The manager as facilitator of dialogue

Joseph A. Raelin
Northeastern University, USA

Abstract
In this article a new role for managers is advocated to create conditions for genuine collaborative engagement in 21st Century organizations. The new role is as a facilitator of emancipatory dialogue, a discourse among parties that can lead to mutual learning, deep understanding and insight, and collaborative consciousness and action. The facilitator role is described and illustrated in the article as a means to encourage free expression and inquiry, but the article also warns about the imposition of coercive norms within the work group that might be externally imposed or even self-imposed. As managers promote an emancipatory form of dialogic engagement, conversations ensue that bring out people's individual and collective wisdom, creativity, and dignity.

The role of management has been debated in literary annals ever since Henri Fayol's (1916) classic formulation of the key elements of the management job. Sifting through the literature, Hales (1999) distinguished the managerial role as being responsible for a bounded area of work activity to be performed by assigned workers and being accountable for the outcome of that activity. Managers also have a level of discretion in ensuring responsibility for a given work practice, depending upon such conditions as their level (e.g. middle or upper), function (e.g. boundary or operating), organizational culture, or personal qualities. So, although they are governed by institutional norms about what it means to manage others, following Giddens (1984), their agency shapes these norms as these norms enable and constrain their own actions.

In recent times, the conventional method to obtain responsible performance through command-and-control management has been challenged by consideration of alternative roles, for example,

Corresponding author:
Joseph A. Raelin, The Knowles Chair, College of Business Administration, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115, USA.
Email: j.raelin@neu.edu

that of teacher, educator, coach, developer, and facilitator. The facilitator role has become popular as an alternative to command-and-control management because of its seeming consistency with self-directed and empowering approaches to leadership. It is seen as a way to encourage autonomy by workers over those decisions which immediately affect them.

This article will focus on the facilitator role in dialogue, with the facilitator role being seen as the interlocutor of dialogue viewed, in turn, as the conversational basis in which parties can have a mutually constructive exchange. Foreshadowing its emancipatory role, dialogue is seen as the genetic material for building a culture of democracy freeing people from institutional forces that limit their personal autonomy and leading to their acquisition of a collective consciousness. This background sets the stage for consideration of a more empowering managerial role that shifts from control to coordination, from working *in* to working *on* the system, and from command to facilitation. Unfortunately, empowering work without a means for critical reflection can unwittingly lead to disempowerment through horizontal control, self-surveillance, and intimidation. This creates the need for facilitation of dialogue using critical discursive practices to upend defensive routines that maintain hierarchical or lateral hegemony and stifle personal growth. Emancipatory dialogue is presented as a means in the workplace to foster critical and collaborative engagement. The article concludes with suggestions for incorporating criteria and norms for establishing inclusiveness in dialogue and with some examples that demonstrate the use of these means to ensure legitimate democratic participation.

The facilitation role in management

Most researchers of managerial roles point to Henry Mintzberg's classic *The Nature of Managerial Work* (1973) as the wellspring of study on these roles. Mintzberg initially preferred ten management roles along with 13 propositions about the characteristics of management work. Since then, there has been a raft of studies seeking to enrich our understanding of the multidimensional nature of managerial behavior (Tengblad, 2006). A recurrent quandary posed in this continuing research is whether standard managerial work persists due to the intransigence of rational administrative structure or whether new contextual conditions along with normative appeals for more transformative behavior lead to the inevitability of new roles (see, e.g. Bass, 1985; Bryman, 1992; Carroll and Gillen, 1987; Martinko and Gardner, 1985; Whitley, 1989; Willmott, 1987). To support the latter contention, there is a growing appreciation for the need for more flexible managerial behavior due to our more organic, networked economy, which has seen the emergence of a range of new 'uncorporations' and social enterprises that have disaggregated erstwhile classic vertical structures (Drucker, 1988; Handy, 1989; Kickul and Gundry, 2001; Miles, 1989; Zuboff, 1988).

Accordingly, a number of researchers have called for service-oriented facilitator-type roles. Kanter called for managers to serve as 'integrators and facilitators, not as watchdogs' (1989: 89) because employees are now more capable of solving problems by themselves through cross-functional networks and project teams. Morgeson et al. (2010) enumerated a range of functions for team managers across such varying roles as project manager, sponsor, coach, advisor, mentor, coordinator, and champion. Fisher (2000) added yet some additional roles, such as business analyst, barrier buster, and customer advocate, which characterize team leaders, who, as opposed to traditional supervisors, place themselves in service to self-directed work teams (Block, 1993).

If managers are to assume a facilitation role, what is it that they might facilitate and how should they conduct themselves? Although facilitation methods vary, the practice of facilitation has taken on more encompassing roles than its original meaning (from the root 'to make easy') may have prescribed. It is not the same as, for example, managing meetings or conducting group therapy.

Most accounts delimit its practice as focusing on process rather than on content (see, e.g. Maier, 1967; Raelin, 2006b; Schein, 1967; Schuman, 1996). The facilitator is expected to take a neutral stance on the content of the discussion, allowing members to examine their values, assumptions, and choices without suggesting or advocating what they should be. As a servant to the group or system in question, the facilitator has one goal: to help the members achieve their purpose by assisting them to have a constructive exchange, as free as possible from internal dynamics that may get in the way of productive discourse.

One popular aim of facilitation that has been promoted recently as an important managerial function is that of facilitating for learning in the organization. Although the learning referred to may benefit the worker, there are purported benefits for both manager and organization. The learner is able to surface, examine, and change his or her beliefs while the manager learns how to delegate and the organization derives improved systems and cost savings (Ellinger and Bostrom, 2002). It is nevertheless unclear whether the focus on individual learning is designed as a vehicle for personal well-being, self-improvement, and citizenship or as an instrumental vehicle to engender conformist behavior and spur organizational productivity (Cunningham, 2004; Dirkx, 1999).

