

An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Leadership: Lessons learned on improving leadership practice

Alan R. Johnson

Dr Alan R. Johnson has worked in Thailand with the Assemblies of God since 1986. He completed his PhD at OCMS in 2006

Abstract

Much leadership training is predicated on universal views of leadership and based on cognitive methods. Drawing on my research of social influence processes in a Bangkok slum, I challenge these ideas and argue that an anthropological approach to the study of leadership suggests training methods that take sociocultural dynamics seriously. After overviewing the results of my work in the Lang Wat Pathum Wanaram community, I explore three key ideas that flow from viewing leadership through an anthropological lens. I argue that leadership must be understood in its sociocultural context, that the practice of leadership is primarily non-discursive, and that leadership training must be an intentional process that is rooted in dialogue and conducted over time.

Introduction

I have worked for the past 20 years with a Thai Christian organization where training pastoral leaders is critical to their organizational survival and success. I have taught, participated in, and observed numerous seminars, workshops, and classes designed to improve pastoral leadership in one dimension or another. Over time I felt a growing dissatisfaction with these efforts because the participants did not manifest any long-term behavioural change. My observations led me to reflect on the approaches that were commonly used when doing 'leadership training'. I came to see that there were two problematic assumptions made. The first is the belief that methodologically we can communicate content and tell people how to lead and this will change their actual practice. This assumption was reflected in the highly cognitive style of teaching and the continual quest to find the 'right' curriculum. The second is that principles of leadership are primarily universal and therefore one does not have to pay too much attention to the impact of local culture and social

organization. This assumption was reflected in the one-size-fits-all strategy that takes whatever the current hot principles and techniques are from a particular spot in the world and markets them as the answer to the leadership woes of another completely different social setting. Both expatriate and local trainers were guilty of operating out of these flawed assumptions. My experiences put me on a search to find a training methodology and content that could work in a Thai setting to bring positive and lasting change in the way people practice leadership.

One of the first things that changed in me personally in my own journey was the realization that I was attempting to train leaders without actually knowing what Thai leadership looked like. So in 2000 when an opportunity came to do doctoral research I jumped at the chance to work on developing a cultural account of Thai leadership. I wanted to find out what distinguishes leadership in the Thai sociocultural setting from other settings. I was interested in understanding how Thai leadership 'works' rather than measuring Thai on pre-existing western generated theoretic

cal frameworks. Because I wanted to be sensitive to cultural dynamics I chose an anthropological approach using participant observation to seek a holistic understanding of the social influence processes operating in the community that I studied. The study generated many interesting findings, answered many of my questions, and raised a host of others. But something else happened as well which was not part of my original agenda in doing the research. Both the findings and the anthropological approach that generated them suggested to me an approach to leadership training that moves beyond the cognitive dumping of supposed universal leadership principles. My intent in this paper is to stimulate and provoke the thinking of those who are involved in training leaders, either within or without of their own sociocultural setting, to explore new or adjusted methodologies in their training that take seriously the role of cultural dynamics in the conduct of leadership. I begin by summarizing some of my research results in order to set the backdrop for the discussion of three convictions that I feel should inform our efforts as we seek to train leaders.

Research Results from an Anthropological Approach to the Study of Leadership

I chose to study leadership as social influence processes in the Lang Wat Pathum Wanaram (LWPW) slum community in Bangkok. When I first started the research, I naively thought that I would produce a single model of Thai leadership, but I quickly found out that what I was experiencing on the ground was much more complex than a single model could account for. The first research finding was the development of the *Thukjai* (pleasing, satisfying) Leader Model (TLM), which represents an implicit leadership theory of culturally preferred leadership in the community. The TLM serves as a representation of the prototypical leader and works in two ways. In dyadic relations the behaviour of the TLM builds relations characterised by a positive and non-exploitative sense of reciprocity and obligation. It represents a form of socialised personal power that leaders are able to draw upon to gain compliance and cooperation in voluntary settings or without resorting to positional power in settings of formal authority. While no single person embodies the TLM, there

are people who operationalize the traits and associated behaviour enough so that others see them as being desirable to work with, effective, and people capable of influencing others.

