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## **AESTHETIC LEADERSHIP KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION**

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### **Abstract**

We wish to develop the argument in this paper that aesthetic way of knowing has a potential to better understand the relationship between academic leadership theory and practical action. By doing so, we challenge the mainstream, cognitive leadership theory that seems to reinforce the existence of the gap between theory and practice.

### **What constitutes academic knowledge in leadership theory?**

Mainstream leadership theory draws largely on cognitive understanding of knowledge, as depicted in classical textbooks, such as Yukl (2002), Whetten and Cameron (1998), Quinn, Faerman, Thompson and McGrath (1996). Mainstream leadership theory treats knowledge production mainly as an intellectual and mindful activity, where the mind is abstracted from the body and personal experiences. It offers the role of knowledge producer only to the researcher. Researchers are seen as the prime knowledge producers whereas the practitioners merely remain as consumers of knowledge. The researchers' and practitioners' roles are separate and isolated from each other. These are the traditional positions given to the researchers and the practitioners in the mainstream normative leadership literature. The researcher is the knower and the practitioner the one that needs to be told to. The mainstream leadership literature takes the tone of knowing better, presenting normative propositional knowledge what leadership is, what leadership qualities, and how effective leaders need to behave.

Leadership is traditionally seen as an individual activity that aims to clarity and logical determination. Enlightening example of this line of thinking is an organization chart, seemingly organized collection of boxes that remain rather unproblematized and oversimplified. The boxes have usually names and titles, but no pictures, no relationships, no activity. Sometimes an organization is "given a face" by putting the portraits of the staff into the chart, but the structure of the chart is always the same, a hierarchy: one box on the top and the others in neat descending, ever more crowded

rows below. But where is the action? Where is the practice? Where are the living, interacting people with their bodies, histories, and experiences?

Traditional leadership knowledge emphasizes cognitive, mindful activity that takes place merely in the leader's mind as meticulous logical reasoning. Leader is obviously the prime knowledge producer here. On the contrary to the leadership ethos of being a social process, it is not conceptually constituted as a corporeal phenomenon that is constructed in relationships and interaction between people, the leader and the followers where the leader and the followers could both be seen as simultaneous knowledge producers and consumers.

From the mainstream perspective, also the researcher is given the knower role. The leaders are seen as practitioners and the researchers as knowledge producers. The academic knowledge production is considered to take place in different time and space than its consumption. According to this line of thinking, the researcher and the practitioners do not get involved in an equal relationship where knowledge would be mutually produced and consumed in interaction. It appears that the gap between leadership theory (knowledge production) and organizational practice (knowledge consumption) arises from the cognitive perspective to knowledge production. This perspective actually seems to construct and re-enforce the gap between theory and practice.

**Practitioners and researchers as partners in developing aesthetic leadership knowledge**

From the academic perspective the aesthetic way of knowing has to do with researchers and practitioners being present at the same time in the same space, interacting with one another, simultaneously producing and consuming knowledge. Production and consumption of aesthetic way of knowing takes place in mundane interactions and everyday practices of people (Hosking, 1999; Ropo & Parviainen, 2001; Sauer, 2005). Aesthetic knowledge depends largely on sensing and feeling, on empathy and intuition (Ramirez, 2005). People's bodily experiences become central in aesthetic way of knowing. By aesthetic way of knowing we mean sensuous perception and knowing in and through the body (e.g., Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In the aesthetic knowledge development the notion of gap between theory and practice seems to become irrelevant.

The aesthetic perspective to organizations and management originated in late 1980s, mainly as a protest to the positivist and rational paradigm that dominated organization and management thinking (e.g., Gagliardi, 1992; Ramirez, 1987; Strati, 1999). Examples of foci have been, among other things: organizational artefacts, such as architecture, logos, brands, office space, and material (Holger & Holmberg, 2002; Paalumäki, 2004).

The aesthetic way of knowing has hardly been acknowledged in leadership research. Recently, a few scholars have taken up the challenge to develop an aesthetic perspective to leadership and organizing (e.g. Meisiek, 2007; Ropo, Parviainen, & Koivunen, 2002).

Simultaneously interest in arts organizations grew among management scholars to exploit the opportunity to learn more about leading people in creative settings, such as orchestra, film, and theatre (e.g. Chiapello, 1998; Koivunen, 2006; Köping, 2003; Ropo & Sauer, 2003; Sauer, 2005; Soila-Wadman, 2003; Taylor, 2002; Wennes, 2002). Art organizations inherently represent aesthetic perspective. They provide a prime forum to study leadership challenges that are encountered in many postmodern organizations today. These can best be addressed by way of aesthetics.

