared leadership (Pearce, 2004), as a democratic principle, it falls short. The main problem is that it can result in a form of bogus empowerment. Whereas real empowerment, as in the principle of delegation, affords workers the opportunity to experience greater autonomy and independence in their work, bogus empowerment can be thought of as a fiction that creates an illusion of self-determination (Ciulla, 1998). Top managers allow other managers and employees to have provisional control over a domain or an agenda. I say provisional because in many cases the control or power can be taken back. As an example, in a recent study by Fox and Comeau-Vallée (2020) of shared leadership characterized by asymmetrical team interactions, those in superior positions were acknowledged to “mindfully relax” the hierarchy in order to share the leadership. Accordingly, workers are often in a contradictory state, not sure whether the power that has been bestowed is theirs to keep (Dentico, 2019). If workers are truly to have freedom to pursue their agendas in their areas of contribution and commitment, then the leadership that has been shared needs to be permanent.

*Distributed Leadership:* As compared to shared leadership, distributed leadership in Spillane’s terms (2006) refers to relationships among the various participants of leadership which are consciously and synergistically managed. Using Gronn’s two categories (2002), the first form is called concertive action in which members join together in work seeking to regularize their distributed action. It has three patterns, the first being spontaneous collaborations in which individuals from across the organization with different skills and capacities coalesce to pool their expertise and work jointly on a task. The second pattern is referred to as an intuitive working relationship which emerges as members join together within a framework of mutual understanding. The third is called an institutionalized practice, such as through teams or committees, which is often grafted onto existing structures. The second category is conjoint agency, characterized by synergy, which opens the way for mutual capacities and possibilities, and by reciprocity by which individual members influence their colleagues and are influenced in return.

Although distributed leadership has a basis for spontaneity and resulting autonomy among the parties, it could be thwarted at any point by a superior authority. In fact, there are cases that characterize distributed leadership as only involving managers in authority (Chreim, 2015). In another variant the distributed activities are assigned by management, thus taking on some of the same concerns expressed

already in the case of empowerment. Further, distributed formations that increase in size to team dimensions may, without protections or norms of reflective consciousness, adopt a clan mentality, creating barriers to entry of others or stultifying freedom of voice through censorship, discipline, or naturalization of authority.

*Collective Leadership:* Unfortunately, collective leadership has at least two meanings besides also referring to the broad category which I am referring to as plural leadership. The first, which was characterized by the Denis, Langlely, and Sergi's review in the *Academy of Management Annals* (2012), refers to leadership situations in which two, three, or more people jointly work together as co-leaders of others outside their group. This format may have little resemblance to a sharing of leadership throughout the organization. Rather, it merely signifies that those at the top of the pyramid collectively decide on the control of the rest of the organization. Governance of this kind has been associated with political parties that control a nation, as has been the case in such countries as China and Vietnam.

I prefer to characterize collective leadership in its more salutary sense in which it is referred to as a co-construction among people involved in an enterprise that reorients the flow of practice (Raelin, 2016). It is a dynamic process in which constellations of individuals emerge, often within a network and across multiple levels, to contribute knowledge, skill, and meaning to the task at hand (Dansereau and Yammarino, 1998; Day et al., 2004; Friedrich et al., 2009). Accordingly, leadership evolves not just between individuals but from the entire system of collective relations, referring to the processes, interactions, decisions, and actions of people involved in mutual agency (Ospina, 2017). The end-result is the capacity generated under these conditions for members to effectively collaborate and produce results together.

Although collective leadership is a clear advance toward heightened democracy, it has its own set of limitations that could lead to anti-democratic practices. The fear is that collective leadership may represent a replacement for hierarchy in the form of post-bureaucratic control relying on sophisticated methods of electronic surveillance and monitoring that, according to some critical observers, not only reduces discretion but also centralizes decision making into the hands of an information-rich elite (Heydebrand, 1989; Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998). Team members would control themselves collectively by identifying those among the group who are shirking or failing to achieve performance targets, which could lead to the establishment of informal hierarchies (Ropo, Mäkinen, and Seppä, 2019).

