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## Leadership as a Profession: A Special Case Dependent on Organizational Ownership, Governance, Mission and Vision

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### Introduction

This chapter is written from the standpoint that is against the idea of turning “management” or “leadership” as general categories into a profession. The management element of the practice can only be professionalized, we will argue, on the basis of specific human-centered values and purpose in the leadership element of that practice. Such professional practice can only be applied in the context of a field of social action that itself has a human-centered purpose concerned with human *emancipation*. The flight of capital to authoritarian regimes and to countries that either have not signed up to important UN and ILO conventions on labor standards and human rights, or where there is weak compliance, is evidence of the gap between the business school rhetoric and the reality of business practice. People need professional leadership to get free of those things, forces and classes that limit realization of their individual potentialities. Organizations like co-operatives, credit unions, trade

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unions and other not-for-profit organizations delivering food and commodity production, health services, housing, education, and social economy services are some of the fields of social action and opportunities for association where leadership and management could be turned into a genuine profession.

Outside the context of ownership and purpose, the language of professionalism relating to management is essentially misleading. Human Resource Management, for example, is not human-centered but a capital-centered activity, yet the British “professional” association, The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), would claim to be human-centered and a profession. To be a profession there needs to be a human-centered ethic driving the knowledge base and techniques. If one is serving a capital-based organization, then the human element is only considered from a purely instrumental standpoint. In this approach one can certainly argue to be good to people is good business, but that’s not being ethical, just manipulative or recognizing pragmatically the human elements’ countervailing power to that of the organization.

J.C. Spenders’ essay (Spender 2007, pp. 32–42) on management as a regulated profession commences with a discussion of professionalism in terms of specific disciplines. His definition of a discipline is a group of people whose practice is shaped by training and credentialing against a proven and rigorous body of knowledge (Spender 2007, p. 33). This definition avoids the issue of purpose and runs into the reality that management covers too wide a range of activities and contexts. The guild model is also seen to be a poor fit for the development of a regulated management profession for similar reasons (Iñiguez 2010, pp. 10–11). Spender recognizes that management is an awkward fit in terms of a specific discipline and seeks to utilize instead the metaphor of manager as artist to find a model of educational accreditation from which to professionalize management (Spender 2007, p. 36). This artist metaphor assumes a “re-imagined management community of creative professionals” supported by management education geared to the formation of such a community based upon an education for creativity. Spender’s concluding definition of management as a profession is so full of qualifications and vague admonitions such as “serious”, “communicative”, “reflexive”, “hard work”, “consideration of impact on others” (Spender 2007, p. 40) that it hardly

seems a basis for measuring standards of practice or accrediting knowledge. Khurana and Nohria (2008) approach professionalization from the idea of establishing ethical standards for management actions and suggest a management version of the Hippocratic Oath supported by a series of vows and promises (Khurana and Nohria 2008, pp. 72–3). However, they provide no analytic basis or tool to assist managers to decide how they should apply the vows and the promises inherent in a code of conduct or handle the conflicting interests that arise in the world of business. Certainly Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian calculation (MacIntyre 1991, p. 234) raises too many ethical questions concerning the treatment of minorities to be worth serious consideration. The golden rule cannot be applied in capitalist relationships either, as the objective of commercial success inevitably leads to the ruin of others with no possible means of guaranteeing even the greatest good for the greatest number. Duty ethics also raises more questions than answers when looked from a stakeholder management perspective.

Contrary to these approaches, this chapter presents the idea of a profession as an association incorporating and dispensing knowledge and skills whose core values and purpose is the basis for *a vocation for human emancipation*. Emancipation uncovers hidden truths, enabling human beings to achieve their potentialities. It is a model that requires its own typology if a professional practice and a professional association is to be established. The author will illustrate his approach with an analysis based upon the Co-operative Movement to justify and define an ideal-type "co-operative leader" in terms of the differentiating elements found in the Co-operative Movements' ideas, history and contemporary identity that fits the above definition of profession. The ideal type to be constructed is closest to Weber's concept of a theoretically conceived pure type arising from normative action where the actor is not merely responding to stimuli but making an effort to conform to an ideal pattern of conduct (Parsons 1947, p. 12). Weber's ideal types are not therefore classifications but a methodology for explanation applied in specific fields of social action (Rosenberg 2015, p. 86).

