

Strategy as Emergence.

Reviewing the *Practice Turn* in Social, Organizational and Leadership Studies from an Integral Perspective

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Abstract: Practice perspectives are increasingly popular in many social sciences. Moreover, the *practice turn* (PT) has gained influence across various disciplines as a novel epistemological and research perspective. It claims to be able to better explain the workings of social action, among them leadership phenomena in organizations, due to a detailed look onto the micro level. Due to their focus and epistemology, they also claim to be able to better describe and analyze the complexity of social action than more traditional individualistic or institutional approaches. This paper therefore takes a closer look at some of the epistemological claims made by practice perspectives, based on integral epistemological concepts and tools. It proposes a selective discussion of the PT's genuine epistemological value, as well as potential shortcomings, blind spots and limitations.

Keywords: Complexity, development, epistemology, integral, knowledge, leadership, practice turn, relationalism, strategy.

Introduction

Practice perspectives are increasingly popular in many social sciences. Moreover, the *practice turn* (PT) has gained influence across various disciplines as a novel epistemological and research perspective. Its aims are, in a nutshell, to shift the “locus of researchers' attention and the logic of their inquiry” towards bridging gaps between “reality” and scientific knowledge by focusing on the details of what actually happens as social practices happen (Orlikowski, 2010, p. 23). As such, practice perspectives particularly attempt to better explain the workings of social action, among them leadership phenomena in organizations, on the micro level. Due to their focus and epistemology, conceiving of social action as practices embedded in structures and webs of meaning, they also claim to be able to better describe and analyze the complexity of social action than more traditional individualistic or institutional approaches.

From an integral perspective, claims of providing more explanatory complexity and comprehensiveness are generally of high interest. It is therefore worth taking a closer look at some of the epistemological claims made by practice perspectives, based on integral epistemological concepts and tools. To what extent can integral concepts and criteria such as holons, (holonic) inter-

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relationalism, cross-field and -paradigmatic multi-perspective and multi-method inquiry and developmental complexity be helpful for evaluating the degree of comprehensiveness of given practice approaches and theories? The paper thus proposes a critical look at practice perspectives viewed through an integral lens. Its aim is not to provide a comprehensive review of practice based research in the field of leadership but rather to provide a selective discussion of its genuine epistemological value, as well as potential shortcomings and limitations. While a more extensive discussion of both the state-of-the-art in integral leadership and in practice research are beyond the scope of this article, the latter aims at recognizing and appreciating the contributions of the practice turn to a more comprehensive analysis of leadership phenomena in organizations, while also illuminating blind spots and potentials of further development.

The paper is organized in four sections. First, it gives a brief overview and dives into the genealogy of the practice perspective, reconstructing basic aims and motivations of practice oriented approaches. The second section shows what exactly these approaches are criticizing with regard to more traditional concepts of leadership and strategy, and how what they themselves have to offer in response to those critiques is framed. Section 3 asks to what extent practice oriented approaches do indeed offer a broader, wider perspective on social action in general, as well as on leadership phenomena in organizations in particular. To what extent can they help to understand and explain those phenomena in a more differentiated way? On this basis, this section also discusses to what extent the practice turn actually provides an epistemological “surplus value” and thereby deserves the label of an epistemological “turn.” In other words, it discusses to what degree practice perspectives offer theoretical innovations going beyond the potentials of more traditional research strategies in the field. Next, section 4 inquires into epistemological limitations, shortcomings and blind spots of practice approaches as seen from an integral perspective. Finally, the concluding section asks to what extent and how perspectives on leadership based on integral theory can systematically reveal and illuminate some of those blind spots and thus, address the respective limitations. In this regard, a particular focus is put, first, on the inner dimensions of social action, in particular on the dimension of consciousness development in leadership phenomena. Another epistemological limitation that can productively be addressed through the lens of an integral perspective is the connection between relations (relationalism) and entities (holism) which are often discussed in practice contexts.

In result, the paper suggests interpreting the PT as a post-modern contribution to leadership theory and proposes a shift towards even more comprehensive perspectives as provided by integral leadership and organization research.

History, Self-Conception and Basic Claims of Practice Based Perspectives

The practice turn has been an important theoretical and epistemological trend in sociology and many neighboring social sciences, amongst them in leadership and organization studies, due to its shift to understanding social action, for example in organizations, on the micro level. By combining first, second and third person perspectives, it aims at describing complex interrelations in a more differentiated way than it has been done in previous approaches, no matter whether they focus on the individual or on institutions.

Historically the practice turn (PT) draws on older theory developments such as the cultural, the linguistic and the interpretative turns, as well as their ontology of constructivism. It takes into account more recent developments such as the performative and process dimensions of social action and structuration. A similar “constructivist shift,” combined with a growing interest in processes, symbols, interactive qualities, grey zones, as well as in the analysis of social complexity and dynamics in general, can also be observed in the field of *Strategic Management* (SM) research, for example in approaches such as *Dynamic Capabilities* (Jarzabkowski/Spoe, 2009). In this context, the previously central theoretical and ontological conflict between structure and actor (structuralism versus individualism) is now partly replaced by the tension between substantialism and relationalism (Schneider, 2013).

Concrete precursors of the PT therefore are relational sociologists such as George Herbert Mead, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens and Bruno Latour, but also post-analytical, phenomenological philosophers like Martin Heidegger, Michel de Certeau or Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Moreover, the PT demonstrates a general trend towards connecting empirical, theoretical and philosophical approaches with social analysis. Among the sources of its theory development and methodology are therefore ethnomethodology and ethnography, cultural history, activity theory, network theory, discourse analysis and Latour’s actor network theory. Finally, pertinent personal experiences of practice researchers seem to be important as well, such as the record of Dalvir Samra-Fredericks who has been working as a community organizer, or work with Change Laboratories reflected by Miettinen/Samra-Fredericks/Yanov (2010, p. 1310). Golsorkhi et al (2010, p. 2) have identified several schools of thought in this regard.

While ethnography observes social actors *in situ* (participant observation), ethnomethodology tries to understand social and moral orders through an analysis of embodied activity, Activity Theory as inspired by Lev Vygotsky sees itself as a psychology of human consciousness and explores its mediations by culture and artifacts. It thereby tries to resolve the dilemma that consciousness has so far been looked at either in its material dimension or via introspection but rarely both at the same time. In contrast, Activity Theory looks at consciousness (*mind*) in an anti-dualistic way as an autonomous reality which is not situated inside human heads but comes into being during the interaction between individual and objective forms of culture created through human work (Gherardi, 2010, p. 1318).