The second finding connects how everyday leadership in the community draws upon the TLM and at the same time shows how the TLM operates outside the bounds of dyadic relations to serve as a prototype of interpersonal influence. In the community the discourse used to describe those considered capable of wielding influence to lead is found in the idea of being trustworthy (*chuatbuu*). Becoming a trustworthy person is based in a constellation of behaviours closely tied to giving in both tangible and intangible forms and which are found in the interpersonal relations dimension of the TLM. At the same time trust is built through observable behaviours for the public benefit that are connected to the task dimension of the TLM as well. While the TLM serves as a prototype, becoming a trustworthy person is seen as something attainable by people in the community.

A third finding grows out of the disjunction between the attribution of being trustworthy and the suspicion that is endemic to all leader-follower relations in the community. This led me to formulate a third model which acts as a heuristic for formal position holders (like the community committee) and those observing and relating to formal position holders. I call it the *Sakdi* (rank, authority, status) Administrative Behaviour Leadership Heuristic (SABLH) because it functions to help people understand what to do (if holding a formal position) or to interpret what is being done (if observing someone in a formal position). The *Sakdi* Administrative Behaviour (SAB) heuristic causes people to see formal position holding as affecting an ontological change in a person. For those in formal positions the SABLH justifies the acceptance of privilege and the practice of seeking personal and in-group benefit. For those observing people in formal positions, SAB is not only accepted as normal, it is assumed even when there is no or only slight evidence of such behaviour. Thus suspicion that personal and in-group benefit is being pursued provides the lens through which people view leaders in the community.

The model of the trustworthy person forms the basis for leadership emergence while SABLH shapes the perspective of nonleaders about the motives and actions of leaders. People in LWPW

do not see these two perspectives as mutually exclusive. An inquiry as to why a person is a community committee member, or the president of the committee, or why a person would be elected is likely to be answered in terms of the trustworthy leader model. However at the same time it is also likely that the same person will be under suspicion for acting for his own benefit. It is helpful to think of the TLM, trustworthy person, and SAB style leader each with its own continuum and with an interaction between the two. Stronger TLM/trust behaviour weakens SAB-style leadership and the element of suspicion. Conversely, the stronger SAB leadership is, the weaker the attribution of the TLM and trustworthiness will be, and this will lead to a higher element of suspicion.

A fourth key finding concerns the distribution of leadership through a group consisting primarily of horizontal relations. This is contrary to views that emphasize vertical relations and specifically assert that groups are created around and bound by patron-client relations. In LWPW there is evidence that people bind together on the basis of friendship and a common interest in the protection and development of the community. As a group they distribute leadership functions through the group and operate on motives other than reciprocity and obligation. In LWPW this means that the formal positional leader within the group may not be the most capable, while those who are capable remain in the background due to time issues. Those in formal positions have the time, while those with the capability do not have the time, but work to insure that critical functions are covered. Those who have time carry on the task of relating to state demands for meetings and information, while issues of greater substance to the community such as putting on festivals and celebrations is carried out by those with the requisite skills. Rather than leadership resting in a single person it is distributed throughout the group with different people playing different roles in order to accomplish tasks that are of importance to them as a community. The community committee can consist of more than one group, with a group being larger than just those on the committee. Groups built on horizontal relations are based on trust and provide a ready source of assistance for tasks that are larger than an individual or set of dyadic relations can handle.

Taken as a whole these models and concepts create a more comprehensive account of how leadership is conducted in the community and

show the dilemmas and contrasting values that both leaders and followers negotiate and draw upon to explain their own behaviour and the behaviour of others. As a gestalt these models, concepts, and their interrelations form a theory of community leadership in the sense of anthropological pattern or configurational theory. It is not causal explanation, nor is it deterministic, but it provides local concepts that are in tension and are drawn upon by local actors to negotiate everyday relationships in the community. Taken as a pattern theory it provides a heuristic tool for examining the perception and conduct of leadership in other settings to highlight both continuities and contrasts.

These results provide a partial answer to my question as to what distinguishes leadership in the Thai sociocultural setting. Within the limited boundaries of this single community study among the urban poor, the points I have summarized suggest some of the cultural material evident within the community that socially constructs leadership. This cultural material comprises a pool of shared resources that people draw upon for strategies of action and to make meaning. The following elements are a part of what demarcates a Thai approach to leading in a voluntary setting among urban poor: the role of giving-oriented behaviours in establishing non-exploitative dyadic relations where a sense of reciprocity and obligation creates the potential for cooperation; becoming trustworthy through publicly-oriented giving and serving behaviours; the tendency towards viewing position as involving privilege and the opportunity to pursue personal and in-group benefit, with the corresponding sense of suspicion of those holding formal positions; and the importance of group to performing leadership functions.