Facilitating for dialogue

The foregoing account suggests that we need to be mindful of the object of any facilitation in which conversants engage. One form of a facilitation that may hold emancipatory promise is that of facilitating for dialogue. As I am proposing that dialogue be the primary modality to be used by managers in their facilitation role, let's initially consider what is meant by the term, dialogue.

Dialogue can be regarded as the conversational basis in which parties can have a mutually constructive exchange. Manifesting what Habermas (1984, 1987) referred to as 'communicative action', it is a format to expand knowledge through intersubjective transformation. People join a dialogue provided they are interested in listening to one another, in reflecting upon perspectives different from their own, and in entertaining the prospect of being changed by what they learn.

The foundation for dialogue as an intersubjective exchange is associated with interactionist sociology and, in particular, with the work of George H. Mead (1934), who saw the relationship between the individual and society as a continual process of construction by the self as part of the social environment. Further, consistent with constructionist thought, in dialogue, language is constitutive rather than representational. Conversants seek to understand the reality they are creating rather than to find or trace what already exists (Pearce, 2009).

Dialogue is distinctive from 'rhetoric', as it was classically defined. Although rhetoric has been rehabilitated in recent years to refer to the way people think and talk about the reality they experience (Anderson et al., 2003), it has historically referred to people's faculty to use language to persuade others. Aristotle in his *The Art of Rhetoric* (1991) invokes its three forms: through *ethos*, based on the character and credibility of the speaker; through *pathos*, using emotional appeals; and through *logos*, the use of reasoning.

Participants to dialogue, as a conversational exchange, are not primarily interested in convincing others of their point of view, though they may engage in vigorous advocacy. Rather the focus is on mutual (rather than unilateral) learning, deep understanding and insight, and collaborative action. It is inclusive such that everyone's point of view is honoured and it is also open-ended in the sense that participants are expected to be open to new discoveries in thought and action as the conversation proceeds.

Consequently, dialogue can be thought of as the DNA of democracy or the critical means by which intersubjective capacities essential to build a culture of democracy can be mobilized (Pruitt

and Thomas, 2007). It is often compared to deliberation, which refers to the process of collective reasoned reflection by political equals leading to improved decisions of common concern (Benhabib, 1996; Hicks, 2002; Klosko, 2000). It is also often contrasted with 'dialectical' exchanges in which parties test the strengths and weaknesses of divergent points of view by assessing the respective evidence and reasoning (Paul, 1995).

There are many traditions that have built the architecture of dialogue, though they have resulted in different *schools* of practice, associated with particular writers. Among them are the following, ordered as per the emancipatory framework that will be subsequently introduced for the managerial role:

- Martin Buber (1965): based as much on a theology as on a practice, Buber was interested in promoting authentic relationships in which communicators would 'turn toward' each other to truly appreciate the value offered by the 'other'.
- Hans-Georg Gadamer (1982): in Gadamer's dialogue, we communicate not merely to reproduce what others contribute but to produce new meanings from the exchange itself, even apart from our original intentions.
- Mikhail Bakhtin (1986): Bakhtin saw language as inherently dialogic in which through multiple voices we learn to see ourselves through the utterances of others. He proposed that 'others' be involved in communication as subjects, not as objects, such that dialogue be considered a form of inter-textual construction that is composed of and assimilates the discourse of others.
- David Bohm (1996): in Bohmian dialogue, we learn that there is no expectation in dialogue to have people behave as we wish them to or as we think we are. Rather, dialogue is more of a 'looking together', that can lead to either individual or mutual exploration. Participants attempt to suspend their beliefs and judgements while speaking together in order to seek an understanding of the movement of the group's thought processes and what their effects may be (Bohm, 1996).
- Jürgen Habermas (1984): associated with the emancipatory form of dialogue, which is the interest in this article, Habermas sees dialogue, or what he refers to as argumentation, as the basis for people gaining emancipation leading to transformed consciousness. In argumentation, no single individual nor point of view is privileged or free from challenge. Equal power is extended to all participants, and decisions are based upon mutual consent rather than on tradition, greed, dogma, or coercion.

The preceding traditions afford five principles that can be associated with collaborative dialogic processes (Chrislip and Larson, 1994; Hicks et al., 2008; Mendenhall and March, 2010; Raelin, 2006a):

1) that the dialogue in any community is based on a collective position or stance of 'nonjudgemental inquiry', such that all stakeholders feel competent, trusted and valued
2) that contributions from group members, such as their judgements and assumptions, are offered freely for others' critical scrutiny
3) that everyone has an equal opportunity to directly influence the flow of the conversation and the decisions made
4) that the process be free from manipulation or inauthentic expression
5) that the dialogue is entered with the express view of creating something new or unique that could reconstruct participants' view of reality

Dialogue as emancipation

In its emancipatory form, dialogue represents a frame to free people from institutional forces that limit their personal autonomy but that have been taken for granted as beyond their control (Fromm, 1976; Habermas, 1974; Marcuse, 1964). It also has the intent of freeing people in a work environment from unnecessarily restrictive traditions and power relations that inhibit opportunity for fulfillment of their needs and wants (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 435).