Some workers may also acknowledge the value of democratic engagement but even when invited to participate may refrain because of personal and situational conditions. They may, for example, wait out management because of a learned mistrust based on past misfirings (Judge, 1999). So when they confront a new and improved culture that practices soft control, but not real participation, they may be willing to submit since it may be easier than fighting for free expression (Ogbor, 2001). Lastly, if hierarchical control is widely endorsed within the organization, those espousing or actually engaging in democratic practices, even those in management, may be correspondingly viewed as indecisive and weak, rendering them powerless to effect change.

*Toward the Democratic Ideal:* The three plural models have variously fallen short in their ascent to the democratic ideal, though collective leadership comes the closest, as is depicted in Figure 1. The ideal is difficult to reach especially when public opinion might endorse the false assessment that certain individuals are more qualified for leadership due to their social position and power. There is no legitimacy to a governing ontology that results in elites controlling others less fortunate or endowed. In hierarchical organization, those at the top in rank order make decisions and direct them down through the span of control. Everyone in the organization, other than the top, is subordinate to someone next higher up in the pyramid of organization. Democratic organizations, on the other hand, can be constructed attending to our earlier cited principles of liberty, equality, and participation. Real democracy is in reach when inclusive practices reach a culmination of human flourishing in which people participate through their own exploratory, creative, and communal discourses. They are accorded a voice to shape their own organizational life. With participative voice within the enterprise comes an enhanced commitment to decisions made and a concomitant responsibility for outcomes (see, e.g., Harrison and Freeman, 2004). Nevertheless, democratic constitution can be fragile because of the lure of power and control. It requires constant commitment, vigilance, and protection. To those who submit to an acclamation of hierarchical inevitability, it is timely to recall Alvin Gouldner's advisement (1955) to those students of social science who were prepared to give in to hierarchical "realities":

Instead of explaining how democratic patterns may, to some extent, be fortified and extended, they warn us that democracy cannot be perfect.... Instead of assuming responsibilities as realistic clinicians, striving to further democratic potentialities, many social scientists have become morticians, all too easy to bury [people's] hopes (p. 507).

\*\*\*Insert Figure 1 about here\*\*\*

*Managerial and worker identities:* Managers can sustain the democratic impulse in organizations as they endorse the formation of spontaneous and enduring communities that can establish their own identity and self-control while entertaining policy initiatives from the strategic function of the organization (Clarke & Butcher, 2006). In this framework, work would not be orchestrated from the top of an organizational pyramid to be passed down a chain of command as much as it would be created as a practice among practitioners who establish their own norms through interactions within a dedicated community. Practitioners would be in their local settings co-creating their everyday operating strategies and likewise developing shared conceptions of activity and new modes of action (Chia & Holt, 2006; Engeström, Engeström, & Vahaaho, 1999). They would not be controlled through retribution, reward, nor any other instrumental means including formal rules or informal codes. Elsewhere, I have characterized the concurrent and collective sharing of decision-making processes and actions through mutual dialogue as “leaderful” practices (Raelin, 2003). In leaderful organizations, everyone can serve as a leader, not just sequentially, but concurrently (at the same time) and collectively (all-together). It emulates 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).

Workers themselves can decide on a host of issues in their social interactions, such as the activities they work on, the frequency of their contacts, or the order of their responsibilities (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Management’s job is to serve them so that they can carry out their work in a free and spirited manner. At times, managers can serve a boundary function, helping workers link to stakeholders with whom they may create an interdependent relationship. Roles such as the boundary function in democratic organizations are specified and even codified but often for a temporary period and sustained by revocable consent. Workers exercise autonomy and authority throughout the organization conducting their work without direction from a manager (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). The unit of analysis is the practice itself, often a coordinative effort in which material-discursive engagements will produce an emergent meaning. No one knows the practice better than the worker who must in relation to others negotiate and arrange the objects of his or her own practice.