Insights on Improving the Practice of Leadership

What lessons about improving the practice of leadership can be drawn from these results and the anthropological approach that generated them? In reflecting on what I learned both through the process of the research and the results in light of my experiences of leadership training events within the context of my organization, I have come to hold a set of what I call 'convictions' that influence how I approach developing leaders in a given sociocultural setting. My purpose here is

not to articulate specific methodologies as to how one might train leaders as much as it is to provide a set of values or convictions that I believe should inform the ways in which we approach training. In the remainder of this paper I will examine in detail each of these convictions and draw upon the research in LWPW for illustrative material.

Leadership Must Be Understood In Its Sociocultural Context

The research results I have summarized above point to the complexity of leadership processes and to the culturally contingent nature of social influence. You can certainly measure the Thai on any of the models of the major research paradigms such as traits, behaviours, various contingency theories, or the charismatic/transformational framework; yet what does this really tell us about *Thai* leadership? I want to suggest that if we really want to help local leaders reflect on and improve their practice it will require grappling holistically with leadership as perceived and practised in real-life settings to produce conceptual insights grounded in local understandings. By saying this I do not mean that large-scale comparative research programs or the search for leadership universals are of no value. They are important, but they do not represent the critical edge when it comes to working to improve leadership within a specific sociocultural setting.

Another way of expressing my point here is to draw an analogy with a problem in the biological sciences. Behe has pointed out that life, in the biological sense, is lived in the details. It is the finely calibrated, highly sophisticated molecular machines that control cellular processes. However, in the literature there is a silence as to how molecular machines, which are the basis for life, developed.¹ In other words, the current state of theory cannot account for what is happening at the micro-level. I am proposing that the life of leadership is also lived in the details, and that macro-theories and universalist schemes, while helpful, leave an unexplained gap in the micro-processes that happen between people in sociocultural settings. To say it more colloquially, the really good stuff about leadership is deeply embedded in social settings. The hope of improving leadership in a local setting does not ultimately lie with abstract and generic principles stripped of the flesh and bones of their sociocultural setting,² but in the disassembling and reassembling,

the untangling of the explicit and implicit, and the challenging of conventional wisdom of leadership on the ground so that practitioners can see themselves and their setting with increased clarity. Then they can draw upon their unique pool of shared cultural resources for new, revised, or revived strategies of action.

I will illustrate my point briefly. My research in LWPW helped to explain why teaching about participatory decision making and its role in building a sense of ownership on the part of people always seemed to fall on deaf ears when working with pastors. This seeming rejection of participatory methods in favour of autocratic decision making started to make sense when I began to understand how *sakdi* administrative behaviour and values means that those who have formal position see themselves as having the right to make decisions without the need to consult. Participation may happen within the boundaries of one's trusted group, but position holders have no sense of needing to bring ideas from those outside their group into their deliberations. This kind of behaviour is 'normal' and in fact is expected by formal position holders and group members, even if the members do not appreciate it. In a setting like this merely communicating content is not going to change deeply rooted values and behaviour patterns.

Leadership Practice is Primarily Non-Discursive

If what is critical for improving the practice of leadership is located in deeply embedded concepts, values, behaviour, and social relations, one of the reasons that this is so is because there is a highly complex non-discursive side to our activities.³ Giddens points out that our discourse, what we are able to put into words 'about our actions, and our reasons for them, only touches on certain aspects of what we do in our day-to-day lives.'⁴ It seems to me that much of what constitutes leadership behaviour in LWPW flows from this implicit and non-discursive side. The concept of cultural models is helpful here because it provides an account from a cognitive perspective of the different types of processing used with explicit and implicit knowledge. Cognitive anthropology asserts that the most basic models of culture are learned through a form of cognitive processing that handles implicit knowledge, and as such, it is difficult to critique or modify.⁵

Much of what people do in the interactions of leadership stems from this implicit knowledge; in this sense it is not 'thought out' in advance, but is intuitively 'felt' to be the right thing to do. In LWPW both official 'culturally correct' views like being trustworthy (chuathuu) and the much more messy realities like follower experiences of daily leadership (such as observing inequitable distribution, the pursuit of personal and group benefit, and not sharing information) are out in the open, the subject of discourse, and thus explicit. Yet when a person becomes a leader it is deeply embedded, implicit values like hierarchy that shape much leader behaviour and these values are rarely brought into the level of discourse. In this way leaders continue to manifest behaviours that they themselves would be suspicious of in the follower role, and this creates a self-reinforcing cycle of behaviour that feeds the suspicion heuristic of the SABLH.