Discourse of this critical nature has the potential to empower people through a dialogic process of gradual enlightenment leading to the acquisition of a collective consciousness. Isaacs (1993), for example, talks about the dialogic process as an antidote to the 'architecture of the invisible'—the unquestioned received wisdom and taken-for-granted processes that constrain genuine interaction. It is empowerment through inquiry rather than through guidance. It questions quick-fix managerial strategies that entail tacit assumptions of control. It attempts to bring to the surface through progressive inquiry those governing socio-political values that may be blocking communications.

In a prior section, we noted that when operating managers facilitate learning, they often have a particular view in mind of the correct way to do things. Their view, in turn, is often shaped by discourses, perhaps conveyed in corporate communications or in exchange with top managers, regarding acceptable work norms or cultural values. A social constructionist view of the reality of any organization is that it is composed of multiple voices set within webs of relations and not reliant on a particular knowing or structuring agent (Hosking, 2011; Law, 2009; Weick, 1995). There can be no objective interpretation of organizational reality because as there is no permanent stock of knowledge, our knowing is situated, contextually bound, and culturally mediated (Gergen, 1985; Tsoukas, 1996). A critical theory perspective would supplement this constructionist view by asserting that certain discourses are privileged, compared to others, because of the power and authority of those who transmit them (Fairclough, 1995; Hardy and Phillips, 2004). To the extent these discourses are tacitly conveyed, they need to be unmasked. Hence, critical theory is guided by its emancipatory interest.

Evolving from a deep critique of positivist models of social analysis using instrumental reason, critical theory sought to cast a light on the unjustified use of power and to change social conditions so that human beings would be freed from dependency, subordination, and suppression (Adorno et al., 1976; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947). Critical theory made its way into management studies because here too, positivist research was believed to sustain internalized normative assumptions that advanced the interests of the most powerful groups in the private organization, such as dominant shareholders, at the expense of marginalized groups, such as workers and even consumers (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Barker, 1993; Marcuse, 1964; Scherer, 2009; Steffy and Grimes, 1992; Trehan et al., 2006). In the instrumentalist approach to management, profitability or performance targets (in the not-for-profit sector) are assumed to be naturalized ends, and any questions about their ethical or political implications are either ignored or delusively accommodated (Adler et al., 2007).

The aforementioned Jürgen Habermas, a member of the Frankfurt School establishing critical theory, proposed to augment the rational *and* normative foundations of critical reason through undistorted communications built upon an ideal speech situation featuring four validity claims: comprehensibility, normative acceptance, sincerity, and interpretation (2001). These can be converted into questions (Gregory and Romm, 2001; Raelin, 2006b) that may be asked during any exchange, namely:

1) Do you understand what the speaker has said?
2) Do you agree with the speaker's point?

3) Do you believe the speaker is being sincere?
4) Do you agree with the speaker's interpretation of the facts and how his/her conclusions were arrived at?

Habermas (1990) thus connected the project of critical theory with discourse, and called on the theorist (perhaps anticipating the role of the facilitator) not to predetermine any outcome but to provide guidance on how to undertake a reasonable argumentation. Ongoing critique from other critical theorists, neo-pragmatists, and post-structuralists have exposed discourse's shadow side that maintains an ideological rather than a mere neutral position because of its acquiescence to socially accepted rules of practice (Kaufmann, 2010). In particular, in complying with a stylistic ideology, its participants' identities can become molded or scripted in conformity with the prevailing culture (Morgaine, 1994). The winners in this new game might be those who possess superior communication skills, have the ability to maintain a dispassionate demeanor seeped in moderation rather than reveal raw uncivil emotions, speak and even interrupt more than listen, have profound insights, or be undaunted by the need to reveal their innermost secrets within the company of strangers (hooks, 2003; Levine and Nierras, 2007; Vince, 2002; Young, 2000).

The purpose of what we refer to as emancipatory dialogue is to open up the conditions for free exchange so that critical engagement can be sustained. Fellow conversants are invited to challenge not only the statements they and others make, but also the assumptions they may be relying upon in producing the statements. Participants to dialogue learn to see themselves and their thinking through the eyes of others (Tsoukas, 2009). By revealing our mutual assumptions, we engage in a triple-loop learning that challenges not only the facts and the norms within a given work context, but the context itself. This can lead to a permanent questioning of the inconsistencies in any action theory of management. When this occurs, emancipatory dialogue can examine the defensive routines that maintain hierarchical hegemony and that stifle further inquiry (Argyris and Schön, 1978). It blurs the distinction between the moral and the political by disarming the powerful. Further, those who might engage in subtle coercive behavior by encouraging conformity to prescribed norms would come to recognize their complicity in a closed social structure and learn to replace it with a system that would better represent everyone's interests (Brookfield, 2001; Gramsci, 1995).

When emancipatory dialogue of this nature is transacted as an intervention, it serves as a form of deconstruction that can question so-called 'truths' from the very conditions of their production (Derrida, 1992). It can thereby open up space for new perceptions that might lead to new ways of looking at the same phenomenon under scrutiny (Rorty, 1996). It liberates us from authorship and objective standards by distributing knowledge, which itself becomes provisional (Bustillos, 2011). It also addresses the challenge of critical theory commentators who find the field short on practical wisdom to help everyday practitioners overcome the technocratic realities of everyday management (Ackroyd, 2004; Parker, 2002; Thompson, 2005). In sum, it opens organizational analysis to a more 'enlightenment/reflexive model' (Zald, 2002) that militates against discursive closure to keep alive the potential for transformative management practice (Gergen, 2001; Hotho and Pollard, 2007).