Based on an ontology of relationalism those approaches essentially call for a new “scientific worldview “and epistemological strategy (Schneider, 2013) primarily focusing on patterns and structures of relation(ship)s, as it is done, for example in the network approach. In this context, social order is described as a process and result of interaction (“*how is that done?*”) between various entities. The latter also include material “actors,” i.e. in Latour’s actor network theory (ANT, Latour, 2005). By including various levels of analysis (micro, meso and macro levels, and thus both individual action, group action, processes, organizations and institutions; see Schneider 2013 and Miettinen/Samra-Fredericks/Yanov, 2010) into a systematic reconstruction of relational structures between all of them, these approaches wish to re-conceptualize agency and social action through the notion of practice, focusing on their respective interrelations (Chia/Holt, 2006).

In doing so, relationalist approaches take over the ontology of constructivism holding that humans create both themselves and their material culture, shaping reality through their own cognitive and relational practices (Orlikowski, 2010). The assumption that social structures (may) precede social actions (Merleau-Ponty: “we take structure to be pre-existing,” cf. also Miettinen/Samra-Fredericks/Yanow, 2010) is now modified by a stronger focus on the practices through which structure comes into being, i.e. by the “ontological primacy of practice in social life” (Orlikowski, 2010, p. 27). The possibility of action is now understood as pre-defined by networks of practice in which actors are embedded, as well as by socially constructed technologies of communication and calculation (Vaara/Whittington, 2012) which can function as “orders of truth” in the Foucauldian sense. According to Foucault’s concept of power and how power is exercised, particular actions are rendered possible or impossible only by specific orders of truth (Foucault, 1982). So given the rather old roots of the PT Miettinen/Samra-Fredericks/Yanow (2010) have legitimately asked if we should not rather speak of a “re-turn.”

Just as network analysis, the practice turn (PT) sees itself as a new theoretical approach, sometimes even as a meta-theory and thus, as a strategy for organizing the cognitive space of knowledge or science as knowledge production in a new way. Certainly indeed, theories can also be thought of as hypothetically-deductive systems of concepts and thus, as cognitive networks pre-structuring the processes of cognitive knowledge production of those who use them and who do research within them. In fact, its constructivist ontology is rightly applied to its own scientific practice as well, for example when Orlikowski (2010, p. 30) asks “what kinds of realities are being produced through our social science” and “what kinds of organizational outcomes do we want to help produce.” In contrast, meta theories or paradigms are considered to be cognitive entities organizing whole systems of theories in their relation to each other on a higher level of abstraction (Holmberg/Tyrstrup, 2010; for an integral perspective see the Model of Hierarchical Complexity, Commons, 2008).

Even though the “theory of practice” can so far not be considered as a consistent theory (Miettinen/Samra-Fredericks/Yanow, 2010), Andreas Reckwitz has provided a detailed description of the general development of sociological theorizing towards a praxeological understanding of social relations. In his study on the “Transformation of cultural theories” (2000, 2002) he has also formulated a corresponding research program. The core concerns of practice perspectives are, on the one hand, to give attention to micro processes on the level of the individual, i.e. to treat it as a living entity with emotions, motivations, concrete actions and strategies. On the other hand (seemingly paradoxically), practice perspectives concurrently refrain from studying actors in favor of practices which are understood as embedded in social interactions and networks of meaning (see below, Jarzabkowski/Spee, 2009). The aim is thus to better understand the practices of individual actions in the social space (Jarzabkowski/Spee, 2009), not only on the level of individual cognition, identity and so forth, but also and above all in terms of their being part of “meta-individual” discourses and interactions which are called “practices.”

Besides the notion of “practice,” that of “strategy” is equally important in the context of the PT. As a matter of fact, both of them are closely related when it comes to describing concrete practices and social phenomena. In the field of leadership and management studies a new sub-field informed by several concepts of practice has emerged in 2003 under the label of *strategy-*

as-practice-research (SAP). For an overview of SAP research and its main research orientations and agendas see Golsorkhi et al., 2010, p. 3 and Johnson et al., 2003)

While there is no clear-cut or dominant definition of “practice” around, Jarzabkowski/Spee (2009, p. 73) understand “practice” as “a stream of activity which interconnects the micro actions of individuals and groups with the wider institutions in which those actions are located and to which they contribute.” On the organizational level practices are also understood as “organizational goings on that give rise to a particular strategic choice rather than on macro-causal factors” (Chia/Holt, 2006, p. 636).

The term “strategy” is not used in an intentional or motivational sense here, but as something usually unconscious or pre-conscious, something immanent, coming into being and manifesting itself in everyday practical action, or as a “consistent pattern in a stream of actions.” We are thus dealing with the very concrete and very practical “doing of strategy” on the one hand, i.e. the question “*who does what when and how?*” This happens based on a clear distinction from conventional intentional strategy research (see the paragraph on the PT’s concerns below). Moreover, practice perspectives are interested in how the development and the emergence of strategies, as well as their implementation is rendered possible or impossible by existing social and organizational practices and the respective socio-cultural sets of experiences they are embedded in (Vaara/Whittington, 2012, p. 286). In result, the central pretensions and concerns of the PT can be summarized by the claim that organizational and leadership phenomena can be better described by a micro perspective which is closer to the complexity of reality. At the same time, it thereby intends to “humanize” the field of *Strategic Management* (SM) (Pettigrew et al., 2002, p. 12, cit. in: Chia/Holt, 2006, p. 635).

Introductions to and reviews of the PT, the state of research and discussion in the field (which reach out far beyond the areas of leadership and organization), and about the field of *strategy-as-practice* and the empirical research done there can be found in Jarzabkowski/Spee (2009, including a typology and multiple ostensive tables analyzing research on the PT according to specific criteria and streams), in Golsorkhi et al., 2010, in Holmberg/Tyrstrup (2010) and in Vaara/Whittington (2012).

What are the Practice Turn’s Main Concerns? Criticizing Modern Heroic and Functionalistic Perspectives

In the context of general tendencies of theory development in the fields of leadership and organization research the Practice Turn can be situated with regard to the main points of demarcation against which it makes its own claims. What does it criticize and to what extent can it legitimately claim to offer an epistemological surplus value – thereby “earning” its label of being a “turn” in the true sense of the term? To what extent does it offer innovative new perspectives able to compensate for shortcomings, inadequacies or blind spots of previous and hitherto existing approaches and research strategies?