Michael Carrithers goes a step further in arguing his mutualist perspective against those who hold to an independent reality of culture as mental models, making a distinction between paradigmatic and narrative thought.⁶ Narrative thought is a 'capacity to cognize not merely immediate relations between oneself and another, but many-sided human interactions carried out over a considerable period.'⁷ Carrithers explains that narrative thought is not just telling stories but 'understanding complex nets of deeds and attitudes'⁸ and he illustrates from his work in a Jain community in India how people's knowledge of Jainism was local, particular, and narrative.⁹ By way of contrast, paradigmatic thought is the abstracted, schematic, and systematic thought which is pulled out of its social nexus.¹⁰

The cultural models and mutualist perspective taken together help to explain the disjunction between ideals and practice in LWPW. The culturally preferred TLM and ideas of the trustworthy leader represent the paradigmatic; a vision of the ideal based on the moral model of society and by extension leadership that is abstracted from real social life. However in real-life social interactions people in the follower role experience others' practice of leadership through the narrative mode of thinking and learning. Through constant involvement in the stories of leaders' lives and through both watching and interacting in leader-follower relations, people in LWPW have a localized and particularistic 'story' of which the acknowledgment of privilege and the suspicion of

its abuse are central. Finally, when people become leaders, their practice follows more from the non-discursive and implicit forms of knowledge than it does from thought-out strategies based in paradigmatic reasoning. Although Carrithers does not make this point I would also suggest that it is in the constant process of negotiating relationships in order to make meaning¹¹ and involvement in the lived 'story' of watching and experiencing others lead where people participate in meaning creation. Over time a shared interpretation develops that is deeply implicit about the nature of leadership practices. It is narrative thought through which much of culture is acquired, and which forms the implicit knowledge that is primarily outside of conscious thought but which forms the backdrop and interpretive schemes whereby we draw on more public sources of cultural materials to utilize in social interaction.

From a training perspective, what the role of implicit knowledge in leadership means is that when we teach paradigmatic knowledge from another sociocultural setting or even from within the very context we are working in, we are only touching the tip of the iceberg. Such teaching is also unlikely to make any connection to the world of non-discursive knowledge. The most important areas where actual leadership choices are made remain hidden, assumed, implicit, and unexamined. Thus training that does not address this part of the leadership matrix will not be able to touch the parts that often are most in need of change.

Leadership Training Should Be an Intentional Process, Rooted in Dialogue, Conducted Over Time

This final conviction grows out of the first two. If leadership is complex, is best understood in its sociocultural context, and is practiced primarily out of implicit knowledge, then any training methodology must take these factors into account. So what might a leadership training approach look like that takes seriously the influence of sociocultural context on local leadership? In this section I will set out three suggestions that have grown out of my reflection on the research process and results in LWPW.

Seek Understanding of the Local Leadership Context First

The first step is my belief that in order to train leaders one needs to have some sense of how

leadership in the setting under consideration is both perceived and practiced. I have found two pictures that are helpful in thinking about the kind of an account that needs to be developed before attempting to do training. The first is Tambiah's notion of 'totalization' and the explanation of 'extant actualities' in terms of the elucidation of indigenous concepts.¹² In the field of attempting to understand the design of traditional Southeast Asian kingdoms, he observed that any explanation that draws on a single mode of explanation, whether cosmological (the traditional one in this case), religious, political, or economic; ultimately falls short. What the Western analytic tradition separates, Tambiah points out, more likely 'constituted a single interpenetrating reality'.¹³ I want to suggest that leadership in a particular sociocultural setting is best viewed as a 'single interpenetrating reality' that has both 'flow' in the sense of the dynamic action of a live game being played, and 'feeling' in that some actions intuitively feel right.

A companion picture to the totalization view comes from the history of navigation over water. During the Middle Ages ships followed the coastlines and used charts called portolans (harbour guides) that told them all the facts about the coastlines such as depth of the water, rocks and shoals, special landmarks, and so on.¹⁴ Later after the problem of calculating longitude was solved, latitude and longitude served as an abstract grid that navigators could apply to all maps thus bringing them into conformity. Barnett notes, 'Despite their virtue of an empirical approach, the portolans told local, piecemeal stories - not only did each tell the tale of a tiny part of the world, but no two portolans of the same place were identical.'¹⁵ An anthropological, holistic approach produces a portolan of leadership for that particular sociocultural setting. With a 'harbour guide' of leadership in hand, you have a sense of the mechanisms of interpersonal influence that facilitate acceptable and effective leadership as well as the things that hinder it.