The case for an ideal type co-operative leader is grounded in the ideological consistency of co-operations vision which brings it into positions that present questions in terms of the writing on legitimation/compliance

and resistance by Max Weber and Michael Foucault. Although the discussion is conducted around the co-operative case, the points at issue are relevant to all forms of professional leadership that could be established on the basis of the standpoint taken here. The adoption of Weber's ideal type approach applied to co-operatives does not imply that co-operative leadership or any truly emancipatory professional leadership as a sociological type is concerned with legitimating dominance predicated on the basis of values that facilitate domination (Rosenberg 2015, p. 98). Neither does it participate in Foucault's axis of subjectification (Simons 1995, p. 2). On the contrary, the ideal type co-operative leadership is legitimated by the cause of emancipation and the leader's personal vocation to that cause. Leadership that is not concerned with the emancipation of those being led cannot be considered professional. Leaders whose knowledge and purpose remains *hidden* from those being led are lacking in transparency and integrity. Their claim to be professional lacks legitimacy and their application of knowledge and skill either mercenary or egocentric, or both.

The ideal type is a template to judge leaders. It helps selection processes for managers and CEO's of all human-centred organizations. It aids the development of affective domain teaching and learning strategies and materials supporting leadership development. It provides a goal against which to judge the organizations' overall performance *as a human-centred organization; in this case a co-operative one*. The CEO's leadership values and vision are recognized to play a critical role determining organizational culture (for a review of this literature see Daft 2005, part 5; Jackson and Parry 2008, ch. 3). Paradoxically the nature of the CEO for human-centred or social economy organizations, particularly co-operative ones, receives hardly any attention in academic research (Cornforth 2015, p. 95). Yet the "hidden truth" of managerialism, and the threat of memberships' or clients' continued subjugation that a manager's practice could impose, remains an implicit theme in the co-operative literature on governance and identity. In all professional practice there remains Foucault's challenge that knowledge confers power which leads to domination not liberation (Rabinow 1991, pp. 6–7).

An ideal type professional leader uncovers these hidden truths and defends organizational purpose, identity and governance. This type of

professional leader can be formulated with different emphasis in other non-co-operative human-centred fields of social action concerned with public service delivery in areas such as health, housing transport and of course education, but only in the context of publically owned or not for profit/social economy organizations.

## Professional Leadership as Liberating Not Subjugating

In Foucault's early *Archaeological* period his focus was to seek examples to explore rules *unknown* to the actors which regulate their behaviors and practices (Burrell 1998, pp. 15–17, 22). An example of this within the co-operative movements' practice today is their "civil service" model of governance which implicitly accepts "management science" as a neutral servant of the elected board, rather than as Foucault would see, management as *subjectification* (Simons 1995, p. 2) and before him Weber's view of management and leadership legitimation as establishing "patterns of rationality" (Parsons 1947, p. 12) *in a quest for an imposed order*, and Michels' (1962) concern with the *leaders' power of subversion*. With all three writers, leadership's connection to management is an essentially *political process*. The failure to take account of this has left co-operatives and other social human-centered organizations vulnerable to dilution/distortion and in the co-operative case, demutualization from within.

Foucault's response to the limitations and hidden controls of professionals in the field that he analyzed was to propose an "ethic of permanent resistance" (Simons 1995, p. 6). Should this apply to co-operatives? It is an important precondition to our case for a special co-operative leadership model that we demonstrate that these co-operative principles applied to leadership *do not* articulate Foucault's "strategically codified field of knowledge" upon which management's "normalizing gaze" exerts control of its subjects (Ball and Carter 2002, p. 552). The *raison d'être* of co-operative principles is to build solidarity or universality and commonwealth as power *against* domination (Foucault 1991a, p. 377). Thus co-operative principles provide *measures of the leader's performance*—co-operative leaders do not control but mobilize. In terms of democratic

governance *they* are controlled and judged. Foucault admits as a *critical principle* the possibility of collective action as consensus, but raises the problem of *unsanctioned* power relationships that inevitably exist because any organization will provide such opportunities (Foucault 1991a, pp. 378–9). Foucault concedes that even if an unrealizable fiction, the pursuit of consensus (the common good) might pragmatically bring about better results than any alternative but urges to always question the degree of non-consensus that exists and whether it can be justified.

Whilst wanting to identify with those writers who justify collective action as the exercise of power *against* domination, there is another defense that can be made for the co-operative position, which goes to the heart of Foucault's philosophy of permanent resistance. For Foucault, resistance is ultimately an *individual* exercise. Foucault sees subjugation as a different form of domination or limitation from "ordering" (Foucault 1991a, pp. 379–80). This I interpret to be a reference to domination based upon the individual's repression of self-identity and/or the imposition of others' morality and personality. In defense against this sort of subjugation, Foucault advocates an undefined and presumably therefore unlimited liberty (Simons 1995, p. 5).