In fact, authors within the fields of practice and SAP research often position themselves and their work in contrast to “outdated” conventional theory perspectives (Holmberg/Tyrstrup, 2010,

Jarzabkowski/Spee, 2009, Vaara/Whittington, 2012, Chia/Holt, 2006) by which they usually mean approaches generally qualified as typically modern, such as Taylorism/Fordism, bureaucratic organizations, strategic or scientific management etc.. Since theorists of the practice perspective often make their claims by juxtaposing their own practice approach to *Strategic Management* perspectives, their heuristic project can be illustrated by a comparison of those two perspectives. By *Strategic Management* we hereby mean strategic and functionalistic perspectives which:

- claim that inner-organizational processes can generally be objectively analyzed, and thus planned and controlled,
- accordingly try to rationally plan leadership and organizational design and to control their outcomes as far as possible,
- make use of a primarily rational, functionalistic and more or less linear logic in order to achieve this,
- preferably work with quantifying methods to investigate the factors which are relevant for leadership design.

In this regard, authors writing from practice and SAP perspectives usually argue that “traditional” and/or modern leadership research hampers a deeper understanding of what actually happens when and while leadership is actually being exercised. The table below illustrates the main divergences between conventional strategy perspectives and SAP approaches.

Table 1: Traditional (modern) leadership approaches and the surplus value of practice perspectives as viewed by the latter.

	<i>Strategic Management research</i>	<i>Practice Perspective</i>
(Concept of) Knowledge	Explaining the world, functionalism, normativity Knowledge represents reality (Representationalism) Claim: comprehensive explanation of the world	Knowledge is never complete and always a social construction → context has to be taken into account We can only know what actually happens (the doings of ...) Claim: Understanding instead of explaining
Overall world view	The world is like a clockwork with its own inner order and functioning. Our task is to understand its mechanics and make optimal use of it through adequate methods and technologies in order to build and shape it according to our aims. <i>building view of the world</i>	The world is constructed in a non-linear way. It is thus neither possible to completely explain it nor to plan and control its functioning and development. The latter are to a certain degree chaotic. <i>dwelling view of the world</i>
Basic epistemological position	Rationalism, functionalism, methodological individualism	Relationism, behavior is always embedded into a web of relations and practices and cannot be studied in an isolated way.

Research options	Structuralism or individualism/voluntarism alternatively (structure/organization <i>or</i> actor oriented perspectives)	Both structures and actors are socio-cognitive constructs and can only be understood in their interrelations and interlacement Dynamics and processes of concrete action as it happens (the doing of strategy: who, what, how) Tension between substantialism and relationism
Research methods	Quantitative methods preferred Concepts of competence primarily envision quantifiable, technically measurable factors, causal relations, analyzing variables, linear causality	Qualitative methods preferred: qualitative interviews, (participant) observation, ethnographic methods, discourse analysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics
What is being analyzed? Perspective on social actors and organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actors as clearly identifiable and circumscribable entities and their strategic actions, understood as intentionally planned - Structures/organizations as clearly circumscribable and describable entities and their designing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bundles of practices inside of webs of relations - Consequences of spontaneous human actions, emergences, processes, dynamics - Actual strategic action, consisting of micro-activities, micro-practices of organizing (Weick) and micro-changes
Concepts and ideals of leadership and organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Building view of the world</i> - Strategic decision making as a comprehensive, coordinated, actively designed process - Leader as a strategic planner/ top-down controller - Motivation of social action is derived from liberal ideology, for example from values like goal attainment and making profit - Specific forms of charismatic and heroic leadership are attractive - Predict and control, understood in a linear way, conscious designing of organizations - Working with intentions, goals and causal references of social action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Dwelling view of the world</i> - Strategy emerges unconsciously in everyday social action - Habitus, relational state of an “absorbed interlacement” with the world (cf. Heidegger, Husserl, Wittgenstein) - Motivation is a result of personal responsibility → focus on management education - Concepts such as charismatic leadership have to be disenchanting - Action in its coming into being, thoughts and emotions are observed neutrally, as well as the grey shades of everyday life

Sources: Gherardi (2010), Holmberg/Tyrstrup (2010), Jarzabkowski/Spee (2009), Vaara/Whittington (2012), Chia/Holt (2006).

So to what extent do the practice perspectives presented here as ideal-typical counterparts of traditional and modern approaches include crystallizing points of an innovative theory develop-

ment on the basis of a critical reflection of existing research? In other words: To what extent are we dealing not only with a new and stylish academic “fashion” but with a perspective which offers qualitative improvements in the sense of a more adequate ontology and epistemology, including the potential to better grasp the complexity of reality? So to what extent are we facing a real progress in theorizing?

The Surplus Value of the Practice Perspective: What are the Merits of the Practice Turn?

A surplus value of practice perspectives as compared to classical and modern approaches to leadership and organization can be observed in several respects. The following section outlines a few important factors and elements illustrating a new and qualitatively deepened understanding of the phenomena observed.

Deeper Interest in and Understanding of the Relational Complexity of Leadership and Organizations

An important motivation of practice perspectives is to grasp, describe and understand organizational and leadership phenomena in their whole complexity in a more adequate way as it has been the case before. In order to do this they make use of a more complex concept of organization than classical and modern theories did. Now organizations are not viewed as hierarchical, more or less bureaucratically administered entities consisting of clearly describable (infra-) structures, positions and functional levels anymore, but as the sum of inner-organizational relations, as “a bundle of practices and material arrangements” (Schatzki, 2006, p. 1863) which constantly inform, change and renew them and have multiple interrelations with each other. Practice perspectives thus put a particular focus on the intertwining of components such as social action, structures and “assemblages” of various material objects, which are analyzed as general arrangements, constellations or figurations (see also the configurational sociology by Norbert Elias).

At the same time, practice perspectives do not view leadership as unidimensional, linear phenomena anymore but rather aim at a thick description of the characteristics, problems and workings of everyday leadership. Leadership practice is of interest here precisely in its fragmented, non-linear and sometimes chaotic gestalt (Holmberg/Tyrstrup, 2010, p. 356).

For both the analysis of leadership and of organizations, the procedural perspective is central in practice approaches (Schatzki, 2006 and Holmberg/Tyrstrup, 2010 speak of a “fundamental priority of processes”). It stresses the strictly social and collective nature of leadership and organizations, as well as the temporal and spatial dimensions of concrete phenomena and constellations. Practice perspectives on leadership and organization can thus be summarized as focusing on “doing leadership as a practical activity in complex organizations” (Denis/Langley/Rouleau, 2010). Insofar as this constitutes a considerable differentiation of the perspective of analysis as compared to modern understandings of leadership and organization, the PT offers a clear theoretical and epistemological surplus value. The Model of Hierarchical Complexity as a content-free framework for analyzing the structural complexity of actions and utterances (Commons, 2008)

would most probably classify the traditional SM approach as a formal (stage # 10) concept while practice perspectives as contextual epistemologies are likely based on systemic (stage # 11) reasoning.² Therefore a crucial element of their epistemology is a systematic interest in the contextual, relational conditions of all social action.

