Cultural Management and the Discourse of Practice

CONSTANCE DEVEREAUX

Cultural management, like many other fields that have emerged over the past several decades – women's studies, leadership studies, information science, digital humanities, cultural studies, to name a few – has been described as a field of inquiry rather than as a discipline in its own right. More than a mere hybrid (i.e. the combined study of culture and management), cultural management is broadly interdisciplinary by nature. It straddles, sometimes uncomfortably, the boundaries between the social sciences, the humanities, management, and the arts, neither accepting a place, nor fully accepted – in many universities – squarely within the camp of any one of these disciplines. Moreover, the term 'cultural management' is used to designate a wide set of practices relating to the management of cultural organizations and cultural activities for achieving a variety of aims including production, distribution, exhibition, education, and other related activities within a variety of sectors including the nonprofit, for profit and public. Such diversity and fragmentation makes it difficult to define a specific set of characteristics common to all cases; similarity among organizations and individuals engaging in the practices of cultural management, therefore, may be more a case of family resemblance than of well-defined categories. Arts/cultural organizations and the diverse roles of cultural managers, are more likely to be linked by a common pool of similar characteristics, operating more or less within the arena of arts and culture, than by any common or core characteristic. The field takes its methods, practices, and even its motivations from a variety of other fields according to the needs of practitioners and their organizations as determined by utilitarian measures of efficacy and success.

A formal field by the name of cultural management, or arts management –the preferred term in the United States – is less than a century old. A considerable strength of the field has been the ability of practitioners to adapt their practices to political and social forces, adopting new methods and strategies to meet with new challenges. Nonetheless, it has developed into a field where reaction rather than pro-action is the norm with little reflection upon how its practices fit within a larger context (DEVEREAUX 2006). This article argues for developing a wider dis-

course of practice that accomplishes that goal and suggests the resulting benefits for the field. It also emphasizes the need for scholarly inquiry as an essential component to field development and training of future cultural managers.

1. Practice vs. A Discourse of Practice

The term 'discourse' as it is used in the social sciences relates to knowledge construction and institutionalized ways of thinking. A 'discourse of practice,' briefly defined, examines the institutionalized ways of thinking about the practices of a field. Its approach is anthropological as well as critical in that its enquiring view is one of the observer who is more apt to see what the natives cannot. The hermeneutic advantage of such a discourse is underscored when one considers the limitations and compromises, as described by van Manen (1999), of the practice of "reflecting-about-doing-something-while-doing-it." He notes, for example, limitations within the relational dimension; specifically the difficulties of reflecting upon the thing in which one is engaged (e.g. a conversation or activity) at the moment of being engaged in that very thing. Some distance from the activity – even if one admits (GADAMER 1977) the difficulties of any interpretive enterprise – is especially important for a field like cultural management, which does not yet have the long view of history as a check and balance upon its methods and practices.

A second compromise relates to the differences between thinking *about* a practice and thinking *in* a practice. This temporal dimension concerns differences between reflections about the past (retrospective reflection) and the future (anticipatory reflection) compared, especially, to reflections about present, in-the-moment, activities. Conflating these reflective activities and their outcomes is problematic because the reflections are differently structured (GADAMER 1977) and, therefore, require different means of analysis.

A further consideration is the need to recognize the distinction between discussion of practice that focuses on the how-to-do, and a true discourse of practice that focuses on a wider range of conceptual issues. The first concerns such things as how to write a grant, the steps to developing a successful arts marketing campaign, the means for managing a volunteer workforce, or the techniques for successful stage management. In contrast, the latter is interested in critical examination of cultural management practices in order to understand the epistemological,

ethical, and conditioned assumptions that underpin them, the norms and preferences for action, the accepted ways of doing – and what makes them so acceptable – and the deeper structures that such ways of doing reveal. Both have relevance to the development of the field and for training future practitioners. However, a critical analysis arising out of a discourse of practice, i.e. deep exploration of the language games, the habits, values, knowledge traditions, principles, and assumptions of the field provides practitioners, scholars, and students with a fuller understanding of how cultural management practices operate within their own context as well as within larger society. The benefits can be realized in terms of knowledge production and a deeper conviction of the value of cultural management and cultural managers, and thereby, a broader acknowledgement of the role and value of cultural production as a human activity.