This is where I see the role of intentionality in the work of training leaders. Seeking holistic understanding does not happen by accident, nor is it the work of a moment. It demands that we intentionally insert ourselves *as learners and listeners* into the flow of social life in order to at least grasp some things that will enable us as trainers to raise the right questions with those we seek to train. Using the 'totalization' and 'harbour guide' ideas, let me illustrate how my work

in LWPW will help me in working through leadership issues in a Thai setting. In terms of a 'totalization' ethos there were three points that my work touched upon. First, I tried to develop an account based in indigenous concepts or practices. The 21 terms of the *Thuukjai* Leader Model represent key ideas that shape the discourse of prototypical and preferred leadership attributes and behaviours. Several of these terms were rather complex Thai concepts and as such serve as demarcation lines that highlight Thai cultural components in leadership. Connecting and indicating some of the relations between ideas of trust (*chuathuu*), respect (*nabthuu*), and personal power (*baramii*) along with terms dealing with deference (*kreng jai and kreng klua*) and grateful obligation (*bunkhun*), as well as the functioning of groups or cliques (*phuak*) and the role of unity (*samakhi*) for leaders and group life, also shaped the work towards a holistic configuration.

However it is not enough to simply re-describe things in local terms; there has to be a reconnection as to how the elements described interrelate so as to draw together both ideal conceptions and actual practice. In this I attempted to elucidate both the 'official' Thai cultural transcript and actual leadership practices in the community by showing how concepts are utilised, transformed, clash, or seem to inhabit separate cognitive worlds. At this point I drew upon concepts that go beyond local terminology and emic structures to describe what is happening in a way that local actors would not be articulate in the same way. I moved from local terms and practices to another level of abstraction to describe the *Thuukjai* Leader Model and *Sakdi* Administrative Behaviour-style leadership. Finally, I sought to achieve 'totalization' by consciously seeking out what is explicit that people can articulate and talk about, and that which is implicit and out of verbal reach. In the case of LWPW it happens that people can discourse freely about the culturally preferred model, the trustworthy leader, and their suspicions of those with leadership positions as well. However, people have much more difficulty in talking about *Sakdi* Administrative Behaviour; they can describe this behaviour of others, but generally do not consciously recognise it in themselves when practising leadership. Thus the phenomena I observed in LWPW is that people are suspicious of leaders, yet practised the very things they are suspicious of when leaders themselves.

When approaching a leadership training sit-

uation, my findings in LWPW also function as a leadership 'harbour guide'. It shows the ideal and preferred values and practices that form culturally relevant and acceptable routes to building interpersonal influence both in dyadic relations and in a broader community. At the same time it also shows the rocks on which leaders crash: how they often ignore the very behaviour patterns, attributes, and practices that they themselves articulate as being capable of producing interpersonal influence and do the opposite, thus creating suspicion and limiting cooperation. What this means is that within the sociocultural system itself are both the conception of the practices for successful leadership and the hindrances, obstacles, barriers, and blind spots that derail good leadership practices. In my opinion, good leadership training is going to work at mining this material out, or at least getting the questions that can do so lined up, before attempting to 'train' anyone. We cannot teach someone how to be a good leader if we have no clue as to what good leadership looks and functions like in that particular socio-cultural setting.

Bring the Implicit to the Surface

Seeking 'totalization' or a leadership 'harbour guide' is not *the* answer to leadership training, but it points in a hopeful direction because it can highlight areas of disjunction, clashing, and disconnection between ideal values and other values that drive the behaviour of real politics on the ground. Getting to this point requires a great deal of work and commitment on the part of trainers to understand what is happening, but it is only the first half of the work. Simply sharing these results as paradigmatic knowledge is to miss the whole point of the implicit nature of much leadership knowledge. The second step in the pedagogical process for leadership training is to utilize the insights from the study of leadership in that setting to bring to the surface what is normally unexamined and unnoticed. The critical leverage for helping to improve leadership in a given sociocultural setting is to find a way to help people to talk about what is usually implicit. This involves facilitating people to dialogue about how and why they default to unproductive leadership patterns and why culturally preferred behaviours remain for the most part ideals. This is not only an exercise in awareness, but it requires participants to find cultural resources that will help them to

value and integrate into practice their own culturally preferred forms of leadership. This is why leadership training must include dialogue and be seen as a process and not a point in time event. It takes solid relationships and trust to be able to talk about things that are normally invisible to us.