Foucault's project is to negate all limitations whilst allowing there can be "consensual disciplines" (Foucault 1991a, p. 380). This means his principle of permanent resistance is a project limited to the individual. Co-operation as a strategy depends on solidarity, but as a goal its vision is one of emancipation ultimately for individuals. Co-operators agree with Foucault's call for permanent resistance against unnecessary and inhuman limitations. The co-operative emphasis, however, is on both the value of working together and the aim of enabling individuals to reach out and achieve their *potentialities*, and on this later point Foucault is silent. Co-operation proposes the establishing of the human-centered focus of liberation from the "controlling discourses" *through solidarity in the struggle for a future vision*. Contrary to Foucault, co-operators recognize we cannot escape limitations but we can realize our *potentialities*, which is for Aristotle the only true good we can aspire to (Lear 1988, pp. 19–22).

Co-operations' morality goes beyond consensual disciplines resulting from the power exercised against domination to the assertion of our individual dignity, which is fundamental for human freedom. Yet Foucault

asserts “Nothing is fundamental” (Foucault 1991b, p. 247). Co-operators insist on the *eternal* dignity of the individual that is grounded in humanities’ truest or most perfect expression of selfhood, which is *the ability to give ourselves*; not out of fear, instruction or indoctrination, but according to the rule of love (agape). To be in Foucault’s “ethic of permanent resistance” to the rule of love is simply an act of self-destruction—a denial of our defining human potential to love.

Co-operation provides an eschatological, moral and social framework that is certainly compatible with Christianity *but is not confined to it*. Co-operation, like Catholic social doctrine, *is a necessarily secular statement*, an invitation to *all* women and men of goodwill to join together not for conformity, as Foucault fears in “unbearable group pressure” within a utopian community (Foucault 1991b, p. 247), but for the exercise of *citizenship*. It is a universal invitation to all, whatever personal rules they adhere to, to work together for the emancipation of the individual to be free to pursue their personal potentialities. This is the ultimate goal for all professional leaders in whatever field of social action they practice. All professionals aim to provide the health, the education, the built environment, the materials and the technologies to enable the individual to be free to realize their potentialities. The co-operative business model is one that in its intention and ownership model can facilitate this professional goal without conflict of interest/objectives.

## **Co-operative Purpose and Principles: An Ideological Statement Informing Co-operative Professional Leadership**

Catherine Webb’s account of the first UK Co-operative Congresses between 1830 and 1832 (Webb 1904, p. 58) identifies the movement’s original statements of aims and values, including the unity of all forms of co-operative to work together for the united co-operative commonwealth. Brett Fairbairn (1994), writing on the Rochdale Pioneers’ objectives and principles established in the 1840s and later revised in the 1850s, provides evidence for the continuity with the 1830s. Catherine Webb, in 1904, looking back on two decades of growth in all aspects of co-operation,

wrote “The last twenty years form an ‘Era of Expansion’ of the Co-operative Commonwealth” (Webb 1904, p. 10). The Commonwealth dreamed of by co-operators in the 1830s, through the 1900s until today, is a society in which the means of production and distribution are in the ownership and democratic control (one member, one vote) of associations of members operating with open access, voluntary membership, education (as an end as much as a means), and where wealth is accumulated for investment for the common good and distributed on the basis of use, not capital. Development, peace, sustainability and fraternity arise because all co-operative associations are committed to co-operating with each other and to the building up of a society based on fraternity and universality. The vision gets lost, but as the literature referenced here indicates, there have always been prominent leaders and intellectuals calling for renewal (see, for example, Barnes 1926; Goedhart 1928/1995; Mercer 1931/1995; Carr-Saunders et al. 1938; Cole 1947; Garnett 1966; Backstrom 1974; and for a detailed dictionary of the key historical figures and organizations 1870 to 1997 see Shaffer 1999).