The basis for a new management role and its ambiguity

Is there a role for managers in facilitating dialogue of an emancipatory character? How might it change the very role of especially front-line managers as establishing and controlling their workers' standards of performance? Should dialogic encounter remain an exclusive medium just for senior managers? Let us consider these questions taking management level into consideration. It is

a normal expectation that senior managers work on a strategy for the entire organization and then turn to middle management to produce the tactics and budgets and to monitor worker performance for carrying out this superordinate strategy. However, senior managers have to manage their own staff and, due in part to their wider accountability and longer time horizons, have ultimate responsibility for segments of the entire organization (Adler, 1999; Charan et al., 2011; Jaques, 1990). Further, due to restructuring and other factors, the role of middle managers is changing from being the implementing arm of the organization to contributing to its dynamic capabilities through such practices as championing strategic alternatives, developing staff capabilities, and shepherding change (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Wooldridge et al., 2008). Because of the increasingly critical role of middle management, it would be inopportune to reserve dialogic encounter as an exclusive senior managers' domain. Moreover, as has been long reported in the annals of strategic change and implementation (for a poignant case example, see Weissflog, 1988), planning designs at the top, no matter their level of engagement at that level, without the involvement and participation of those in the operating domain are doomed to failure (Nutt, 1998).

Yet, other discourses suggest that the role of middle management is on the wane due to managerial redundancies and other post-bureaucratic pressures, to be described next, in which case, the very role and identity of middle managers have been called into question (Cameron et al., 1991; Denham et al., 1997; Thomas and Linstead, 2002). Nevertheless, it seems clear that innovative and emancipatory practices involving discursive processes if circumscribed by levels of management would be short-sighted.

Role ambiguity in management is partially due to the shift in managerial behavior documented in what has been referred to as the 'post-bureaucratic' era, which is characterized by broad public standards of performance and flexible peer decision-making processes (Heckscher, 1994). As an accompaniment to post-bureaucratic conditions, Kerr and Jermier (1978) in their 'substitutes to leadership' approach demonstrated that managerial activities can be taken over by technology or by empowerment of the working strata, who have learned to manage themselves (Grey, 1999; Mant, 1977).

Another movement, called post-industrialism (see, e.g. Bell, 1976) contemporaneously called for a redesign of the corporate order whereby structure would need to accommodate an explosion in knowledge capability, in which power and responsibility in organizations would flow to the task and actors at hand. The resulting structures would be modular, in which responsibility and accompanying resources would be decentralized to semi-independent units based on a set of core activities and coordinated through horizontal and contractual relationships (Child and McGrath, 2001; Schilling and Steensma, 2001). In 1980, Henry Mintzberg (1980) named the *adhocracy* as the 'structure of our age', and, as a post-bureaucratic form, it has only grown in popularity since that time. Rather than rely on classic managerial control, Mintzberg asserted that adhocracy *coordinates* by mutual adjustment in the form of shared sensemaking primarily among well-trained professional specialists who are often found working in multidisciplinary teams. For example, the percentage of use of autonomous work groups among large US firms and multinationals has been pegged as high as 47% (Guzzo and Dickson, 1996; Kirkman and Rosen, 1999), and even higher (58%) among British firms (McGovern et al., 2007).

The dominant organizing vehicle in the adhocracy is the project, which as a self-governing entity obviates the need for strategy-making from the top. Team- and project-based structures tend to organize laterally and transfer learning often across a wide value chain of stakeholders (Swan et al., 2010). Social capital and trust are viewed in these structures as critical to knowledge creation and resource acquisition, so practitioners, including managers, are as likely to be as involved in interorganizational as intraorganizational social networks (Brass, 2000; Kroeger, 2011). In these

settings often characterized by knowledge intensity, management is unlikely to possess conventional managerial authority that relies upon command-and-control leadership. Since managers often do not have the esoteric knowledge to rationally control their workforce, not to mention that the work itself is characterized by a high degree of ambiguity and complexity, they need to rely upon facilitation rather than command. Professional workers, meanwhile, are empowered to use their core competence and natural creativity to develop new ideas, products, and services and share them selectively across boundaries (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Jain and Triandis, 1997).

The control mechanism associated with post-bureaucracy would be self-direction or self-management as sanctioned by organizational authorities and accepted within the various operations. Under a self-managed philosophy, practitioners would look to control themselves rather than submit to force, reward, or detached external rules or codes (Kirkman and Shapiro, 1997). They would maintain their operation through social interactions involving such unfoldings as skilled improvisations, just-in-time coping, and facilitation of shared understanding (Chia and Holt, 2006; Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Goffman, 1967; Mead, 1934; Raelin, 2008).

Unfortunately, the democratic nature of post-bureaucracy may have been oversold, leading to debate about any enduring change in employee freedom from managerial control (Hales, 2002). If top management were not willing to authorize autonomous activity within the units and if resources for accomplishing the various functional staff activities, such as hiring, were not provided, self-leadership would never materialize (Kirkman and Rosen, 2000). The same holds for operating management within the units. There are a multitude of operating matters, such as budgets, salaries, information systems, recruitment, deadlines, that need attention and either come under the aegis of the 'responsible' manager or are left to the team to regulate. Within self-directed teams, some designated team leaders may continue to operate under a conventional mindset of individual responsibility and vertical accountability (Hales, 2002).