## Leadership Development for Democratic Institutions

Within the field of adult learning, an emancipatory view would hold that the role of adult learning is to free workers from hierarchical thinking, thereby questioning the imbalance in power within our cultural-historical structures in which knowledge comes to be taken for granted (Freire, 1970; Clark and Butcher, 2006). The first step in any expression of emancipation is the willingness of the members of a community to participate actively in both regular and spontaneous dialogue about contested views (Cludts, 1999). Indeed, being able to communicate one's interests through civil dialogue free from coercion within a community of interest is the hallmark of a democratic order, that in its constitution relies upon the collective wisdom of its participants (Woods, 2004). It seeks to release these members from any restrictive institutional forces that may limit their personal control and autonomy (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). There is no denying how prevailing these forces, which may operate as a nested infrastructure of interlocks, can be in maintaining privileged systems (Raynard, Kodeih, and Greenwood, 2019). In a condition that Crouch (2004) refers to as "post-democracy," the institutions of democracy are ostensibly kept in place, but they are increasingly controlled by political and economic elites co-opting the participation of the populace. Yet, as long as democracy is approached not as an end in and of itself but as a fluid and evolving process of contestation and evolving representations, it has every chance to enact the contingent ontological terrain that ignites the practice that is leadership (Smolović - Jones et al., 2016).

Are there conditions that may encourage members to engage in practices entailing emancipatory dialogue and deliberation such that their participation will make a difference and will not be co-opted for the benefit of power elites? Without authentic voice, we risk having emancipatory discourse represent no more than a staged affectation. Among the criteria to establish norms of inclusiveness in dialogue and deliberation (National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD), 2009; Raelin, 2013), consider the following:

- (1) Does the discourse invite deep listening of one another characterized by an exploration of new ideas without predetermined outcomes?
- (2) Does it provide a forum where all voices, inclusive of race, sexual preference, age, class, rank, and point of view can be recognized, understood, legitimized, and appreciated?
- (3) Does it allow challenge of power relations and dominant discourses, such as the interests being served, the source of any knowledge base, or the reason for work processes?

(4) Does the discourse incorporate the airing of social, political, and historical processes that may have naturalized taken-for-granted activities, such as leadership?

(5) Does the discourse welcome the legitimate and constructive voicing of emotions and other forms of expression, accommodating oppositional argument or dissent containing deeply held convictions?

Emancipatory expressions of this nature, however, are unlikely to advance without at least the willingness of top managers to express doubt about their managerial beliefs and without their corresponding commitment to foster creative ways to accomplish the work of the organization. Learning to release one's power, ego, and control to extend the capacity of all members to contribute to the organization without fear of constant oversight requires a self-efficacy and humility that recognizes that one can't go it alone (Fast, Burris, and Bartel, 2014). There is a need to engage everyone in a collective discourse to learn the many facets of meaning that can be brought to bear by those who are principals to the endeavor at hand (Bohm, 1996).

If executives are unwilling to honor emancipatory discourses, some activists might turn to liberationist tactics that operate outside the physical and symbolic boundaries of the organization via separation and struggle. In other words, the development of democratic institutions requires some form of either liberationist or reformist agency. It should be noted, however, that acts of liberation, occurring outside hierarchical structure in the form of protests and other demonstrations, can make way for reformist transformation. The *leaderful* development process, which we develop here as a reformist strategy, can be mobilized through change agency. Internal or external change agents come forth to encourage the endorsement of a culture of learning and participation within the system in question. Change agency also needs to occur at multiple levels of experience, namely at individual, interpersonal, team, organization, and network levels (Raelin, 2010). Although members of a team or institution may be at a stage of readiness to assume call it leaderful properties, they may not choose to or know how to act leaderfully without some instigation from those willing to share their foreknowledge and experience. What makes the change agent of leaderful development unique is his or her commitment to learning that is sufficiently participant-directed that learners comprehend, by the agent's practices - including his or her communication with them, that leadership can be a mutual phenomenon (Friedrich et al., 2009).