Systematic Interest in Complex Contexts of Social Action

Due to their relationalism and their sense of complexity of concrete leadership and organizational phenomena practice perspectives have a different understanding of social action in general and of strategy in particular. Based on phenomenological descriptions of the world as proposed by Heidegger, practice perspectives aim at a more adequate “re-conceptualization of agency, action and practice and their interrelations” (Chia/Holt, 2006). Gherardi (2010) and others stress that the central goal of practice-based studies consists in explaining the “doing of strategy” out of the interrelations between practice and their respective context.

More specifically, theorists of practice use a concept of strategy based on the social nature of all action, in result of which the latter cannot be understood as conscious, intentional goal attainment anymore, but rather as a behavior embedded in social contexts from which alone it can be understood. Some authors also draw analogies with rituals or liturgies, for example in Vaara/Whittington (2012).

Through its interest for the workings and the constitution of agency within a web of social practices the practice perspective, as a relational theory, comes to a more differentiated understanding of “strategic” processes. While dynamic contexts of practice are revalued in comparison to structures, new theoretical resources are made accessible for the discipline of strategic management (cf. Vaara/Whittington, 2012). Practices are thereby conceptualized as complex, flexible and polyvalent phenomena with both social and material dimensions (Vaara/Whittington, 2012, p. 298). Since the practice perspective has a particular interest in the micro foundations of social phenomena, it also puts a special focus on discovering and reconstructing the processes of interrelation between all of those dimensions.

Different from ideal typical modern strategic thinking, attention is directed not (only) on the behavior of single individuals, but on that of networks consisting of meaningful interactions and their outcomes and materializations (“webs of practices”) which are treated as dispositive in a Foucauldian sense. The latter constitute socio-cultural “operating systems,” the socially constructed *modus operandi* of which on the one hand guarantees a certain stability, anticipatory reliability and consistency of social action. On the other hand it epistemologically does not need the concept of strategic planning in the traditional sense.

Two additionally important concepts are therefore that of *emergence* (“what is actually happening”) as well as that of the “*dwelling mode*” as compared to the “building mode” which is at the basis of the traditional motivational understanding of strategy. The former, in contrast, describes a mode “in which strategy emerges non-deliberately through everyday practical coping”

² A more detailed discussion of the correspondence between the epistemological perspectives reviewed here and stages of complexity as defined by the MHC is beyond the scope of this article.

(Chia/Holt, 2006). This understanding presupposes a permanent changing and re-creating of contexts of social action. Their analysis – more so than that of acting in the classical understanding – thus figures in the center of studies based on practice theory. Their close relation to social theory and the analysis of power, as well as to discourse theory and analysis in the tradition of Michel Foucault is therefore not surprising. Foucault conceived of power as of the concrete nature of the contexts which enable or prohibit certain actions, which is why he analyzed the creation and change of similar contexts *in actu*. Foucault saw a key for explaining collective knowledge production, amongst them collective processes of learning, in how power is exercised in practice through designing and changing contexts of meaning (Foucault, 1982).

This concept is not only opposed to the idea of rational problem solving; the underlying contextual epistemology can also be characterized as more differentiated and thus more complex than previous theoretical perspectives. In view of our initial question concerning the epistemological surplus value of practice perspectives it can thus be argued that it combines micro and macro perspectives, individualistic and systemic (or field-specific) approaches in a hitherto unique way. Through conceiving both relations and networks, just as things, as prolongations of our possibilities of action (“dwelling with the object,” Chia/Holt, 2006), it makes accessible new dimensions of knowledge, thereby clearly going beyond those offered in classical management studies.

Constructivism and a Higher Theoretical and Methodological (Self) Reflexivity

With its context sensitive, constructivist understanding of leadership and organization we observe a decentering of the research perspective and thus a higher degree of methodological reflexivity, as well as a corresponding (self) critical potential. Practices which had been taken to be self-evident until then are uncovered through the study of pre-verbal understanding by the practice concept, similar to what is practiced by the sociology of knowledge, these more subtle conditions of knowledge made accessible to critical analysis (Schatzki, 2006, p. 316). By relating practice and the contexts of knowledge in which practices are embedded – and which, vice versa, are brought about and changed through practices – a postmodern, constructivist concept of knowledge becomes the basis of empirical analysis. It is particularly interested in “hidden knowledge” influencing and canalizing social action without necessarily being conscious to the respective actors themselves in a specific situation.

By putting similar, systemically operating mechanisms into the center of attention, the degree of (self) reflexivity and thus the epistemological potential of research are improved considerably. Leadership is hence not only described in detail in its coming into being, but the “how” and the underlying mechanisms and dynamics are explained from a perspective which takes into account systemic relationships (Schatzki, 2006, p. 372). Thereby, if nothing else, certain *mental images* of the researchers themselves may come into the focus. For the definition of a social phenomenon (for example “gender”) as a practice is of course also a construction (cf. Gherardi, 2010). Bourdieu has therefore proposed that a “sociology of sociology” and a “science of science and reflexivity” should be central concerns of a (self) critical sociology (Bourdieu, 2006). Compared to traditional concepts this must be considered as another step towards decentering the analytical

perspective which, from an integral point of view, corresponds to the shift from formal to systemic thinking as conceived by the MHC (see above).

Inclusion of Inner Dimensions (Individual and Social Unconscious)

With the aim of bringing analytic light into unconscious processes and mechanisms, the PT also demonstrates greater attention for unconscious or pre-conscious inner and psychic dimensions of the social. For to grasp phenomena of leadership and organization in their complexity, and to experience “the complexity of an organization as it happens in real time” (Schatzki, 2006) also means to live instants, situative constellations and events as series of performative moments more consciously. Organizations are therefore conceived and perceived by practice perspectives as “taking place” (Gherardi, 2010) or as “occurring” (Schatzki, 2006). Hitherto unconscious dimensions and aspects are thus moved into the focus.

This kind of “thick” attention is directed both towards the individual, the social and the organizational unconscious – the two left quadrants in an integral model. In view of the individual unconscious, the PT’s aim is to investigate dimensions like intentionality, identity, authenticity, vulnerability, self and autonomy in depth and in more detail (Carroll/Levy/Richmond, 2008). With the post-modern world view inspired by Heidegger’s concept of “Geworfensein” (being thrown into the world) and being-in-the-world, most practice perspectives also demonstrate, on the one hand, a greater attention for other than merely rational competences, intelligences and modes of being, amongst them emotional, interpersonal and spiritual ones. On the other hand, the analysis of the inner realms of the individual calls for a more precise examination of cognitive processes as they really occur in the context of perception and experience, interpretation and meaning making, as well as a clarification of how which activities are coordinated in what way. In the context of the PT this often happens through qualitative (see below, section on qualitative methods) and quasi-phenomenological case studies or through “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973, Holmberg/Tyrstrup, 2010).