Consequently, self-directed or empowered action can end up disempowering workers by fortifying control or intensifying work activity in the name of progress (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998; Parker and Slaughter, 1988). In fact, labour process theory suggests that, owing to new information technologies that can increase the scope and reach of workplace surveillance while relying on subtle forms of horizontal control within teams, real discretion and autonomy among workers may be more curtailed now than even under pure Weberian bureaucracy (Burawoy, 1979; Poster, 1990; Rosen and Baroudi, 1992; Sewell, 1998). Weber's conception (1947) at least provided workers with the protection of rules and procedures and these devices' accompanying collective goodwill against the pure whim of management. Under post-bureaucracy, organizational structure transitions from objective rules, hierarchical authority, and influence based on formal position to broad public standards of performance, flexible peer decision-making processes, and influence based on personal qualities (Heckscher, 1994). However, control remains intact except rather than use authority structure, it relies on sophisticated methods of unobtrusive ideational appraisal that, according to some critical observers, not only reduces discretion but centralizes decision making into the hands of an information-rich elite (Heydebrand, 1989). Furthermore, aided by electronic surveillance and monitoring, team members can presumably control themselves collectively by identifying those among the group who are shirking or failing to achieve production targets. As an elegant form of snooping, it turns the value of teamwork upside down. While promoted as a basis for humanizing the workforce (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993; Zuboff, 1988), it can be used as a control vehicle usurped by managers who by recruiting allies within the group can destroy any democratic process through sheer intimidation.

Even more, disciplinarity, as per Foucault's revised account of Jeremy Benthan's model prison, referred to as the 'Panopticon' (Foucault, 1977), would become internalized by each worker such

that surveillance devices would themselves become unnecessary. Although available as a basis for self-organization, high-technology human tracking systems can also order human systems through subtle and elaborate tactics of discipline that habituate the experience of self-control (Ericson and Haggerty, 2006). At the group level, according to Barker (1993), the norms created can become rationalized and embedded in social relations among members to a degree that their effects can also become accepted and concealed. As a result, these new value-based rules can end up tightening the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy even more than Weber had envisioned.

Managing for critical discourse

To upend the defensive routines that maintain hierarchical hegemony and to head off spontaneous and unplanned coercive behavior within the practice group, managers as facilitators would seek to create a dialogic environment in which group members would become increasingly comfortable engaging in critical discourse via what I have been referring to as emancipatory dialogue. They become willing to face their own vulnerability that they may lose control, that their initial suppositions may turn out wrong, or that no solution may be found at least in the short term. They become receptive to what Alvin Gouldner (1970) once referred to as 'hostile information', or to data that run contrary to their comfortable stance. While becoming more willing to face critical scrutiny from others, they would concurrently be encouraged to advocate their own viewpoints, even those that might not be immediately accepted in their community. They would become willing to face the utter isolation that might come from ostracism from the group (Giddens, 1991).

Elsewhere, I have characterized the concurrent and collective sharing of decision-making processes and actions through mutual dialogue as 'leaderful' practices (Raelin, 2003). In leaderful organizations, everyone's talent is mobilized to contribute to the goals of the entity. People bring their whole selves to work and feel 'at home' contributing to the greater good. Given an increasingly networked economy sustained by webs of partnerships, it makes less and less sense to traverse the hierarchy to check with 'headquarters' to clear decisions. In most cases, people within the practice are the ones who have the necessary information at their disposal to make the most efficacious decisions (Spreitzer and Mishra, 1999).

This tradition can pose a threat especially to middle management not only because of institutional pressures, including a denial of implicit theories of leadership placing the manager as the person in authority (Lord et al., 1999; Offermann et al., 1994), but because it may presage job elimination. If project groups can direct themselves, they no longer need managers to control their aims and operation.

I have submitted in this article that a critical service role for managers is to act as a facilitator of emancipatory dialogue within the practice setting, precisely to overcome some of the nefarious self- and group-control devices, such as peer monitoring, often set in motion by group members themselves in deference to corporate expectations or to team conformity. Facilitators can support what Alvesson and Willmott (1992) refer to as 'microemancipatory' projects, which can encourage the endorsement of a culture of learning and participation within these practices to head off the imposition of coercive norms that are either externally imposed or self-imposed.

The adoption of an alternative role that empowers others likely requires an individual agency that in turn harnesses the agentic capacity of others to serve goals that lie beyond self-interest and that result in an intersubjective collaborative process (Spender, 2008). Admittedly, the democratic culture characterized here is not the accepted norm. Pressures from all sides—internal and external—converge to fortify cultures of dominance and control (Currie et al., 2009). The manager committed to emancipatory dialogue will thus need to posses a sufficiently healthy level of ego development

and self-differentiation that will encourage the dispersion of control (Akrivou, 2009; Kegan and Laskow Lahey, 2009; Torbert and Associates, 1994). Acting as a democratic change agent and sensegiver, the manager would maintain a commitment to praxis that is sufficiently participant-directed that workers would come to appreciate, by the agent's practices, that leadership can be a shared mutual phenomenon (Gronn, 2002; Raelin, 2011).

The facilitation role would thus be dedicated to the development of independent and interdependent behavior that encourages increased autonomy and self-determination among workers (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Weibel, 2007). To facilitate for emancipatory dialogue would encourage practices based on the principles referred to earlier in this article. Among them would be to bring together all the relevant stakeholders to the problem at hand to listen together and to respect the coherence of the others' views. The facilitator would ask for a temporary suspension of preconceptions so that fear would be released making way for a nonjudgemental inquiry among equals. Participants would acknowledge their positions and expressions of power such that no one individual would be able to manipulate or force or dampen the expression of others. People would be invited to advance their ideas uncompromisingly but be open to the critical inquiry of others. Uncertainty would be welcomed in search of common ground and mutual understanding. The tone would be one of trust and empathy that would seek to produce such interpersonal outcomes as tolerance of ambiguity, openness and frankness, patience and suspension of judgement, empathy and unconditional positive regard, and commitment to learning. Moreover, there would be an invitation for a creative interaction among multiple and contradictory voices that would attempt to come to terms with adversarial differences (Lyotard, 1984). In the end, participants would seek to create something new or unique that may never have been conceived prior to their collaborative engagement (Difficult Dialogues Initiative, 2010; Knowles, 1980).