Let me illustrate at one point the kind of material that would form the basis for such a dialogue in a Thai setting. As the research progressed I was fascinated that people seemed to be able to verbalize about the TLM and the trustworthy (*chuathuu*) leader model, yet would act contrary to the ideals of these models when they occupied a formal leadership position themselves, even criticising other leaders who did so as well. In LWPW trust has to do with leadership emergence and the ability to secure cooperation. Yet distrust is manifestly everywhere throughout the slum. The suspicion heuristic of the follower dimension of the *Sakdi* Administrative Behaviour model forms the operational context for leadership. It is precisely ongoing repetitions of blatant pursuit of personal gain on the part of elite levels in Thai society that feeds and makes plausible the suspicion heuristic as it concerns leaders. The preferred leader and trustworthy leader models, based in giving behaviours, and notions of deference, reciprocity, and obligation, are by their very nature symbol systems easily manipulated by people who can thus maintain a public face of benevolence, concern, and generosity while pursuing personal advantage. It is this ease of manipulation, leading to common cognitions of mistrust that vastly complicates the practice of leadership in the Thai setting.¹⁶ Because trust is low and suspicion high, leaders tend to rely on their group (*phuaak*), who they do trust.¹⁷ The more that information stays in the group and the more the group demands benefits to the exclusion of others, the greater the sense of distrust and suspicion on the part of those outside the group.

In seeking to improve leadership in a Thai setting like LWPW it will be necessary to get both trust, which is something that is talked about, and suspicion, which is not generally talked about, up on the table. Leaders need to recognize and intentionally bring into conscious thought the suspicion heuristic and work precisely in the opposite direction of what suspicion expects. To do this will require behaviour that runs counter to some of the privileges that leaders have come to expect, but the results of enhanced influence by being considered trustworthy will result in increased

cooperation. The issue of trust could also be used to ask questions that probe social relations in Thai society and may open the door to finding new leadership patterns that have the potential to improve the quality of life for people in slum communities.

For instance, strengthening horizontal networks would immediately improve life for people in slums by connecting them more meaningfully with people outside of their own limited kin and friendship networks and increase the possibilities for collective agency. However I observed that while inside a *phuaak* (group) it is possible to work in terms of horizontal relations because there is a level of trust between the parties, outside of the *phuaak* (group), *sakdi* administrative behaviour is activated. I saw this clearly one day when I helped with cleaning the Saen Saeb canal landing in preparation for a popular festival. The event was announced over the community loudspeakers, but only a handful of committee members and a few of their friends came. During the actual cleaning dozens of residents of the section where people from the northeastern provinces live that abuts the canal stood around watching. I never saw one of the community leaders, who are all Bangkok born, ever speak a word to any of them. I asked a Thai friend about this later on and she said they did not talk to them because they are not part of their *phuaak* (group); they do not know them. In the administrative leader role, as the officially sanctioned committee, events are announced and people are invited to help, but committee members in LWPW find it difficult to interact with people that are not in their *phuaak* (group). Leaders need to discuss issues related to enlarging *phuaak* and connecting different groups to form larger ones. Surfacing why it is difficult for community leaders to develop relationships with community residents outside of their group will be important to finding ways to build a sense of community that overcomes the fissures that exist between the three sections that comprise the single administrative unit of LWPW. My point in all of this is that training methods used for improving leadership should not simply focus on passing on facts and principles, but should work at sensitizing and providing skills in mining the implicit in one's cultural setting and leadership practice to bring them into conscious thought. As I noted above, this is a process not an event and it requires dialogue and not monological information sharing.

Look for Local Answers to Cultural Problems

While nobody in LWPW completely embodied the culturally preferred TLM some were considered more desirable leaders than others. It may very well be that it is precisely those people who are able to step outside of themselves and reflect on leadership behaviour in the light of idealised cultural preferences, the implicit, and the assumed, who are able to devise strategies of action that are fruitful for task accomplishment. Such people are valuable sources for learning not only what they do, but the conditions and circumstances that are involved in their practice. Positive and successful examples can be probed as to how and why they were able to tap one source of culturally preferred material over another.