With respect to the social unconscious, practice perspectives aim at making structural sets of everyday practice intelligible as “organizational memory” (Halbwachs, 2004) or as habitual “*modi operandi*” (Bourdieu). In approaches inspired by Halbwachs, organizational memory is understood as a “social version of mind,” as the consciousness of organizations in which memories about “how to do things” are stored. In this context Schatzki (2006, p. 1867) mentions four elements of the “memory of practice”: general understanding, practical understanding, rules and teleological structures. For social actors to grasp similar sets of practices as structures it is important to have a personal experience with respect to how stable and thus how influential the respective rules of “doing things” are in everyday contexts. For, as Chia/Holt (2010) have stressed, the functioning of unconscious dispositions of thinking and doing depends on the experience of inner consistency of action in line with past experiences.

In contrast, approaches inspired by Bourdieu emphasize the habitual components of social practices. The latter function as structured dispositions, similar to the concept of “space of possibility” described by Foucault (1999), framing concrete practices in the sense of a *de facto* functioning operating system (as a “*modus operandi* enabling actors to mindlessly cope with unexpected and changing situations”) or even keeping them “trapped” (Chia/Holt, 2010, p. 645). With

this implicit embeddedness (mostly unconscious to social actors themselves) they provide a certain continuity and stability of the social, also described as “social inertia” by Chia/Holt (2010).

The question how similar socio-cultural dispositions or socio-cognitive operating systems (which we as participants of social spaces of communication need in order to function within those spaces) come into being in the first place is of particular interest in both approaches. So how does consensus about the meaning of certain concepts, terms, cultural values and guiding principles arise at all? How are collectively shared criteria of good leadership attributed, for example? In order to reconstruct the processes through which specific meanings become dominant or even hegemonic, change or transform, a leadership research guided by this conception of practice has to work in a discourse analytical way. According to Chia/Holt (2010, p. 765), it needs to focus on the dynamics and the power relations between competing discourses and their interrelations.

So the inclusion of the dimension of the unconscious does represent another enlargement of perspective in the sense of a higher epistemological complexity as compared to strategic management approaches (where it is hardly present or not at all). However, the overall relation between consciousness, individuality and their social conditions of existence ultimately remains unclear in most practice theories (see critique below, general evaluation). Even though the need to create consistency and congruency of action with past experiences is claimed to be a functional and necessary quality of consciousness, many authors also try to “get rid” of the dimension of consciousness by using alternative concepts such as *habitus* and *Strategy-as-Practice*. In fact, in some texts it appears as if consciousness was considered as a kind of black box that cannot be fully explained and is therefore treated skeptically (Knights/Wilmot, 1992, also Chia/Holt, 2010). Instead, concrete coping strategies observed in the context of social practices are explained as “practical wisdom” and claimed to be simply transferred “silently from body to body” (for a critique see below).

Working with Qualitative Methods

In the course of this shifting of theoretical and epistemological preferences from the “building” to the “dwelling mode,” from “strategy in the center” approaches to “strategy-as-practice (SAP)” ones with their focus on inductive and explorative approximations to concrete real processes, inner worlds, grey shades and improvisations, working with qualitative social science methods understandably becomes more and more important. Even though the complexity of concrete leadership phenomena is indeed difficult to “thickly describe” due to its multidimensionality as Carroll/Levy/Richmond (2008) have correctly noted, qualitative methods such as in depth interviews, participant observation, phenomenological, ethnological or discourse analytical methods are very well suited for doing thick descriptions of external, inner-organizational, as well as of inner, psychological processes and developments. Since qualitative methods focus on understanding (instead of causally explaining) what they analyze, they can help to reconstruct nuances and qualities of engagement and of relations with oneself, with others and with the (organizational) world. Also, the question “how agency is constituted in a web of social practices” can be answered in a methodologically adequate way. On this basis, Vaara/Whittington (2010) are right when they note that qualitative approaches provide “new theoretical resources to strategic management” and contribute to a better understanding of strategic processes.

As a matter of fact, the large number of qualitative case studies in the field of SAP research is striking. An important part of them is working with thick descriptions. With regard to data generation, participant observation, life case descriptions, discourse analysis and action research, SWOT analysis, interview studies (among them group interviews) and self-reflections (for example through diaries of managers; Vaara/Whittington, 2010, p. 293ff.) are the dominating choices. Thereby, the respective approaches try to reconstruct and to understand the reality of life and work of managers and leaders in organizations, as well as their strategies of meaning making *in actu* (for more examples see Gherardi, 2010, p. 120 and Holmberg/Tyrstrup, 2010).

As a mode of analysis, building types, for example when (re-) constructing typical narratives about how leaders view and evaluate their own work, is equally typical for qualitative approaches within the practice field. It is not surprising that in this context, traditional stories of heroic management, i.e. of omnipotent managers in control of every detail in their organization slowly gives room to stories of artists of improvisation who move within and through the everyday jungle of chaos and contradicting challenges in really existing organizations more or less successfully and often rather intuitively. Holmberg/Tyrstrup (2010) have coined the term “well then what now?” for this post-modern managerial *habitus* which can often be found in contemporary organizations. So in this regard, we can equally state a differentiation and thus, an epistemological enrichment of our current image of leadership in/and organizations.

General Evaluation, Achievements and Limitations

So how can the Practice Turn within leadership and organization research be evaluated from an integral perspective, based on criteria such as a holonic understanding of inter-relationalism and emergence, cross-quadrant multi-perspective and multi-method inquiry and developmental complexity? At this point, I wish to recall that the present considerations do not claim to give a comprehensive evaluation of the entire field of practice studies but simply discuss some of the limitations in much of the literature reviewed for this article which appear to be quite obvious done from an integral perspective. One of the aims of this critique is to highlight the surplus value of more integral conceptions of leadership and organization as compared to post-modern ones such as the practice perspective. This can of course only be done in a summarizing and exemplary fashion. Note that some of the following observations and critiques have also been voiced by authors from the field of practice studies themselves as suggestions for future research.

As stated before, the practice and SAP approaches discussed earlier provide a very valuable broadening of research perspectives bringing new, hitherto neglected dimensions of leadership and organization into the focus of analysis. Due to this clear epistemological surplus value and the corresponding greater cognitive flexibility they deserve the label of a “turn.” In the changes of perspective brought about by the practice turn, a number of typically postmodern claims, approaches and concerns are translated into concrete research. As a matter of fact, through the concept of practice, this happens in a quite focused way. However, the perspectives used by many practice approaches still remain under-complex in several respects and could be further developed and differentiated in view of the challenges posed to leadership and organization in a context of global interconnectedness.