Dialogue and change

In the prior section, I advocated on behalf of the role for managers as facilitators of dialogue, in the sense of dialogue as an emancipation from habitual routines and power relations that govern our practices without opportunity for free expression and shared engagement. Dialogue, then, would become a tool for change but not in the sense of problem solving as much as in the sense of working toward shared meaning around contested versions of practices as they are unfolding. Change, in this emancipatory view, would occur through a transparent airing of the multiple discourses occurring within a practice, even those that are resistant to any dominant regime (Parker, 1997; Thomas and Davies, 2005). It is possible in the unfolding narrative that new meanings may emerge that can integrate the competing discourses, although the discourses themselves and their language would be subject to study and assessment (Ford and Ford, 1995; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Dialogue in this meaning-making sense may result in issue transformation because its organizers are typically interested in creating a safe space for people with different views to air their personal differences. As people engage in this way, they come to realize that their own contributions are based upon the contributions of others, and that it is our conversations that can bring out our individual and collective wisdom and creativity. Outcomes from dialogue can also lead to three other effects: 1) exploration, 2) decision making, and 3) collaborative action (NCDD, 2010).

In exploration, people and groups are invited to convene with one another to learn more about themselves, their community, or just about a particular issue. Often new insights are generated because of the nature of the conversation featuring openness and genuine listening.

Dialogue on behalf of decision making has been referred to as deliberation, in which participants use critical thinking and reasoned argument as a way to make decisions about important

policies. Consistent with emancipatory dialogue, participants attempt to understand the values, perspectives, and interests of others and to reframe their interests and perspectives in light of a joint search for common interests and mutually acceptable solutions.

Lastly, dialogue can be used to effect collaborative action in which people and groups are empowered to seek shared meaning and nourish relationships built on trust and humility. An attempt is made to encourage integrated activity among the diverse stakeholders involved in the issue at hand.

When dialogue for collaborative action is facilitated to embody the principles of authenticity and fairness, it tends to produce a high likelihood of program and policy sustainability, whatever the domain may be. Stakeholders perceive a process as authentic when their input is valued and when they believe that the dialogue itself, rather than some external force, possesses the agency to make the decision at hand. It distinguishes a legitimate dialogue from a 'fake' one in which communication is all one-way or where some participants do not open themselves to hearing and reflecting on what others have to say (Pruit and Thomas, 2007). In this case, dialogue becomes disassociated from the practice to which it is referring, not to mention from the stakeholders' meaning and identity. The challenge in authentic dialogue is to counter the tendency of participants to provide only superficial explanations for what they believe in (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011).

Fairness, meanwhile, tends to refer to procedures that are applied equally and inclusively, that provide voice to those who may have been excluded, and that contain safeguards to counter any disproportionate influence or behind-the-scenes manipulation (Leventhal, 1980). Field research by Larson et al. (2002), Gomez et al. (2005), and Tyler and Bladder (2000) found that perceptions of procedural fairness were the primary motivation for discretionary cooperation within workplace settings. Fair procedures lead to cooperative behavior, such as taking others' needs and desires into account in forming one's own convictions. The result is a virtuous circle in which the initial commitment to collaborative dialogue fosters greater commitment to the process and to continuous dedication to sustaining the effort (Hicks et al., 2008).

Examples from the managerial world

Any shift to managerial facilitation relying on dialogue produces a different form of discourse than may be the accepted standard in most organizations or units. Emancipatory dialogue, in particular, treats participants with a high level of genuine interest, even of fascination. It opens up a safe space for an exchange characterized by authenticity and fairness. In this space, there is every hope for the creation of a future for the matter at hand that is based on the mutual hopes and aspirations of the parties to the exchange.

Are there examples of this depth of civil discourse in the managerial ranks? Although not always the norm, there are people from all levels and functions of management that either intuitively or through concerted learning attempt to engage their colleagues in dialogue and deliberation as a managerial practice. In some cases, they rely upon internal or external change agents to assist them in creating the necessary conditions for dialogue to occur; in other instances, they exert their own agency often in collaboration with trusted colleagues (Raelin, 2010). To follow are several instances captured in diverse levels and settings. After each example, I offer a brief commentary on the respective actors' accomplishment of emancipatory dialogue, acknowledging that total fulfillment of the criteria may be elusive in managerial settings experimenting with this form of discourse.

In the first example from the world of top management, Deepika Nath (2008) describes a team of manufacturing vice presidents, assembled by the senior vice president of a $3 billion division of a Fortune 100 company, to engage in more productive dialogue as a means to create

a set of uniform manufacturing standards for the division. The SVP, with the help of Nath as a consultant, wanted to create a new manufacturing platform using dialogue as a means to foster openness and trust among the team members, who would rely as much on their own collective decision making as from any directives from him. Over a 12-month period, the team was exposed to concrete applications of emancipatory dialogue. For example, during some meetings, they would sit in a circle and use the method of the 'talking stick' to allow more authentic leaner expression, deep listening, presence, and respect for silence. They were encouraged to suspend their judgements and assumptions in order to listen and truly understand one another's point of view.