*Change Agency:* There are four different agency forms depending upon the level of intervention: coaching, facilitation, organization development, and weaving (Raelin, 2010). The achievement of coaching or mentoring at the individual level stems from its practice as a medium for reflection and

learning. Learners commit to exploring the social, political, and emotional reactions that might be blocking their own operating effectiveness and well-being. Confidential issues, such as working relationships with managers, relative attention to diverse points of view, or the participants' own growth and development, are given a forum for open consideration. Learners get a rare opportunity to think out loud and receive constructive feedback on critical and untested views and actions (Kram, 1985; Lawrence and Moore, 2018). Coaching can also function at the interpersonal level since it can help individuals discover wisdom about themselves through others' eyes. Coaches can assist learners not so much to mount arguments to successfully compete with others but rather to encourage them to share their reflections openly and solicit those of others. Reflective learners become sensitive to why things are done in a certain way. They inquire about the values that are manifested behind any behavior. They learn to uncover discrepancies between what is being said and what is being done. Finally, they show an interest in probing into the forces below the surface that have led to their own actions and outcomes.

The facilitation role operates at the group level to ensure that the members of a team maintain ownership of their own agenda and increase their capacity for reflection on the consequences of their own actions. The facilitator observes and provides feedback both to individual members and to the team as a whole on their dynamics. The facilitator is not thought to be a classic meeting moderator. Rather, facilitators, through their process consultation, seek to develop interactive practices that endorse full participation in task accomplishment while maintaining socioemotional support within an environment of psychological safety. To head off spontaneous and unplanned coercive behavior within the practice group, facilitators seek to create a dialogic environment in which group members would become increasingly comfortable engaging in critical discourse. This requires what is sometimes referred to as a focus on process—a conversation of validity checking in which members of the team would be encouraged to challenge not only others' positions but also the assumptions that they may be relying upon in advocating their viewpoints (Argyris & Schön, 1974). This more emancipatory form of discourse attempts to reduce the defensive routines that maintain hierarchical hegemony.

Organizational change can be mobilized by organization development (OD) consultants and other change agents (including facilitating managers) who specifically dedicate themselves to producing a self-renewing enterprise, who assert that any party affected by a change be involved in the change process, and who encourage the endorsement of a learning culture within the organization. In such a culture, it

is acceptable to dialogue openly about such “undiscussables” as unpopular views, defensive routines, conflicts of interest, or clashes of personality. The OD consultant, often an external change agent, attempts to improve organizations by applying knowledge from the behavioral sciences to help their members enhance their collaborative processes (Cooke, 1998; Cummings and Worley, 2008). In many instances, the learning and development function will require specific training interventions to expose members of the organization to both democratic skills and attitudes. Members and teams begin to develop their individual and collective self-efficacy respectively resulting in a confidence that democratic organizing is possible and can be learned. Among the learning interventions at the organizational level, action learning might be the most propitious because it begins with the perspective that leadership learning needs to take place at the very setting where the group is performing its work. Learning in this setting becomes a reflexive process invoking collective consciousness. Leadership itself would be seen as a construction that can be self-correcting. As change agents, OD consultants attempt to mold structures and systems that tolerate dissent and encourage open communication. Among the new structures would be sociocracies, holacracies, communities of practice, learning organizations, and the like, constructed to encourage mutual and free inquiry, challenge to dominant narratives, and horizontal learning and discovery.

Life in organizations has become more complex because boundaries have become more permeable. In order to accomplish our work within a knowledge economy, we need to rely on a range of stakeholders, many of whom operate outside the organization’s borders. Indeed, life in the Twenty-First Century is becoming increasingly networked whereby we may begin to think of ourselves as parties to webs of partnerships. Social networks, in turn, are typically characterized by collaborative practices in which the parties learn to share resources and acquire mutual benefits. There are always cases in which one of the institutional members of the network mobilizes the participation of others, but most social networks are self-organizing, resulting in members participating to enhance their collective interests (Contractor, 1999). We have given the name “weavers” to designate those agents who play a critical role not only to organize networks but to sustain them once formed. Network weavers work with others to mobilize and to encourage collaboration across the network. Using tools such as social network analysis (SNA), weavers can point out where there are gaps in knowledge resources, where bottlenecks may be blocking communication flows, where access to new resources may be necessary, where special expertise may be required, or where clusters of new connections may be formed to accomplish the work (Cross, Cowen, Vertucci, and Thomas, 2009). Another prospective tool is critical discourse analysis



(CDA) because it can uncover the ideological use of language to critically examine social inequalities among actors (Wodak, 2011).