Process(ual)ism and Relationalism as New Absolutisms: Throwing out the Baby with the Bath Water?

Even though the PT by its relational perspective and its attention for micro processes does make accessible new and important additional dimensions of analysis, as outlined before, it is in danger of “overshooting the mark” and to throw out the baby with the bath water, just as other theoretical innovations in the past. Certainly, the PT’s insight is correct that leadership activities inside organizations cannot be explained exclusively by the intentions of the leaders (as it is done by methodological individualism), as well as its own claim that leadership phenomena are embedded in multiple relational contexts and webs of relations conditioning and influencing their concrete coming into being. At the same time, some theorists of practice seem to conclude from this that everything has to be dissolved analytically into the relations constituting it. With the dissolution of the opposition of structure and agency, the category of social action itself seems to be dissolved in some cases, getting lost in complex contexts.

Furthermore, in the more radical forms of relationalism the idea of entities is principally considered as epistemologically outdated. Schneider (2013, p. 13) mentions the field of International Relations as an example, in which authors like Jackson and Nexon (1999) have claimed a priority of “relations before states.” Schneider therefore asks to what extent nation states can be (analytically) dissolved into webs of relations. Even if it appears epistemologically meaningful and interesting to think of and analyze international relations *as relations* that are subject to constant change, existing collective entities such as states do not become obsolete by this (see also Bunge, 2000). Rather, we can historically observe how the relevance and importance of particular entities changes, often in result of a change of their interrelations. Consequently there have been “complexes of relations which had a transformative impact on their relata and brought into being new relata,” as Schneider (2013, p. 14) notes – and vice versa. So instead of puristically replacing one by the other (“relations without relata”), both concepts (as cognitive constructs and systems) and their interrelations should be studied in their respective dynamics. Viewed from an integral, developmental epistemology, this could be called a meta-systematic exercise.

Even if the shifts of focus from the “building” to the “dwelling view” might engender new insights, there is a certain danger of a new absolutism and thus, a new reductionism if the dwelling perspective is give the ontological status of a “fundamental priority of processes” (Nexon, 1999, also Schneider, 2013, p. 10), while the principal heuristic value of non-processual categories such as entities is negated. For a discussion of this danger see also the discourse on “processism” in De Cock and Sharp, (2007, p. 246). From an integral perspective, discovering the importance of processes and relations does not render individuals, actors and entities (as the underlying relata) superfluous. Rather than calling for an ontological either or choice between them, a more (self) reflexive, developmental and holonic perspective would come to see both views a complementary approaches, both contributing to our knowledge and understanding of complex phenomena and their dynamic interrelations.

Descriptive Bias, Overestimation of Externally Descriptive Perspectives, Lack of Theory

Another potential bias of the practice perspective is linked with the reductionism mentioned before. As noted before, the PT does offer increases in complexity as compared to classic SM approaches. However, this is true mainly in the sense of a “horizontal” differentiation. For even if the relational – as a systemic – perspective opens up new dimensions of knowledge, it does so, for the time being, primarily via thick descriptions of micro level processes and phenomena. Although it claims to *explain* practices via relations and their interactions (Jarzabkowski/Spee, 2009), many approaches de facto remain in a comparatively descriptive mode. Besides the prominent interest in the micro foundations of social practices, this is especially true for the PT’s treatment of the inner dimensions of social and relational processes. The latter are – on the one hand – mainly addressed via, and thus reduced to their behavioral aspects (upper right quadrant in an integral model). An example is Chia/Holt’s (2010) claim that social action was unreflected and “mindless” while it actually happens, and that therefore what has actually happened – and, my addition: what has been thought along the way could only be reconstructed retrospectively. By conceiving routines as largely unconscious practices, which mostly become objects of reflection only through failures, disappointments, counterproductive results or a “breakdown of organizational functioning,” the actor’s consciousness is treated analytically as a more or less irrelevant dimension. And while some authors do focus on sub- or unconscious and other inner psychological states (e.g. Yiannis Gabriel, 1999, and other psychoanalyst oriented scholars), the structural dimension of consciousness development seems to be absent even in practice approaches that are aware of genetic epistemology, autopoietic systems theory (Grand/Rügg-Stürm/von Arx, 2010), or that focus, for example, on identity change and its impacts on leadership (Johnson/Balogun/Beech, 2010).

So even though practice perspectives with their idea of “beings engaged in exercise” aim at solving the “eternal problem of structure and agency” (Miettinen/Samra-Fredericks/Yanov, 2010), the concept of “prolonging our possibilities of action” through “dwelling with the object” (Chia/Holt, 2006), including material arrangements (Schatzki, 2006), mainly targets external dimensions of social action, while inner subjective and psychological factors largely stay out of the focus. In this respect, the approach is not dissolving the Cartesian subject-object dualism, as argued by Miettinen/Samra-Fredericks/Yanov (2010), but rather represents a material and contextual “prolongation” of the concept of social action. An integral approach, in turn, would propose to transcend the idea of a subject-object dualism by a comprehensive, complementary conception of subjects and objects as entities that are interrelated in multiple ways.

When inner dimensions of social actions are being illuminated mainly by questions such as “how actors construct themselves” or “how classes of actors perceive what they do” they are thus merely reconstructed in a primarily descriptive way. At the same time there is no theoretical model for explaining the respective perceptions and cognitive constructions. The individual – and in particular its relations – are indeed objects of study (Holmberg/Tyrstrup, 2010). The individual’s role as subject of knowledge and insight in its own right, however, remains underexposed or at least theoretically unreflected by limiting the analytical perspective to its embeddedness in specific contexts.

So even if the PT has led to a considerably higher appreciation for qualitative methods, it lacks a resilient theory for actually explaining individual and collective/organizational inner dimensions in a solid and reliable way. The fact that the PT seems to shy away from a more thorough analysis of those inner dimensions – which nevertheless play an important role for the coming into being and the exercise of concrete practices and routines – could be linked to another bias:

Blind Spot: Consciousness (Psychic Structures and Entities)

As mentioned in the previous section, many theorists of practice systematically assume a priority of actions *before* mental representations. On this basis, their tendency to abandon actors as theoretically relevant entities seems consistent (even though actors are perceived as living beings with emotions, motivations, intentions etc.). This happens in favor of descriptions of concrete actions informing a modified concept of strategy. The latter conceives of strategy as consisting of and coming into being through physical being-in-the-world and bodily interaction with the world which are clearly understood as “primary in comparison with knowledge and cognition” (Miettinen/Samra-Fredericks/Yanov, 2010, p. 1313). Sometimes social action is also conceived as “coping” in the sense of a flexible “responsiveness to a situation as it unfolds.” A psychological component, in contrast, is not envisaged within the practice perspective, at least not as a systematic part of its explanatory model. Here we can well state a certain contradiction with its principal plea for integration of unconscious factors, multiple intelligences and competences.