In her history of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) between 1910 and 1950, reviewing the ICA’s work across two world wars and the Cold War, Rita Rhodes poses the question—what was it that enabled the ICA as a working-class organization to remain united when its sister organizations, the trade unions at the international level, split along the lines of the global conflicts (Rhodes 1995)? Rhodes concluded that one key feature was the lack of nationalism or chauvinism in the delegates who made up the alliances’ collective leadership (Rhodes 1995, p. 386). She quotes the French co-operator Fauquet as being correct to describe the co-operative spirit that permeates co-operatives as a living organism—a shared set of beliefs leading to toleration and goodwill between members (Rhodes 1995, p. 386). Rhodes notes that:

...delegates to ICA meetings and Congresses appeared to think of themselves first as Co-operators and secondly as Britons, French, Swedes or other nationalities. (Rhodes 1995, p. 378)

We find in the 1995 issue of the *Review of International Co-operation*, the journal republished the 1928 paper by Goedhart, and the 1931 paper



by Mercer. Referring back to the Rochdale Pioneers in the 1840s, Goedhart, having noted how much the movement had become erroneously trapped in the conception of co-operation as being purely for the pursuit of economic ends, wrote:

The aims of the promoters of the co-operative idea at the time were much broader; they emphasised the great necessity of building up slowly, but continuously, a new moral world and a better system of society. (Goedhart 1928/1995, p. 7)

At the end of his paper, the former president of ICA wrote:

It is undeniable that as long as the members and leaders of Co-operative Societies of the whole world fail to realise that the Co-operative Movement is the best and noblest way to raise human society to a higher level, that is to say, so long as they do not see in their membership of the Co-operative Movement a moral command to the utmost minute of loyalty to the co-operative ideal, the attainable satisfaction and joy in our principles will not be realised. (Goedhart 1928/1995, p. 10)

Thomas William Mercer, referring to the Rochdale Co-operative Society principles of the 1840s, wrote in 1931:

...no man or woman who wished to join their number was ever shut out. Here is a fact of immense significance. Behind it lays the greatest principle mankind will ever discover—the Principle of Universality...Before the impact of that principle all the barriers of race, colour, creed, class and party are broken down. (Mercer 1931/1995, pp. 11–12)

For Foucault and many others today, we would add to that list sexual identity, as well as people with physical and mental disabilities. In this principle of universality, co-operatives have the facility for all to express themselves and not be limited in that expression except by the need not to harm others. Universality offers a clear protection against Foucault's valid concern with subjugation. It is important to distinguish here between universality or openness of membership to all humankind, which requires toleration and freedom of difference, to one of forced

agreement with difference. Here liberalism becomes an instrument of dominance. Free expression of belief is essential for the authentic practice of education, which is another key principle of co-operative identity. In a co-operative practicing universality, there will always be a tension between the right of self-expression and identity and the right to criticize. The resolution of this tension depends ultimately on empathetic understanding of the other and acting on that empathy in expressing one's own views (Natale et al. 2017).

Mercer looked forward to the establishment of other international co-operative wholesale, banking, transport institutions, which

...one day is needed to sustain the structure of the International Co-operative Commonwealth. (Mercer 1931/1995, p. 14)

Protecting this wider view of the co-operative purpose was a significant motivation for the review of co-operative values and principles, leading to the adoption of a new ICA *Statement of Co-operative Identity* (MacPherson 1995). The author of the preliminary report investigating the need for a review of ICA Principles (International Co-operative Alliance 1995), Sven Åke Bòðk, a former member of the Swedish Co-operative Advisory Board, wrote:

We need to be in agreement about future global perspectives, because co-operatives have as much as ever to contribute to the future of mankind. With this in mind global solidarity should be considered as the fundamental basic principle. (Bòðk 1992, p. 6)

## Co-operative Leader: An Ideal Type for a Co-operative Future

Rosenberg (2015) insists that Weber's sociological ideal types:

...reflect their specific elements, which can be tentatively summarized as (1) configurations of *generally* intended subjective meaning to which

(2) modes of *recurrent* social action are oriented, in the context of (3) *communal* or *associative* social relationships. (Rosenberg 2015, p. 85)

We have argued above that co-operation demonstrates a historical phenomenon with a generally accepted social philosophy (subjective meaning) influencing recurrent social actions, oriented towards communal or associative social relationships upon which a clearly differentiated model or ideal type of leadership legitimation can be constructed. Both in its morality and in its processes, co-operations' alternative business model carries within it an *alternative* political order for regulating conflict (Rosenberg 2015, p. 95). An alternative political order requires its own ideal type of leadership embedded in its distinct mode of *recurrent* social action oriented, in this case, towards a *co-operative social movement for the Co-operative Commonwealth*.