How is aesthetic leadership theory and practice constructed? We propose that aesthetic leadership knowledge production and consumption are not separate from each other. While the practitioners and the researchers interact, the researcher does not merely gather data as an objective observer, but she actively participates to construct leadership in time and space. The researcher sees, hears and feels and maybe even “smells” how leadership is done. The researcher’s own emotions and experiences play a role in the process.

Both the study of organizational artifacts and art organizations have given a new direction to leadership research by emphasizing the role of aesthetic knowledge in leadership theory. In art organizations, such as theatres and orchestras the outcome, a play or a concert, is co-produced and co-consumed together with the players, actors, leaders and the audience. As researchers, we have become co-producers and co-consumers of the artistic outcome. At the same time, the ‘subjects’ of the research become co-producers and co-consumers of academic knowledge.

Based on the above line of thinking we argue in this paper that aesthetic leadership knowledge is co-produced and co-consumed simultaneously. Thus, aesthetic epistemology has a potential to bridge leadership theory and practice. Academic theory and practical action are no more separate entities. We will illustrate this in an empirical example in a theatre context.

### **The researcher and the practitioners in action**

The first author of this paper has been actively involved in studying leadership in a theatre context. Her personal account (Sauer, 2005) on leadership knowledge production and consumption process follows:

*Eleven years ago I was able to do five semi-structured interviews with actors, a director and theatre managers in Tampere Theatre, being very careful not to lose the 'poker face' of a trained researcher. At the time, I was working at the theatre, so it was quite easy to approach the directors, who are the gatekeepers to their ensembles. I quickly learned it was not self-evident at all to gain access to the group. I was turned down once, because the director did not want to disturb the sensitive process, even though I had planned to do the interviews outside the working hours. Another director accepted my request and I was able to interview her and two of the actors. This play did not turn out very well. The rehearsal process was quite stormy: everybody felt quite disappointed with it and also with the result. The play was withdrawn from the repertoire only a few weeks after the premiere, as it did not attract the audience as expected and the actors felt uncomfortable performing it.*

*In the winter 2003, I did observant participation in an ensemble in the other of our local theatres, TTT. At the time I was living in the USA. I called the director two months before the process was about to start to ask if I could come and watch them rehearse. He accepted immediately, so I traveled from the USA to Finland to sit at the rehearsals for twice a day from 10 am to 2 pm and again from 5 pm to 9 pm, for two weeks. I also did interviews with the director and all of the actors in the play.*

*I was more informed of constructionist paradigm, reflecting my own position, paying attention to the unsaid, undone, to the atmosphere, to the silly details, hierarchies and feelings. As I came in for the first time, the group greeted me as if it was part of the play that someone sat at the audience. I also spent time with them socially. By accident, the first day I was doing the observing, a Scottish playwright, Gregory Burke, whose play was on the repertoire performed by the same actors I was observing, came to see his own play. The group was invited to have dinner with him afterwards, and maybe, as I had come over from the USA, and was expected to speak fluent English, was invited by the actors and the director to join them.*

*It was a nice evening. During the next days I was told and I also felt myself that sitting in the audience was a natural thing for me to do. It did not bother them: in fact, they seemed to be glad of my presence. The rehearsals were entertaining to look at: the group got their knickers in a twist time and time again. They told me they were actually quite tired and quite nervous, since the rehearsal period was intensive and short. Despite their anxiety, the play turned out to be a success, both financially and artistically. The critics as well as the audience liked and it was kept in the repertoire almost a year.*

*In the fall 2004 I was given a chance to jump straight into the world of an ensemble: I had a double role as a researcher and as a member of the work group in a small independent cabaret production. The directors and the actors were all professionals from our local theatres. At first, I was supposed to be a costumier, but soon I was partly assisting the director. Everybody was very determined and committed to make the performance work. The group rehearsed mostly at odd hours during eight weeks: sometimes in the night, early in the morning, but sometimes also quite normally in the afternoon. Along with preparing the show, the group gradually and consciously built the feeling of intimacy and closeness. Sometimes the sensitiveness developed into oversensitiveness, and the group went through some moments of confusion, but the outcome was a success. The expected amount of audience was clearly surpassed and the critics were praising the show.*

*In all the productions the structure of the work group was rather similar. There was a small scale dramatic play or performance to be prepared with a small group of actors, sound and light technicians and set- and dress designers. In each of these, the central tension was built between the director and the work group, because in preparing a play most interaction goes on between the actors and the director.*