Therefore, the inherent danger practice perspectives are confronted with, given their concern to transcend strategic and motivational perspectives by including contextual and habitual factors, is to “overshoot the mark.” In other words, they have to beware not to make their own focus on context and habitus absolute inversely. If Knights/Willmott (1992), for example stress the social and organizational dimension of leadership, the reader gets the impression that the authors are looking for explanations which exclude the factor of “consciousness,” as if the latter were an outdated category the essence of which was better explained via external factors. Indeed, they stress that those embedding contexts of meaning which all acting individuals are part of, are not a denial of our individuality but their very condition of being. Nevertheless, the different aspects and components of individuality can be found on the analytic agenda only as products of social contexts of practice.

As a result, the relation between individuality and its social conditions of being, standing in the center of attention of practice theories, ultimately remains unclear. From an integral perspective, the strategy of rendering the dimension of consciousness dispensable – which seems to be feared theoretically and/or methodologically as a sort of black box which cannot be fully explained – or to define it out of the explanatory model (Knights/Wilmot, 1992, also Chia/Holt, 2010) creates several problems.

In this conception, practical competences are acquired solely through imitation of the behavior of others (this is called *practical wisdom*, Dreyfus, 2001, p. 48). This theoretical preference can be explained by the rather fragmented, non-linear and occasionally chaotic world view of post-modern theorizing (Holmberg/Tyrstrup, 2010), as well as by the strong assumption of the fundamentally contingent nature of the social. However, not every social practice and not every

coping strategy can be considered to be “practical wisdom” just because it has been passed on “silently from body to body” (Dreyfus, 2001, p. 48, cit. after Chia/Holt, 2010, p. 649; for an overview of research on wisdom see the recent issue of *Integral Review*, vol. 11, 2). Viewed this way, practice research has to be understood primarily as a *research practice*, as a method for describing social practices on the basis of a specific theory and epistemology.

Unfortunately, in the context of this concept of practice theory, standards and criteria for evaluating *qualities* of social action within relations get lost, for example when networks and relations are solely described in a quantitative way, looking at and mathematically determining the number of connections in them, instead of looking for the implicit internal rules and systems of meaning which govern them. By the way, this dilemma has been indirectly conceded by Vaara/Whittington (2012) when they refer to specific orders of knowledge and the practices (re)constructing them as “source of cognitive bias,” in other words as sources of “false consciousness.” However, false consciousness should not exist as a category in a theory which treats consciousness as irrelevant and all contents of actors’ minds as equally valid (as quasi epiphenomena). Therefore the question remains open, what “right” or “correct consciousness” is and how this can be recognized.

In the mental realm of the practice perspective, based on the assumption proposition of a complete contingency of the social, the claim that social action cannot be explained “by reference to rules” is indeed coherent. But as soon as we include psychological and social-psychological factors into the analysis, it becomes clear that most “social operating systems,” *modi operandi* and forms of *habitus* (which also represent systems of rules) are much less contingent and arbitrary than practice theory claims they are. They can rather be explained alongside well known psychological mechanisms.

Discussion

So what are the main limitations and shortcomings of practice perspectives as compared to integral approaches to leadership, and in what way can the latter propose a more comprehensive understanding of leadership practices in organizations? Table 2 illustrates the main differences between post-modern (practice) and integral approaches.

Table 2: Post-modern (practice) and integral approaches to leadership.

	<i>Practice Perspective</i>	<i>Integral Leadership Perspective</i>
(Concept of) Knowledge	Knowledge is never complete and always a social construction → context has to be taken into account We can only know what actually happens (the doings of ...) Claim: Understanding instead of explaining	Knowledge is never complete and always subject to development, ideally towards more comprehensiveness; knowledge is subject to processes of individual and social construction which are framed by structures of cognition and culture
Overall world view	The world is constructed in a non-linear way. It is thus neither possi-	The world is a possibly emerging and regressing holonic entity consisting

	ble to completely explain it nor to plan and control its functioning and development. The latter are to a certain degree chaotic.	of interrelated holons in various dimensions and fields. These can be accessed and analyzed through multi-perspective, cross-field and cross-level methods and heuristics.
	<i>dwelling view of the world</i>	<i>emergence view of the world</i>
Basic epistemological position	Relationism, behavior is always embedded into a web of relations and practices and cannot be studied in an isolated way.	Inter-relationism, social action is the result of inner and outer factors and systems of meaning making on individual, social and cultural levels, the inter-relations and developments of which have to be carefully studied.
Research Options	Both structures and actors are socio-cognitive constructs and can only be understood in their interrelations and interlacement Dynamics and processes of concrete action as it happens (the doing of strategy: who, what, how) Tension between substantialism and relationism	Relations and entities are complementary aspects of an integral holism of inter-relationality Dynamics of action and their structural and (inter) relational conditions Tensions between partial epistemologies are a productive expression of complementarity
Research Methods	Qualitative methods preferred: qualitative interviews, (participant) observation, ethnographic methods, discourse analysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics	Mixed methods research designs, integrated methodological pluralism
What is being analyzed? Perspective on social actors and organizations	- Bundles of practices inside of webs of relations - Consequences of spontaneous human actions, emergences, processes, dynamics - Actual strategic action, consisting of micro-activities, micro-practices of organizing (Weick) and micro-changes	Practices as composed of/constituted by - individual actions, as well as their conscious or unconscious motivations and driving forces - cultural foundations and influences (shared values and knowledge) as enabling and constraining factors - systemic embeddedness in (inter) relations, infrastructures and sets of resources
Concepts and ideals of leadership and organization	- <i>Dwelling view of the world</i> - Strategy emerges unconsciously in everyday social action - Habitus, relational state of an "absorbed interlacement" with the world (cf. Heidegger, Husserl, Wittgenstein) - Motivation is a result of personal	- <i>Facilitating the emergence of individual and collective intelligence</i> - the concept of strategy is replaced by holonic emergence - Social actors/members of organizations are both subjects and objects and have to be considered in a comprehensive way

responsibility → focus on management education - Concepts such as charismatic leadership have to be disenchanting - Action in its coming into being, thoughts and emotions are observed neutrally, as well as the grey shades of everyday life	- Good leadership as a question of personal complexity development and intercultural competences - More traditional concepts of leadership and strategy are valid and meaningful in their own right in specific contexts while integral leadership aims at facilitating a maximum comprehensive approach serving the emergence of individual and collective intelligence
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The holonic increase in complexity and thus, the epistemological surplus value of integral perspectives can be illustrated with regard to two interrelated aspects: ontology of holonic emergence and rather differentiated multi-level approach to developmental complexity and its implications on leadership in organizations. While one of the important achievements of practice perspectives is their ability to “thickly describe” (Geertz, 1973) practices, relational constellations and processes within the realm of leadership and organization, they fall short of systematically explaining the dynamics of their interaction. Based on the relativist ontology of the PT, the latter can only be done in a more or less arbitrary and thus incomplete way. In fact, this seems to be the reason why the concept of contingency – filling this gap – plays such an important role in post-modern theories.