The idea of leadership types mirroring types of governance is not a new idea. In the *Politics* Aristotle discusses different classifications of *polis* and their types of leader but also wrote concerning the importance of associations in the wider *politeia*—one way of translating this is as civil society. Aristotle saw these associations as being able to engage in positive ways to improve the lot of those living within the *polis* and even to produce peaceful change in the *polis* itself (Aristotle 1962, p. 195). Aristotle argued the success of any form of *polis* required a supportive *politeia* made up of various associations and the formation of a leadership and citizenship with the appropriate attitudes and values to match the type of government exhibited by the *polis* (Aristotle 1962, pp. 215–16). Aristotle's definition of citizenship is that the citizen is a person who *participates* in government and he recognized that this definition best suited the democratic form of government (Aristotle 1962, p. 102).

Co-operative leadership and management is vocation for human emancipation measured by the realization of co-operative member's level of citizenship in the *existent* Co-operative Commonwealth. That is, the degree that the member has engaged with co-operative spirit, its ambition and vision, as being actively generated within the current co-operative organization. The degree members see themselves as Co-operators. The ideal type for such embedded co-operative leadership we define in the paragraph below.

## Co-operative Leadership

*Legitimation is rooted in commitment to the vision of the Co-operative Commonwealth, and its values and principles. Co-operative leadership is always based on transparency and the communication of truth. It is a co-operative value-based leadership committed to the engagement, development and mobilization of members and other stakeholders in the governance, commercial, educational, and wider social and joint co-operative activities of the co-operative, credit union or trade union to which they belong.*

To elaborate, a co-operative leader is first and foremost committed to implementing the co-operative vision by gradual, peaceful but transformational co-operative strategies. They explore in all the day-to-day operations of the co-operative or credit union ways to move the wider project forward, in collaboration with other co-operatives and associations, particularly trade unions, which as democratic associations of workers, can be won for the cause of co-operative production. Some trade unions in the UK even had “co-operative production” in their aims and objectives, and in France in 1828 a society named *The Duty* combined both trade union and consumer co-operative functions (Lambert 1963, p. 205).

Co-operative leadership is always expressed in terms of a prophetic analysis of the contemporary context applied to the attainment of the co-operative vision. Co-operative leaders will measure their own success by the degree they achieve member engagement in the commercial, governance, educational and wider social and inter co-operative activities of their co-operative, recognizing *all these dimensions to be of equal importance as part of a leadership strategy.*

In their personal morality, co-operative leaders, particularly in the role of CEO, will seek to keep their remuneration within a ratio that does not distort their solidarity with the members and staff and is equitable. Truth is the essential foundation of moral discourse (Davis et al. 2017). This implies not giving false information or non-disclosure of information that harms the interests of stakeholders. It is in competitive markets within this moral compass acceptable not to disclose information to protect decisions to purchase, invest and to protect patents, inventions ingredients etc. But all decisions/information in the co-operative context must be shared with the elected board for their independent evaluation.

A co-operative leader does not seek to control but rather to *defend* the co-operative in terms of its ideals, values and vision. They *moderate* the democratic decisions on the equitable retention for development and distribution to all stakeholders of resources in a manner that promotes the fulfillment of the co-operative vision and values. They gradually build up the Co-operative Commonwealth of the future in the present. What is the measure that will best demonstrate the successful co-operative leader? It is the quality of *citizenship* within the co-operative association. This depends on the quality of the citizen, which is always a combination of character, education, vision, potential and opportunity. The leader's role is to ensure the co-operative provides the education, the vision and the opportunity. The member brings their character, their potential and their needs. The successful co-operative ensures that in meeting needs, it also provides those educational opportunities for vision to prompt character, and character to realize potential. The individual with the vision and character to strive to reach their potential who has the opportunities to do so and who wants the same for their co-citizens is an emancipated citizen. It is not freedom without limits, but freedom to be all we can be.

## Conclusion

The idea of professional leadership presented here may, to the general reader and indeed even to many committed to the co-operative cause, be read as hopelessly idealistic. But what should we be aiming for in leadership if not the highest possible ethical standards and the clearest commitment to the emancipation of those for whom the leader acts? No amount of codes, and no matter how creative the model of management education we can come up with, can create a professional practice in such broad-based categories of human activity as management and leadership. Technical skill and knowledge must have as their goal the further emancipation of humanity and the defining of this as a professional practice can only be within a specific field of social action in which this skill, knowledge and purpose combines. Co-operative leadership is one example of such a profession.

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