*On the basis of the collected data, I wrote four caricatures, i.e. fictional narratives, where I condensed rehearsals according to the differing emotional processes. I participated in creating these narratives by constructing the scene together with the people I interviewed, observed, discussed and worked with. I have chosen to name them caricatures. A caricature means exaggerating features in such a way that the phenomenon still stays recognizable. My decision to write caricatures was based on my aim to underline the emotional side of leadership by means of story and narration. In order to enhance this I decided to combine my own experiences, the interviews, the stories told in informal discussions and the observation data and to condense this into stories. When going through the material four different story lines started to take form: monster, family, elitist and tea-party. Caricatured way of presentation condenses the happenings, tensions and dramatic events of six to eight weeks of rehearsals into a short version of a couple of pages. These are descriptions of the processes, but not representations of reality. Writing these stories was already a form of analysis by having chosen what to write and how, and what to leave out.*

*As the traditional academic writing gives little room for presenting emotions, this is an attempt to make use of new, or at least rather unconventional methods in leadership research to display the data in the way that it serves the research question.*

## Aesthetic Leadership as a Caricature

### *Tea Party*

Characters:

Director	-	Laura
Actor	-	Leo
Actor	-	Ville

*“Ok, let’s take it again from here! Ville, could you please come in once more? I am not quite sure if we got it right... Maybe we are leaning too much on the script... Leo, please think about green mornings and hazy summers, don’t you just smell the grass?”*

Laura painted impressions for the actors. She held on to the script in her hand. The papers were full of notes made during the several try-outs. They had gone through so many Laura could not keep track of them any more. This was maybe the seventh time this scene was repeated this morning but she was calm. She had made the schedule for the rehearsal which left no options but to haste towards the end of the process.

Leo and Ville did not know what to do differently any more. They knew Laura did her best to help them, but the first signs of frustration began to surface. Ville got this slight tinge of tension in his voice as if he would have been struggling to keep something inside.

Laura cut him off:

*“OK, Ville, please once more... maybe you could emphasize the word ‘greed’, because this is what this scene is all about, isn’t it? I mean how do you see it? Let’s talk about it for a while. I wish you would think what greed means to all the characters and what it is supposed to look like?”*

They all sat in a circle, scripts in their hands, dressed in jogging suits. Some of them had closed their eyes. The greed discussion round was finished after two monologues and some extremely brief statements. The routine was started over again. The lines



were read out. The director thanked them, described the approach of the next character and asked the actor to proceed. Sometimes they could go through two, even three sentences before Laura talked about what it was all about and asked them to repeat. The rhythm of the language seemed to be important. She explained how the personalities of the characters would grow according to the rhythm of the speech.

At exactly 12.15 they would stop and have a lunch break. As usual, they would all go to staff canteen downstairs, take the menu of the day and sit on two round tables side by side. Laura explained how she was touched by the subtlety of the text and how she thought their approach needed to be extra careful not to destroy the sensitivity of each word. She explained the etymology of the words, the philosophical positions of different characters and the literary influences the novelist had had as he was writing this play. She was a well-read, well-prepared director whom everyone liked. Her calm way of directing was a comfort to many people who had been through many kinds of processes.

The work group was eager to please her. They thought she was very good at creating a safe atmosphere and at directing the plays. By nature she was very nice and polite to everybody. It was important for her also to behave in a just manner, because the unjustness of the world was one of her favorite themes. She was known to most of them from the theatre school where many of them had studied. There was no need to pretend anything. They knew that inner balance was important for her. She practiced this balance by living an extremely healthy life, eating organic food and avoiding all unhealthy and disturbing habits. She was no moralist, though. She knew other people lived differently. She had decided to concentrate on her own life.

The text was quite challenging and difficult. It included separate stories and demanded real flexibility from the actors. Yet Laura was calm and confident. From the beginning of the rehearsals she had asked the actors to arrive on time, and not five minutes late. She believed that the calming down together would help everybody to concentrate. She herself was an avid yoga practitioner and she asked the work group to exercise a few movements with her and meditate for 20 minutes after that.

At 10.04 every morning during weekdays the work group was warming up by stretching their bodies. At 10.20, as the meditation had lasted about five minutes, the first sounds of snoring could be heard. Luckily, Laura was absorbed in herself. She did not seem to hear a sound. The snoring might have offended her, so to keep her concentration and spirits up, this persistent habit of someone falling loudly asleep was kept from her. She never mentioned it.