Viewed from an integral perspective, the most important blind spot of the practice perspective and its contextual epistemology is that it limits itself to grasping mainly horizontal plurality and complexity, thereby misconceiving the fact that socio-cultural, just as cognitive “operating systems” can – as systems – also be differentiated vertically. Viewed this way, these systems also have the character of (invisible) entities which can be reconstructed analytically, namely functional or cognitive-cultural entities as proposed by structuralist developmental theories. Those vertically differentiated entities which integral developmental theory helps to understand as more or less complex holons might not determine all social action, but they do canalize and pre-structure it, speaking with Foucault, in a limiting or enabling way.

Even if they do this, for the most part, in a way that remains unconscious to the respective social actors, this does not mean that it happens arbitrarily. On the contrary, cognitive structures and systems operate in a rule-based manner which can be identified by trained observers. They can thus not only be described but also predicted in a theoretically relevant way (Kegan/Lahey, 2009, Fein/Weibler, 2014). Admittedly, we are dealing with psychic rules here, calling for a theory of mind as it is offered, for example, by the corpus of adult development theory. On this basis, different qualities of relations can, for instance, be allocated with specific degrees of cognitive differentiation or increasingly complex stages of personal, cultural or organizational development. Furthermore particular rules can be identified with regard to relational phenomena on specific levels of development, such as networks of patronage or corruption (on earlier stages), which would not be functional on other (later) stages of development such as in modern or post-modern organizations.

In fact, some authors rooted in the practice perspective like Schneider (2013, p. 9) acknowledge this fundamental limitation, for example when he calls for a consequent meta-perspective, just as integral approaches would do. At the same time, even though he occasionally concedes that the whole is more than the sum of the parts, he unfortunately associates the term “holism” with a simple collectivism in which “the whole determines the parts and where individual action is an effect of social structures and processes (Schneider 2013, p. 9). While he considers the relational ontology as being just as reductionist as a one-sided individualism or institutionalism, Schneider implies that a more comprehensive approach should transcend similar reductionisms. So while he rightly calls for a “moderate relationalism in which entities exist out of their own right,” he does not provide a coherent model of explanation in this regard, just as practice perspectives in general. Structures of vertical complexity are lacking in this conception. They are not seen which is why there is no solid theoretical ground for explaining differences and mechanisms of functioning of specific relations and contexts of practice.

At this point, integral approaches go a large step further. By systematically integrating the dimension of consciousness in its structural, vertical complexity into their epistemology, concrete processes, relational constellations and dynamics of leadership and organization can be understood as results of a holonic interplay of horizontal *and* vertical structures, inter-relations and entities, in other words as holonic inter-relationalities. Moreover, a comprehensive integral understanding of practice shows how practices in organizations holonically comprise processes and structures that are simultaneously autonomous and dependent, characterized by differentiation (generation of variety) and integration (generation of coherence). It looks at them as constituted by individual and collective holons, each with their insides and outsides, either tending to a more ‘subjective’ or a more ‘objective’ identity. Integrating the inner psychic spheres and the external, behavioral aspects as well as the corresponding collective embedment within an organizational community and culture along with the external structural-functional realms allows to relate and assess them together in view of a multi-domain, cross-level and cross-quadrant analysis of social practices and their changes and developments in organizations (Küpers/Weibler, 2008, 447). More so, on the basis of a more differentiated understanding of those interrelations, they can also be actively constructed and configured more successfully. Relations and entities are thus coordinated as equally important systems and tools of explanation in a meta-systematic way and combined towards a new paradigm of holonic inter-relationality.

Thereby, integral approaches to leadership and organization, as compared to post-modern ones not only offer an epistemological, but also a considerable practical surplus value in view of their application and implementation in real life leadership contexts and challenges. They therefore constitute a paradigm shift in the field of leadership and organization studies which might still be marginal as compared to the current (mainly post-modern) mainstream in the field, but are likely to gain momentum in the future. Therefore, it is not surprising that integral and developmentally based approaches are increasingly received and used within the field of leadership and organization studies (Bradbury, 2003, Cacioppe/Albrecht, 2000, Cacioppe/Edwards, 2005a and 2005b, McCauley/Drath/Palus/O’Connor/Baker, 2006, Lucas, 2012, Pauchant, 2002, 2005, Prewitt, 2004, Reams, 2005, Rooke/Torbert, 1998, Vincent/Ward/Denson, 2015, and Volckmann, 2005).

Conclusion: Transcending Postmodern Relationism through Integral Inter-relationality

So what can we conclude from the previous discussion of the merits and limitations of practice approaches to leadership studies based on an integral perspective? Given the theoretical preferences and the analytic qualities of approaches inspired by the Practice Turn discussed above, the latter appears as a rather typical post-modern theory perspective. Considering its interest for the workings of communication in a plurality of contexts, and for the many faces of micro functioning of relations and systems through embodied sets of practices, its epistemological features and complexity clearly transcend the formal and rather linear logic (MHC stage # 10) of modern science. Therefore, it can probably best be explained as a form of systemic thinking in terms of stage # 11 of the Model of Hierarchical Complexity (Commons, 2008). For even though practice perspectives largely propose an antifoundational and relativist ontology, skeptical of comprehensive models of social order, they do look out for complex webs and systems of relations which explain social action as it happens.

Indeed, similar variations of systemic thinking represent the current epistemological state-of-the-art in much of mainstream social science, including leadership and organization studies. For example while, practice theorists promote to combine a large number of different perspectives and subject positions, and thus, a certain epistemological pluralism (“practice-based and institutional level analysis can complement each other;” Jarzabkowski/Spee, 2009, p. 89), they usually do not make a step towards a cross-paradigmatic epistemology and research. This, in turn, would require a meta-systematic perspective and mode of inquiry as described by stage # 12 of the MHC and above, which coordinates various systems with each other from a higher level of abstraction and is thus able to illuminate the inherent, mostly implicit structures and rules of functioning and meaning making by which particular systems are governed. This meta-systematic view is mostly missing in practice perspectives, as well as in large parts of the social sciences to date. However, the increasing attention for developmentally informed approaches is a good sign.

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