It is noteworthy that in a study of principals in Thailand who were able to bring documented reform to their institutions, the researcher found it was precisely because they did not act in the normal and expected fashion that the principals succeeded. They relinquished some of the authority that their position would normally assume, using a more participatory style, and thus were able to negotiate changes that were resisted and subverted in other schools.¹⁸ In LWPW my interviews showed that Uncle P. was the most respected person. Two things he did were very appreciated by people and are different from usual leader behaviour. When serving as committee president he walked around the community inquiring how people were doing, and one interviewee noted how he called frequent meetings to share information and that he respected him for that. While reflection on the differing cultural materials available for leadership behaviour may be rare, there are people that do this and discussing such examples can open the door for seeing new and culturally relevant options for leadership practice.

This point, along with my previous one, illustrates that need for time in the unfolding process of leadership training. Finding cultural exemplars, discussing them, and learning how they work requires time and multiple meetings. Taken together the three points I have made here about understanding leadership in its context, surfacing the implicit, and seeking local answers, highlight the need for a training methodology that is intentional, a process, utilizes dialogue, and which happens over time.

Conclusion

While the notion of leadership may be contested in academic circles, in real-life settings it is highly valued. How groups hold together, maintain relationships, and accomplish their tasks is no small matter. Group relationships and task accomplishment can be done for better or worse; and this has great consequence for the quality of human life inside of these groups and among those outside of their boundaries that they influence. This means that training leaders is not something to be undertaken lightly. I have argued here that our attempts at training leaders need to be informed by a deeper understanding of how leadership is perceived and practiced within its own socio-cultural setting. Anthropological approaches that seek holistic understanding of interpersonal influence processes in a social setting combined with training methodologies that use creative means to facilitate dialogue about both explicit and implicit leadership dimensions are more likely to result in productive leadership behaviour patterns.

Notes

1 Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 5

2 Weber's comment is germane here: 'The more comprehensive the validity - or scope - of a term, the more it leads us away from the richness of reality since in order to include the common elements of the largest possible number of phenomena, it must necessarily be as abstract as possible and hence devoid of content. In the cultural sciences, the knowledge of the universal or general is never valuable in itself.' Max Weber, *Methodology in the Social Sciences*, E. Shils & H.A. Finch, Trans. (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1949), 80

3 Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987), 7

4 *Ibid.*, 7

5 Roy D'Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 178. See Brad Shore for an example of explicit and tacit models in Samoan conceptions of village space in *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture and the Problem of Meaning*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

1996), 272-3

6 Michael Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures: Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). See particularly Chapters 5 and 6 where he develops these ideas in detail.

7 *Ibid.*, 82

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, 109-10

10 *Ibid.*, 109-14

11 *Ibid.*, 106

12 Stanley J. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 252-86

13 *Ibid.*, 257

14 J. E. Barnett, *Time's Pendulum: From Sundials to Atomic Clocks, the Fascinating History of Timekeeping and How Our Discoveries Changed the World* (San Diego, California: Harvest, 1998), 97

15 *Ibid.*, 101

16 One of the theoretical perspectives on trust is that of common cognition, where expectations held in common by people structure behaviour in certain predictable ways. C. Lane, 'Introduction: Theories and issues in the study of trust' in C. Lane and R. Bachmann (eds.), *Trust Within and Between Organizations: Conceptual Issues and Empirical Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 10. I want to suggest that there exist in Thai society common cognitions for both trust and mistrust, and these are what structure the ideas behind the TLM and the suspicion of the SABLH. Whatever the source of opportunism in Thai society it has been prevalent enough to create the common expectation of predictable behaviour on the part of those who are in leadership positions.

17 Kanter talks about how uncertainty abounds even in bureaucratic systems and how this uncertainty in human institutions means that there is a degree for a need to rely on human persons. Rosabeth M. Kanter, 'How the top is different' in R. M. Kanter and B. Stein (eds.), *Life in Organizations: Workplaces as People Experience Them* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), 25. What she calls the 'uncertainty quotient' causes people in leadership positions to create tight inner circles with homogeneous relations and loyalty (*Ibid.*, 26)

18 P. Hallinger and Pornkasem Kantamara, 'Educational change in Thailand: Opening a window onto leadership as a cultural process', *School Leadership & Management* 20:2 (2000), 189-205