During the fourth week they moved to the stage. The period of practicing only the text had been very long, but as Laura had underlined the meaning of intonation and pronunciation, no one had protested. Ville was a very physical actor. He preferred to get on to the stage as soon as possible to work on the character. He was happy about the progress. Ville had found his positions and entrances almost before the others had had time to get on the stage. Leo was more hesitant. He preferred to have the clothes the character would use as he started rehearsing on the stage, but he did not want to complain or to disturb Laura's concentration.

She had underlined the importance of this step for her visual memory. She explained how the words expressed during the last weeks would now melt into bodily images moving in space. She seated herself in the first row and asked the actors to start. In the first scene Ville was supposed to start to smoke a cigarette but then to change his mind, and toss the whole pack away. He walked in and made a gesture to offer a cigarette to some one sitting in the first row. Laura cut him off and asked him to try again and not do it. After that she asked him to walk further up the aisle in the middle of the audience seats. Next, she asked Ville not to go there at all but to throw the box into the audience.

In the afternoon the actors gathered around Laura. She told them she was aware of the need to proceed faster and not to get stuck. However, she said she needed not to rush and she felt it was important to let things evolve slowly. Leo had thought to ask when the clothes would be ready but decided to swallow the question. As Laura said, they would most probably be used when the time was right. In the rigorous and strict pace along with the calm, non-gushing atmosphere the play was built like a puzzle, piece by piece.

They were making progress exactly according to the schedule. The premiere would take place in two weeks. In the rehearsals, the same procedure was continued. The process went on like a railway engine, without any hesitations or unnecessary interruptions. The analysis of every word was complete, the positions and technical details were in place. The sounds and lights were coming together at an assuring pace. Laura left nothing to chance.

In the opening night there was no air of nervousness. They had already played to a couple of audiences for the general rehearsals and everybody was assured the play worked. It did. It worked so well that the critics admired the technical virtuosity of the actors, but they wrote also about a mechanical aftertaste. The perfection had reached such a level that the human chance for chaos and error seemed non-existent. The audience gave steady, polite applause, always long enough, but they never got wild or excited. It was as if they had been watching a film, a well-cut and clever story, just neat and clean enough to be forgotten as you walk out of the theatre. The tickets sold well enough to cover the costs of making the play, but soon it was forgotten in the flow of new and more interesting performance.

### **An aesthetic perspective to leadership in the Tea Party caricature**

Aesthetic aspects of leadership can be condensed in the following way in the Tea Party caricature: Leadership was both centered around the director and was shared among the actors as the rehearsal process continued. Although the text itself and the process of rehearsing were emotional, the director used her own emotional repertoire sparsely. Her body was very controlled and self-centered. She used analytical and polite language controlling the rhythm and space of the process.

	<u>Tea Party</u>
<b>LEADERSHIP EMPHASIS</b>	<b>Individual and shared</b>
<b>EMOTIONAL REPERTOIRE</b>	<b>Narrow</b>
<b>BODY</b>	<b>Self-centered, controlled</b>
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	<b>Analytical, polite</b>
<b>RHYTHM</b>	<b>Organized, restrained</b>
<b>SPACE</b>	<b>Controlled</b>

Table 1. Aesthetic aspects of leadership

### **Emotions**

Emotions produce and organize our knowledge. This means we should pay attention to the events that tell the "story" of the emotion (Bruner, 1990; McIntyre 1990). Hence, the experiencing and sensing body becomes central. When talking about leadership, organizations and emotions become epitomized in the human body. Leadership is constructed and takes place between people. Organizations consist of people and their relationships. Emotions become meaningful in relationships between (corporeal) human beings.

In the tea-party caricature there was a feeling of calmness and trust. The director had the text, the method and the work schedule firmly in her grip and the actors, for the most, trusted her. The work group enjoyed the feeling of safety. They felt confident about the solutions, since they saw how much energy the director put in meticulous organizing. The atmosphere was harmonious. Nobody wanted to disturb the peace. That was also the pitfall of the process.

The leadership process in the group was controlled by the director, but there was a tension between her and some of the actors. She had the group in her grip by being polite, calm and almost overtly meticulous and analytical. By being “perfect” and “balanced” she denied the actors the possibility for open criticism. The emotional repertoire being so narrow, the actors did not want to take the initiative to break it. The process is definitely less consuming for everybody, if the “comfort zone” is preserved. The bodily exercises and the control reflected the mental control. The rhythm of the process was built through this controlled calmness. It set the metronomic pace to the process, which sometimes could be described as slightly monotonous.