The roots of 'discourse of practice' in practice theory, from the wider spectrum of cultural theory, point to practice as embedded within a particular social/cultural context. "Integrative practices" (SCHATZKI 1996: 98), such as teaching or business practices have as their context the particular activities and behaviors of the field (teaching, business, or cultural management) out of which they arise. Van Manen (1999) identifies these as the "explicit and the tacit dimensions of the rules, precepts, codes, principles, guides, commitments, affects, and behaviors ...within a domain of action." Discourse of practice is concerned with the ways in which practice operates within the reciprocal influence of a structural or systems construct – that is, both acting upon and acted upon within a particular domain. The application of such theories within an applied realm – such as is discussed here – is an important reminder that even the most banal, task-oriented activities are embedded within a context that can be reflected upon, considered, evaluated, and critiqued in comparison to alternate and other ways of doing that may not be wholly evident to those too deeply immersed within the social/cultural context in which the particular practice arises. The relevant context for cultural management has never been fully explored or defined, however, and there are many competing views on "the nexus of sayings and doings", (SCHATZKI, Ibid) lurking within the term 'cultural management'. Transferring skills and knowledge, in the field, has proceeded largely through apprenticeship, on-the-job-training, and adoption of best-practices through processes that are more descriptive than analytical. Moving the locus of training to the university has not changed the essential character of cultural management pedagogy. The tendency, in terms of pedagogy

and training, therefore, is to see practice as rule-bound and from the perspective of 'correct' or 'incorrect' in relation to the execution of its activities. However, the actual practice, especially from a (philosophically) normative perspective – e.g. what *ought* to be done compared to what *is* done – remains open to examination. This adds to the need for – and difficulty of – engaging in a discourse of practice without fuller clarification of concepts and terms.

For purposes of inquiry, it may be useful to examine the differences between a "how-to-do" discourse and a discourse of practice in comparison to Ryle's distinction between "knowing-how" and "knowing-that". The first, 'knowing how', relates to the rules and precepts of a practice. Knowing how to play chess, for example, means that one knows the rules of that game. Performance can be assessed in terms of following or not following the rules. 'Knowing that' is to be in possession of certain knowledge or information. For example, "knowing that John Doe knows French" (RYLE 1949: 125) would result from receiving evidence of just that.

Several significant problems arise in examining knowledge of practice in an area like cultural management. Knowing how to write a grant assumes that there are particular rules governing grant writing. While it is true that grants often follow guidelines (e.g. "describe the grant activity and its outcomes in terms of measurable objectives," or "limit your response to 500 words"), the difference is that grant writing know-how is measured by the outcome (the grant is awarded) not by awareness of, or even command of, a set of rules. Explicit grant writing rules do not exist in the same way as rules for playing chess. Rather, grant writing is, in many ways, more akin to playing a violin. The rules in the latter case, such as they are, can be violated – even drastically so – with aesthetically successful results. Indeed, simply adhering to the supposed rules, for violin playing, can result in very bad musicianship. So, whereas Ryle acknowledges that one can *know how* to play chess, yet do so very badly, a person who writes a grant and does not receive funding would not be said to 'know' how to write a grant. The same is true for many other activities relating to cultural management, e.g. marketing a performance, preparing a budget, recruiting volunteers, leading a non-profit board meeting. Whereas the statement, "he knows how to play chess but does so badly", makes perfect sense, the statement, "she knows how to write a grant but does it badly" does not. That is because the proof of 'knowing how' is teleological, making the determination of competence more akin to an Aristotelian determination of ideal ends where "the full attain-

ment of excellence must be added to the mere function" (ARISTOTLE 1962: 1098a); The function of a lyre player, in other words, is the same as the function of the 'excellent' lyre player, for the person who plays badly is not properly called a lyre player and could not be said to *know* how to play the lyre. To be sure, Ryle is in partial agreement regarding an assumed level of expertise in performing an activity, though his use of 'knowing-how' and 'knowing that' have very different aims than the concept of a discourse of practice, as presented here, implies.

> What is involved in our descriptions of people as knowing how to make and appreciate jokes, to talk grammatically, to play chess, to fish, or to argue? Part of what is meant is that, when they perform these operations, they tend to perform them well, i.e. correctly or efficiently or successfully. Their performances come up to certain standards, or satisfy certain criteria. But this is not enough. The well-regulated clock keeps good time and the well-drilled circus seal performs its tricks flawlessly, yet we do not call them 'intelligent'. We reserve this title for the persons responsible for their performances. To be intelligent is not merely to satisfy criteria, but to apply them; to regulate one's actions and not merely to be well-regulated. A person's performance is described as careful or skilful, if in his operations he is ready to detect and correct lapses, to repeat and improve upon successes, to profit from the examples of others and so forth. He applies criteria in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right. (RYLE 1949: 28f.)