As members of the team developed a greater capacity to become observers of their own, others', and the team's behavior, they began to co-create a shared set of guiding principles for their ongoing work together. Their conversations went from fractious interactions and fighting to get a word in to a calmer rhythm in the team whereby each individual felt heard and appreciated. In Nath's words:

> As they learned to value their own contributions and role on the team, their insecurities went down. By practicing compassion for themselves, they developed the capacity for compassion toward others. They were able to appreciate silence and the quality of reflection and insight that came from it. One member noted: 'I realized how much of my time is filled with doing things—meetings, conference calls. I never get time to think'. There was a greater sense of camaraderie and trust. A commitment to each other's success provided a strong basis for collaboration.

In my analysis of this case as a forum for emancipatory dialogue, I was impressed with the seeming authenticity of the discourse, although we are at times not sure that people may be holding back because of latent or real fears about their role and about their participation. The fairness of the proceedings would require a deeper awareness of the nature of the agenda and whether participants were free to voice objections to goals formulated at the top, and also whether the participants' subordinates were also ultimately able to shape the new manufacturing platform. There is often a question about hidden voices, those actors whose interests, for whatever reason, are not considered. Who speaks for these actors and stakeholders? We are not necessarily comforted that those in positions of power speak for these actors; rather they need to acquire their own platform for agency. Heidegger referred to this type of intervention as a form of authentic solicitude that:

> Does not so much leap in for the other as *leap ahead* of him in his existential potentiality for Being, not in order to take away his 'care' but … to help the other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become free for it. (1967: 158–159)

Moving to the operating level, let's consider next an example of a project manager (see Raelin, 2003), whom I was working with as part of a leadership development program. He had not yet adopted a dialogic approach to facilitation but was intent on learning to become more receptive to it as a way to improve his management of project staff. As we know, dialogue can permit us to examine not only our assumptions about ourselves but about others, often in ways that can overcome misplaced inferences, which, without scrutiny, can produce unfulfilling actions. If we can slow down our inclination to make unfounded attributions by inquiring with an open heart about others' circumstances, we can minimally verify our assumptions. More critically, we can learn to understand both our common and different meanings and begin to reconstruct our mutual activity on a more compassionate basis. In this case, the project manager became upset when a purchasing

representative on his project team ostensibly did not perform some required tests that were deemed critical for the team's mission—a new process improvement system. Here's the manager's account of what happened:

> I asked Fred (the purchasing rep) if he could give us a summary of the results of his testing. He said he played around with the new system, but he had no specific details about the testing except that it did not provide purchasing with the appropriate tools necessary to do their jobs and he wanted the new system to function identically to the old system. In my frustration, I let my emotions take over and I concluded from these comments that Fred had not done any testing, and I viewed him saying he needed the functionality of the old system as a 'cop-out' for not doing the work. I managed to calm myself before commenting to him that this was unacceptable because we needed the testing results from his area to properly evaluate the new system.
>
> Later, after some personal retrospective reflection, I realized I could have handled the situation differently. I had viewed the observed data through my eyes, making a conclusion based upon my interpretation of the facts. I subsequently scheduled a meeting with Fred in order to try to gain some information into why he was not prepared. During the meeting I realized that he was attempting to do his part but technical issues within the system and a lack of documentation were causing his frustration and were limiting his ability to test properly. This is not an excuse for coming unprepared and I wish he would have told me so at the meeting, but maybe my stern comments hindered Fred's ability to speak openly. I now had a better understanding of what he was thinking and I could see why he was still resisting the testing of the new system. He and I worked together to come up with an action plan that would address the system issues, which would give Fred the ability to continue his testing.

Although this example merely recounts a two-person exchange, it reminds us that dialogue begins in such conversations and requires rehearsal and, oftentimes, in-the-moment reflective practice to ensure that our inquiry is fair, especially when we are in positions of power. In the instant example, there may not have been sufficient questioning of the process improvement system and, as a result, the project manager may have lost a chance to take advantage of the local knowledge potentially harbored by the purchasing rep (Yanow, 2004). In turn, the company managers may have missed the opportunity to create a culture of learning to challenge naturalized taken-for-granted plans and activities or to overturn perceptions of hierarchical manipulation.

Our next example takes place in an unusual setting, a hard-nosed negotiation between a management and a union at a steel plant that was scheduled for closure unless the management could find a way to buy itself out. A dialogue was scheduled by Bill Isaacs (see the full account at Isaacs, 1999) in what can be termed a classic adversarial culture built by years of mistrust and perceived betrayal. Isaacs introduced a number of dialogic practices, among which was that of respect in which there would be no tone of accusation or blame. Participants would not try to convince anyone else of his or her position. They were invited to try to understand what each party had done that had prevented them for seeing their mutual interdependence. In the conversation that ensued, the managers revealed their despair over the possibility of losing the opportunity to create a new company. Union people admitted that they wanted the deal to fail at times simply because of their intense anger at the company for decades of perceived abuse. Both sides vented as they worked through years of patterned behavior that had not allowed either side to see the other's intentions and meanings.

After a series of internal late-night exchanges, the union eventually voted to approve the contract and the company became independent. Beneath all the political noise, Isaacs reported that this

dialogue became one of the single most transforming experiences for both parties and one that is still talked about to this day. As one of the steelworkers commented:

> For the first time in my life here, I've seen management truly recognize me as an individual. I've seen the people in our union recognize that we need the people in management doing what they're doing to make it all come together, rather than trying to get everything we can from one another by lying and deceiving one another.

Admittedly, as Isaacs subsequently noted, the 'container' or safe environment for the exchanges in this case included representatives from the two sides and not the range of other stakeholders who would be affected by the eventual buyout, including employees who would lose their jobs regardless of the approved contract. The scaling up of authentic engagement activity remains a critical issue within the dialogue and deliberation community; those within the container may have benefited and may have even brought their heightened consciousness of the value of collective inquiry into their own communities, but without extension to affected parties outside the core group, the full effectiveness of dialogue may remain elusive.