## Conclusion

It is ironic that this essay appears in the provocations department of the journal. Why is it that advocating for democracy in organizations has become such a provocative idea? Perhaps it is provocative because, being so difficult, it hasn't been given that much of a chance. But wasn't it nearly 100 years ago that John Dewey wrote that democracy is indeed difficult because it demands continuous revitalization through the practice of community-building - a practice that would require "conjoint, combined, associated action" (Dewey, 1927: 23). Further, the common good in any community would not require an extension of self for others, but rather with others. So, no one said it is easy, but when people in their collective endeavors act together in the world, they can shape their local communities for the better, that is, in ways that are responsive to their mutual needs. It has become facile to succumb to the hierarchical principle of organizational behavior. Let us begin, simply but unequivocally, in the day-to-day practices that we people of goodwill may extend to one another. Everyone can be a party to leadership. Everyone can value another's interest. In due course, we may take it as natural to enlist our fellow learners in forging a democratic identity.

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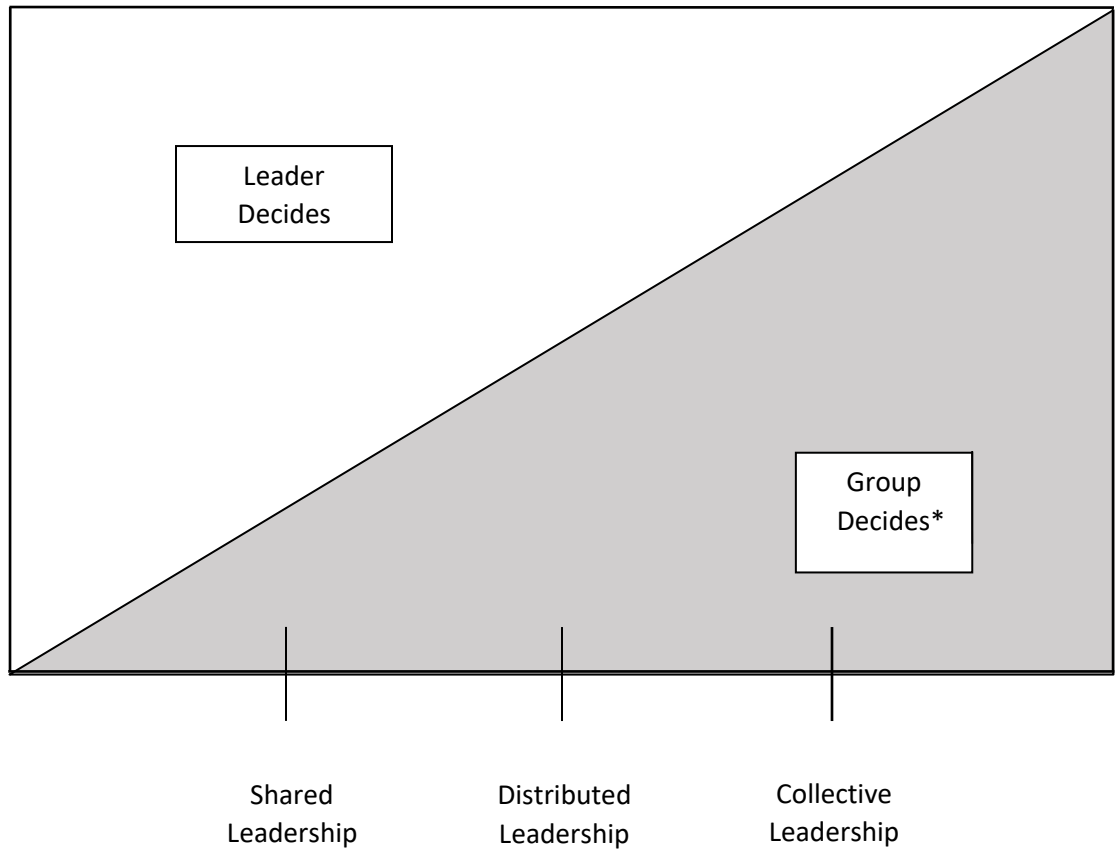
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Figure 1

Plural Models of Leadership on the Hierarchy-Democracy Continuum

**HIERARCHY**

**DEMOCRACY**



\* NB: Group decides without stifling the voices of the members