While the rules of excellent grant writing or excellent volunteer recruitment may not be explicit, there exists a wide range of implied rules embedded within the habits, values, and beliefs of a particular cultural management system. In a given time period a particular set of values or beliefs may dominate – for example the preference for funding arts participation among children – without anyone seriously questioning if the preference translates into something beneficial – overall – in this case, for children, society, or the arts.

While 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' do have relevance within the cultural management profession, it is clear that neither of these is sufficient for the training and development of cultural managers or the continued development of the field. The concepts, themselves, do not demand a critical stance toward accepted practice or a pressing need for excavating layers of embedded assumptions in order to question the practices already in place. The need comes, instead, from a recognition that doing so may translate into real benefits for cultural managers and for the state of the field.

2. The Current State of Practice

As currently conceived in the United States, the skill set of a successful cultural management practitioner includes marketing and audience development, economics and finances, public policy, fundraising, real estate (if an organization owns or leases property), board development, arts education, strategic planning, as well as the diplomatic skills for developing relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders (AEA CONSULTING 2006). This list (which describes an ideal that may or may not be typical of real-life practitioners) is by no means exhaustive; it defines a range of competencies pertaining to the day-to-day management of cultural organizations. Clearly there is much to say regarding the 'how-tos' of the field, especially as a field that has yet to emerge from its ontological phase (what *is* cultural management?)

A more comprehensive list of skills would include familiarity with theories of culture and art, aesthetics, theories of management, leadership, and evaluation, with a bit of psychology and sociology thrown in for good measure. Many forward-looking university programs in arts or cultural management include some dimension of instruction in these areas in their training of students. However, the preponderance of courses remain strictly focused on a 'hands-on' or 'how to' set of skills.

A further case can be made for development of skills that, while highly practical, are arguably more essential and intractably difficult to teach. These include flexibility, creativity, and the ability to conceptualize and decode across a range of possible problem schemes and their resolution. However, unlike many of the other examples of fields of inquiry listed above, cultural management training and research is strongly focused on discussions of competencies and methods of practice; conversations within the field exhibit a strong leaning towards the pragmatic and experiential to the exclusion of deeper intellectual reflection, even regarding issues of contention, such as the meaning of culture or the role of art in society. Teaching and research issues revolve predominantly around applied and professional themes, action-oriented issues, and outcome specific problem-solving both from the perspective of the practitioner and as a teaching and research aim of the academy.

In comparison to a field like cultural studies, which shares an adjective – at least, cultural management does not exhibit the same intellectual interest in moral, epistemological, or sociological reflection, in the relevance of power relationships, or the conceptual underpinnings of

principles. Questions of political or economic import are often limited to those that fall neatly within the applied realm.

As a result, the field tends towards a utilitarian, reductionist approach to inquiry; one that troubles itself very little with the deeper analysis that would situate practice within the larger context of its functions in relation to culture, for example, or society. Admittedly, the complexity of cultural management as a field demands a high level of technical competency, and this may go a long way towards explaining why discussion of action-oriented techniques dominate both instruction and research. One has to admit, as well, that the field of cultural management is not unique in its skills-based focus on practice. "Every practice rests on theory", writes the American management guru, Peter Drucker (1985: 26), "even if the practitioners themselves are unaware of it", suggesting – in fact – a lack of such awareness in the field of business management. In public policy, education, and many other professional fields, utilitarian concerns also often override reflective awareness of practice as a set of phenomena to be examined, reconsidered, and explained. If cultural management keeps company with these other well-established fields does it need to engage in a discourse of practice? What, in fact, does it gain?

In response to the first question, many of the fields cited have already engaged in a discourse of practice, in particular, education, which provides a framework for discussion in the following section. Further, it is a mistake to see the present argument as a simple plea for resolving the theory versus practice divide or for acknowledging that hidden in practice is a great deal of theory. It is also not to say that ideally trained and reflective cultural managers "do a bit of theory and then a bit of practice," before taking any action – a ghost in the machine, in any case, according to Ryle (28). Rather, the intent of a discourse of practice, as presented here, is to submit commonplace understandings to the rigor of focused examination. For example, we commonly refer to those newly entering the field, as well as those undergoing training in the academy, as 'emerging leaders'. One might ask, therefore, what foregone conclusions, are embedded in that designation as opposed to calling someone an 'emerging practitioner'? This is particularly relevant in an era of leadership studies whose literature is pointed in its distinction between 'manager' and 'leader'. Do these terms, though common in usage, really translate to a real difference in the world of practice? Or, does the difference appeal to an ideal to be realized – a way for newly minted arts managers to find value in their chosen career, even if the rest of society does not yet view them as leaders? Or, could it be a bit of marketing rhetoric meant

to attract members to organizations or future students to university programs? Who, after all, would not rather be counted a leader, even if it is the same thing as 'manager' with a new label applied?