In our final example reported by Catherine Needham (2007), we move to the world of public housing and service management in a project in northern England sponsored by the National Consumer Council, now referred to as Consumer Focus. The project is an example of what is known as *co-production* in public service administration and is essentially a dialogic encounter between users of public services, such as citizens, clients, and consumers, and frontline providers and managers of these services (Percy, 1984). Although co-production can take many forms and can apply to a range of contexts, such as health care, local education, and policing, in this case it entailed a search for a common agenda among housing users and producers who were invited to join a workshop conducted away from the point of delivery. Fifteen public housing residents, representative of social housing users nationally, along with ten frontline housing officers were brought together to listen to each other, explain their perspective, and diagnose the barriers to effective service delivery under trying conditions. In particular, in an environment of rationed housing service, low trust and hostility prevailed due to staff officers often acting as defenders of untenable housing policies.

Once some of the natural acrimony between the parties was allowed to be voiced, the participants found that they could move on, listen to each other, and begin to share their knowledge and recognize a common agenda. Some of the tenants voiced their frustration at a bureaucracy that shuffled them from one office to another; while the officers made a plea for better tenant understanding of the pressures they faced. By the end of the workshop, they were able to communicate a set of shared priorities; to agree on a set of operating responses to repairs, anti-social behaviour, and service fragmentation; and to design a choice-based letting system. The workshop was deemed to be the beginning of a collaborative process of co-production, leading to more effective engagement at the point of delivery.

This example points to the potential value of assembling a representative sample of users to engage in dialogue with management. Although it is not, therefore, a pure or full engagement, it may be a fair one if those selected are truly representative of the affected population. Exponents of public consultation, using sampling, claim that the conclusions reached are consistent with what an informed and reflective citizenry might want policy-makers to do (Fishkin, 2009). Such a process would need to be scrupulous in determining if free choices have been made and whether deeply held convictions, no matter how voiced, were accommodated.

Discussion

It is certainly my hope that the aforementioned examples, along with the prior explanations of the contribution of dialogue to managerial behavior, provide some confidence to practicing managers about the choices they may make in facilitating conversations. In dialogue, the manager starts with the assumption that he or she does not have the whole truth; thus there is a need for an exchange to attempt to learn the many facets of meaning that can be brought to bear by those who are principals to the endeavor at hand. As Bohm (1996) advised, since dialogue is exploratory, its meaning and methods continue to unfold. Hidden values and intentions may enter our consciousness and behavior, so we need to create a space in which we might overcome any misplaced assumptions so that we can learn and create together in fellowship and harmony.

Incorporating the five principles of collaborative dialogic processes, addressed earlier in the 'Facilitating for dialogue' section, and the criteria embodying authenticity and fairness, a number of norms may be proposed to establish inclusiveness in dialogue (Fryer, 2011; Nash, 2001; NCDD, 2009; Raelin, 2008). These norms could be used to assess the quality of discourse as parties seek to deliberate with one other for purposes of mutual exploration, decision making, and shared action.

1) Does the discourse invite deep listening of one another characterized by an exploration of new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes?
2) Does it provide a safe forum where all helpful voices, even those heretofore unheard, can be solicited, recognized, understood, legitimized, and appreciated as equal?
3) Does the discourse incorporate the legitimate and constructive voicing of values and emotions and other forms of expression?
4) Does it allow challenge of dominant discourses, such as the interests being served, the authority or expertise relied upon, the source of any knowledge, or the reasons why the work is organized the way it is?
5) Does it warrant that participatory efforts have a real potential to make a difference?
6) Is it inclusive of and does it value a diversity of race, gender, age, class, rank, and point of view?
7) Does it bring together participants from all involved institutions, from government, from the community, from ordinary walks of life?
8) Does the discourse incorporate coverage of social, political, and historical processes that may have naturalized taken-for-granted activities, such as leadership development?
9) Is it genuine and not a guise for subjugation, manipulation, or exploitation?
10) Does it encourage an examination of whether one's needs have been freely created and, if not, how to make free choices about meeting them?
11) Does it envision the workplace as contested terrain in which oppositional argument or dissent, containing deeply held convictions, can be accommodated?

When relying on dialogue for collaborative action, as well as for exploration and decision making, the foregoing norms along with the criteria of authenticity and fairness provide some critical ingredients to fortify the managerial role as facilitator of emancipatory dialogue. At a micro level of analysis, we seek to replenish the agency of managers who are not interested in control but in endorsing cultures of learning and engagement that preserve the autonomy, self-determination, but also the collaborative instincts of workers. At a macro level of analysis, we seek to unearth even subtle expressions of power that lead to hierarchical hegemony, coercive discourse, and nonporous social structures.

Lastly, I hope that researchers will experiment with the norms enumerated here, using a range of modalities, including ethnographic inquiry, to seek to understand the political and cultural constraints of emancipatory dialogue within groups and communities as they experiment with this form of discourse. I also hope that practitioners of dialogue and deliberation will add these features to their ongoing practice and amend them as they learn with fellow conversants how to produce more authentic and fair engagements.

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Author biography

Joseph A. Raelin is an internationally-recognized scholar in the fields of work-based learning and leadership. He holds the Asa S. Knowles Chair of Practice-Oriented Education at Northeastern University in Boston and is also Professor in the College of Business Administration. *Address*: 112 Hayden Hall, Northeastern CBA, 360 Huntington Ave, Boston, MA 02115, USA. Email: j.raelin@ neu.edu