### **Body: presence, vision, gaze, listening, touching**

The bodily presence of actors is a requirement for a play to take place. People experience emotions from body to body, even without any physical contact. The body is needed to send, receive and to create emotions. The body comprises emotions. The body equals presence. The body epitomizes our gender. It mirrors our physical health, power and condition. The body signals our moods, feelings, emotions and affects, and changes in them. Our bodily presence reflects also our personality, level of alertness

and even mental health. Violence and aggression, as well as nurture and care, are bodily expressions demanding a suitable emotion.

The body looks and smells, feels and tastes. The body makes sounds, deliberate and unintentional ones. The body reveals our emotional states. Thus, leadership can be seen as bodily negotiated between the participants in the everyday routine of the rehearsals. It gets bodily negotiated through senses: through seeing and looking, through hearing and listening and through feeling and touching. The body is a source and a target of pain and pleasure, of shame and pride. The bodies can be looked at as individuals or as groups. The bodily presence of the work group is a necessity in theatre. The bodily presence of a group can signal collectivity or diversity and friction. How people move within a group, if and how they look and touch each other are implicitly emotional acts. The actors' bodies are under scrutiny through their work. Directors are also closely observed.

The presence of the director was materialized in the actor sensing the director's eyes following him/her. The actors wished to be able to capture the eyes of the director, which in the rehearsals represented the gaze of the audience. To be the target of the gaze means that the actor is interesting enough to hold someone's gaze.

Besides being the object to someone else's gaze or being the observer, the actor takes the self as the target of his or her look. It is the nature of the profession of an actor to be in public, to be looked at, to submit oneself under scrutiny and criticism, to the evaluation and comparison with others. By being an object to gaze and look, the

profession molds the actor very much aware of his or her talent and appearance, which can become a burden, but also a source of inspiration and joy.

Leadership is associated in the literature with the ability to understand, to vision and to see clearly. Leader is in the center, in the position of the visionary observer. Visual orders are loaded with expectations, norms and feelings, which all together become part of interaction. The Cartesian tradition of seeing defines the stereotypical understanding of leadership, where the leader is the static, criticizing and controlling eye, and the follower is the object to his/her gaze. Yet the reciprocity of the leadership is left out of discussion: The leader is both the one who sees as well as the one who is seen.

In the leadership literature it is normatively repeated that the leader should provide the followers with a vision or goal towards which the organization will strive. She or he should also be able to guide and control the process. The main task of the leader has been to effectively and clearly communicate the vision, so that the followers could identify it as their own (Bryman 1996; Yukl 1998).

Under the leadership of a director with a less clear vision, the rehearsal process may take unexpected turns. The actors are autonomous in their profession to lead their characters according to their own intuition thus being entitled to participate in co-constructing the process. Through the bodily practice of rehearsing and acting on the stage the vision gets altered, shared and co-constructed again and again until everybody finds their place in it.



Another central area where visual order and the ways of seeing become relevant are cultural norms defining the gaze and ways of looking and seeing (Seppänen 2002). The culture produces not only ways to see, but the repertoire of ideal bodies and ideal ways to be seen. Yet the efforts to reach the ideal are all doomed to fail.

Through look and touch the concepts of distance and closeness become important. Closeness is perceived as safe, whereas distance brings along criticism and fear, a possibility of shame. Often, people touched each other as a gesture of gratitude.

### **Language**

Language is important in any organization and even more so in a theatre, also outside semantic meanings. Sharing a language becomes a metaphor for a very deep understanding and bond between people. Speaking the same language means that work becomes easier.

Choice of words and how we utter them is important. Also our choice to name the caricature a “Tea-Party” is an emotional deed. It reflects our feeling of the process: tea party is a metaphor for a polite, calm and traditional process that neither shocks nor moves anyone. It reflects also the verbal communication of the process: a lot was left unsaid, because disturbing the balanced atmosphere the director wanted to create would have been rude.

Groups and gangs sometimes develop their own distinctive style and manner of speaking. The cultural use of language may vary in terms of style and dialect, by the use of specialized terms, thus forming an exclusive group. The norms and taboos are culturally shared through language. Which subjects get the most interest, which evoke

strong emotional outbursts, which subjects are forbidden or never joked about, is humor used, and if, about what? Who are featured in the stories? Who tells the stories and who listens?