What is uncovered in questioning the common positioning of the terms 'high art' and 'popular art' as opposite in meaning? The answer is: much, but more than is superficially evident. Even if some scholars and analysts see the distinction as irrelevant (after all, "high" and "popular" are not mutually exclusive), the terms continue to resonate as meaningful for many other people. A critical discourse of practice may help us understand how decision making, policy, marketing, and planning may be influenced by unreflective use of these terms.

Why does the common usage of 'arts education' conjure up images of children much more readily than senior citizens, and what does this entail in terms of policy problems and solutions? Why is it relevant, in arguing for increases in funding, to suggest that arts participation among the young leads to lifelong participation in the arts especially given the scant evidence that it really does? Participation, in fact, is a particular case in point presenting a timely need for discourse and reflection. In the 20th and 21st centuries policies and programs have strongly focused on the need for audience development. This gave way to a program and policy concern with 'participation'. This latter term, very lately, however, has acquired considerable negative connotations relating to globalization and neo-colonialism. Are the fears, concerns, and perceptions of power relationships suggested within these trends warranted given the potential for impact on developments in practice? Surely there is some value in unpacking these terms.

Likewise, within the mantra that art *is* business—so often heard, especially in the performing arts—are unexcavated strata of meaning, assumptions, and values that a discourse of practice can bring to the surface. Given the many ambiguities of key terms like culture and art, how can we bring differences in usage to the surface in a way that does not hinder effective practice? In past writings, this author has identified four levels of abstraction in the meaning of 'art' as it has been used in the field, as well as the tendency, in cultural management and policy, to conflate them, and the policy problems it entails (DEVEREAUX 2006). Questions such as these are rarely posed or pursued in the field. The questions themselves hint at the possibilities for new critical understandings.

While the examples here focus on problems with language, the opportunities for deconstruction and examination of practices are not lim-

ited in this way. The intent of this article is not to suggest a comprehensive array of paths for inquiry within a discourse of practice, but to argue the need for and benefits of pursuing such a direction. The next section looks at some of those benefits, from both a practical and a meta point of view.

3. Why Reflect Upon Practice?

Practice theory, as noted above, is a type of cultural theory, which looks at practice as a patterned and routine way of behavior that includes, according to Reckwitz (2002: 250), a range of interconnected, "forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge". The notion of a discourse of practice is more common in a field like education where reflectivity is encouraged as a means for improving teaching and for transferring skills and knowledge from one educator to another. Van Manen draws on the example of education in discussing both the discourse of practice and the practice of practice, citing many of the so-called practice theorists – Schatzki, Bourdieu, Lyotard, Foucault, and Taylor as a foundation for his work. The particular orientations of these theorists differ in some degree. Taylor and Schatzki work from a tradition that includes Wittgenstein and Heidegger, as well as – to some extent, Bourdieu – in the case of the latter. They see practice in the philosophically normative sense as focused on the way things work within a given contextual realm; emerging from practical consciousness, or the way things are in everyday life. Foucault and poststructuralists position practice within a background of understanding influenced most strongly by semiotics and phenomenology where practice is a construct of, for example, codes of knowledge. While Reckwitz acknowledges the differences as no more than programmatic (RECKWITZ 2002: 245) the various traditions are worth untangling in the process of discourse and reflective inquiry for the possibilities each offers as a starting point for further exploration. Each tradition suggests possibilities for virgin ground to be uncovered by cultural managers willing to be so engaged. An awareness of something hidden and deeper to be discovered is, in itself, an advantage if it can lead, eventually, to a critical examination of accepted practices. Van Manen, however, warns about the difficulties in assuming that reflection alone will uncover the hidden assumptions, norms, and deeper mean-

ings of practices in a profession. The comparison of cultural management to teaching is a good one.

The importance of education requires constant reassessment of its practices to bring about improvement in teaching and for training future practitioners. Teaching is generally considered to be more than encouraging children to perform a set of tasks. Likewise, cultural management is more than just managing the production and/or delivery of cultural products through a practical set of skills, analogous to management of products and services in other economic sectors. Such a view, in fact, ignores the function of art and culture in supplying meaning and value to lives – both collectively and individually. For this reason, cultural management can be seen as a type of cultural practice rather than solely as a work practice somehow divorced from its social/cultural impact.