### **Rhythm**

Besides the meanings of the words, linguistic acts, the way of speaking, and the speed of the talk make rhythmic sounds. In organizations talking and listening set the rhythm for different situations. Through the rhythm we get the feeling what the specific situation is like and how and if we are expected to take part in it and how.

Body is needed to understand and produce rhythm. We experience rhythm in and through our body and are influenced by the rhythm of others. To set a rhythm is to organize, while finding a mutual, suitable rhythm that embraces and captures the group is leadership. It is to include and to share instead of dividing and delegating. Rhythm is emotional, as it always signals something, be it peacefulness, rush, anxiety or something else. Leading, sharing and bearing responsibility for the rhythm is important in organizations. Finding an inclusive rhythm can be one aesthetic aspect of leadership.

Rhythm is self evident in life: the heartbeat, breathing, growing and withering, being born and dying, the rhythm of day and night and the change of seasons all define our life. Rhythm gives impulses to emotions (Garret, 1967). Besides the musical connotation, rhythm can be experienced as polite, rude, inclusive or exclusive. Within bodies, rhythm is born in the way people move and walk. Tempo of movement, synchronization, and direction are meaningful to rhythm. Rhythm is evident in

interaction also: The tempo of speech, the time one takes for reflection and answers, if there is a cacophony of every body speaking at the same time, how the turns are taken and for how long the floor is given to a person. Rhythm creates hierarchies and orders.

## **Space**

The spatial dimension of leadership is often overlooked. How do bodies relate to the space, how do bodies relate to each other in a space? It is of interest where the director decides to place him or herself in the room. Will she be in the audience? Why so distant? Or will she run around on the stage and be under actors' feet all the time? How does she display her presence in the space?

The space was controlled in the Tea Party through the intimacy that the director was able to create. She did it by concentrating very carefully in directing the actors on the stage. She was fastidious about the fine details and left very little room for the actors to decide themselves how and where to move. She also kept distance to the actors by not getting on the stage herself. She sat on the first row and the actors were on the stage. There was a clear division between her and the group of actors.

According to Michel Foucault (1967) it would be arbitrary to make a division between the norms of social relations and the space where they take place, thus them being inseparable. The movement of the bodies is essential in making the space meaningful: bodies make space (Saarikangas, 2002). Space is not only structures and environments but also spatial relations and meanings. Space becomes meaningful in another way when it is examined from the point of a living body.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1989), a person does not actively nor passively observe the space, but experiences it with all the senses in the body. We interact with and are connected to our environment. Space exists through the interpretations of the people in it (Merleau-Ponty, 1989).

Organizations are usually located in buildings. They may be specially designed just for the purpose of the organization, anonymous office buildings offering seemingly neutral but professional space, or very improvised looking huts housing various activities. Space makes and marks hierarchies, defines the borders for cultural behavioral codes and emotional norms for people, depending on their role and status. The power and the hierarchy are marked through spatial planning, and spatial practices. Leadership constructs and is constructed by behavioral and emotional norms within spaces.

### **Some concluding thoughts**

We have tried to develop the idea that aesthetic way of knowing and researching has a potential to better understand the relationship between academic leadership theory and organizational practice. In fact, we find that the notion of the gap between theory and practice becomes non-existent or irrelevant in viewing leadership from an aesthetic perspective. We point out that aesthetic knowledge is both produced and consumed simultaneously in the interaction between the researcher and the practitioners. The researcher and the practitioners become partners in the process where senses, not just cognitions, are put in play.

We develop the idea of aesthetic knowledge production and consumption on leadership in a theatre context. Through a leadership caricature we elaborate on what type of aesthetic aspects might be brought up to inform of a different understanding of leadership - the kind of understanding that could overcome the notion of gap between theory and practice. We wish to point out the following aesthetic aspects of leadership: emotions, body, language, rhythm, and space.

We would expect that aesthetic way of theorizing on leadership and organizations might have fundamental political consequences in at least three ways: First, the role of the researcher as a 'knower' becomes more like a partner in knowledge development. The academic knowledge hierarchy might collapse. Second, on the contrary to the truth-seeking, traditional leadership theories, the aesthetic perspective to leadership knowledge gives space to multiple realities and multiple voices by giving importance to personal experiences. This calls for revisiting the cultural norms in academic and managerial practice. Third, aesthetic knowledge brings forth the notion of body that is traditionally overlooked as a source of academic knowledge development.

To reiterate, we argue in this paper that aesthetic perspective to knowledge challenges the existence of the gap between theory and practice. This has a potential to fundamentally alter how we understand the relationship between leadership theory and organizational practice.

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