From a practical standpoint, an interrogation of the habits, traditions, and language uses within the field can reveal the many unreflective ways of doing that have become accepted practice. For a field in which challenges to survival are frequent and often imposing, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation have high value. They are more likely to arise when we adopt a critical, outsider view of the environment.

In another example from education, Putnam and Borko (1998) note, however, that discourse communities (e.g. professional organizations or listservs where practitioners share information) are not enough to bring about the desired reflection. Just as students learning science need more than each other to learn about the field, educators may need an outside source to help them reflect critically upon the practice of teaching. Pillay (2001: 1223-1296) notes that practitioners may be so immersed within the common practice that they will perpetuate the many norms that are overripe for critical examination. "A critically oriented practice discourse is recommended to assist [the field] in reconsidering its present immersion in a reductionistic, technical and utilitarian discourse and toward a discourse that assists an effective sharing of communication".

This indicates a significant value for the role of researcher or scholar who may be in a position to present the outside view. A discourse of practice, therefore, can be the means for producing new knowledge that furthers the development of the field. Citing Foucault in her discussion of research and practice in art, Barrett (2006) maintains that a discourse of practice allows artist practitioner-researchers "to locate themselves within contexts of theory and practice and provides an analytical framework though which [they] might locate themselves and their work within the broader social arena and field of research." Translating these claims

to the case of cultural management, a discourse of practice allows the cultural management practitioner to see the field as a landscape of methods and practices in which she can situate herself for purposes of self-reflection, evaluation, and to situate herself within a broader context.

Whatever aims there are for postmodernists and deconstructionists in the Foucaultian tradition to pursue their own discourses of practice, there is a real need in the field of cultural management for a discourse that turns the focus of discussion from the utilitarian to a critical and conscious reflection upon meaning, interpretations, and values. A more meta-reason for engaging in a discourse of practice, therefore, is to position cultural management within a realm where arts and culture are recognized for the value they bring. Such a view concerns the role of cultural manager as mediator in a process of interaction between individual and cultural product. If art and culture are concerned with meaning and interpretation, then they are essential to the process by which individuals find meaning in their lives.

It may seem strange to suggest that cultural managers do not reflect upon such matters. But, as Putnam and Borko point out, there is such a thing as 'unreflective reflection' – the kind that accepts a particular reflective position without deeper interrogation. To succeed in the role of mediator requires a cultural manager whose skills and knowledge extend beyond the techniques of practice, of course, but if we take the role of mediation seriously, it requires a critical approach to the practices and techniques of mediation that the cultural manager adopts. Advocates and practitioners are often at pains to articulate persuasive arguments for the value of the arts and much activity in the fields of cultural policy and advocacy are devoted to this end. This is an area where a through-going examination of assumptions could prove fruitful. In addition, it has become more typical to present the value of the arts in purely instrumental terms, i.e. economic impact, or improving the standardized test scores of school children. These latter strategies have drawn a measure of criticism (McCARTHY et al. 2005; COLETA 2008). However, even if the field generally accepts that arts and culture have intrinsic value, articulating the position convincingly is an altogether different matter.

4. What Do We Have to Talk About?

The position of this article is that within the range of common discourse in the field of cultural management, there is a need for a reflective discourse of practice. The tradition of practice theory provides a framework for initiating and developing a discourse of practice that can examine and question the given ways of doing, thinking, and believing, that form, in an integrated way, the accepted practices of cultural management. In a field characterized by fragmentation, by reaction rather than proaction, where critical issues relating to the meaning of culture and the value of the arts to society are rarely examined there is a need for scholarly inquiry to contribute to the development of the field and the training of future cultural managers. As the field matures within the dynamic environment of culture and the arts, practitioners and scholars must adopt more critical perspectives about field.

A discourse of practice provides many fruitful avenues of pursuit and inquiry to the interested researcher and practitioner. It suggests a range and direction for raising questions about the meanings, relationships, assumptions, and values that underpin policy and program decisions, and that heretofore have been rarely asked. Among the possible benefits is that a discourse of practice may elevate our appreciation and understanding of the role of the cultural manager in her environment and in the context of larger society. It may encourage reflection upon the ways in which cultural managers, in their role as mediators, may enhance the experiences of individuals and communities, through active engagement, to find their own meanings. A discourse of practice may encourage cultural management practitioners to locate themselves within the background of theory and practice in a way that deepens their own perceived value of culture and the arts and the analytical skills for articulating that value to others.

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