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To **Organisational Change, Leadership and Ethics**

Leadership as *care-ful* co-directing change: A processual approach to ethical leadership for organisational change

Christoffer Andersson, Lucia Crevani and Anette Hallin

A municipal organisation implemented a new digital technology. The technology, an advanced automation tool, performed some of the tasks previously performed by a group of public servants administering and granting services to older people. After a while it was noticed that the replacement of human labour by the new technology not only changed the daily work and role of the employees, but that the whole service routine changed. Earlier, work was performed by human professionals who valued personalised care and attention to individuals' needs. The new technology was incapable of engaging in such practices. This was no surprise to anyone involved in the project. But what was overlooked were the relationships between the work performed by the employees in what seemed to be a simple and discrete process, and other, more complex processes, processes necessary for the older people to obtain the help they needed. The task now performed by the technology used to be the first point of contact between public servants and citizens, a contact through which relationships and trust were built. During this first interaction, additional needs of citizens were identified, but with the introduction of the new technology, this was no longer possible. With the new technology, the seemingly non-complex service now performed by technology became isolated from the rest of the work in the organisation since the service delivery was now a matter of citizens first providing data in an on-line digital form, then an algorithm evaluating this data, and – by matching this information to preprogrammed conditions – the technology also making decisions on whether services were to be provided; and finally notifying clients and providers. Despite having involved the employees in the design process through workshops, task-mapping exercises and various feedback loops, and despite having communicated the rationale behind the implementation, it seemed as if the technology had imposed its own logic. In the end, the service had become more efficiently administered in the eyes of municipal managers since less time and resources were now spent on each case. However, the municipal organisation was now blind to any

additional needs of its citizens. What on paper and from a managerial perspective looked like an isolated work task, primed with potential to become more efficient with the help of automation technology, was in fact an important branch in a tree of relationships consisting of practices that made up the services provided to citizens.

Introduction

In organisations, there is often an expectation that certain individuals are responsible for leading change and that change can, and should, be achieved through particular initiatives. This view is also often expressed in leadership literature. Formal leaders such as CEOs and other managers are thought to be key players in these processes, and to assist them are specialists, for example, change management professionals or project managers, tasked with the mission of leading particular change initiatives and helping to overcome what is usually described as the potential resistance of organisational members.

A fundamental assumption underlying such an understanding of leadership for change is that change comes about through the intentions of leaders, thanks to the characteristics of leaders and followers, and as a result of what is expressed in plans outlining visions, strategies and actions to be taken. Consequently, research also often focuses on these individual entities (leaders, followers, plans) when producing knowledge about leadership for change. Although such a focus has shed light on a number of interesting issues pertaining to the management of change, it is less likely to capture how change is actually accomplished in the everyday life of organisations through the performing of actions and recurring practices. This is better captured by adopting a processual approach.

A processual approach aims at unpacking the fine-grained "how" of leading in order for change to take place. It does so by building on the idea that relations and becoming should be privileged over entities and stable states when it comes to explaining how leadership is performed and with what effects. This means that it brings to the fore the actions, interactions and relations that *produce* leadership for change. In other words, adopting a processual approach involves the understanding that leadership for change is an accomplishment achieved in interaction among actors and thus that leadership is a *distributed practice of co-directing*. These actors, it may be argued, can also be non-humans.(Crevani et al., 2021; Sergi et al., 2021)

During the past few years, influential scholars have mobilised the processual approach to foreground a more democratic and inclusive way of organising. When doing so, they have equated "good leadership" with distributed forms of leadership (cf. Raelin, 2011). This, however, has attracted criticism from scholars interested in scrutinising oppression and power relations in organisations. They point out that mobilising the processual approach to better understand how an ethical leadership may look involves the risk of losing its ability to have a real and fundamental impact on explaining and changing unjust asymmetrical power

structures (cf. Collinson, 2018). Similarly, processual approaches more generally have been criticised based on the argument that it is impossible to understand the workings of power if we no longer acknowledge the role played by structures. The question is legitimate. If we shift from a perspective where we conceptualise the formal leaders as the ones who are in charge, and who should exercise ethical behaviour, to a perspective where the doing of leadership is distributed, then who is to be held accountable for the outcome and effects? If non-humans are also part of doing leadership, how is it even possible to talk about “leadership” and “ethics”?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these questions. Our argument is that a processual approach to understanding ethical leadership for change is necessary if we want to develop a more fine-grained understanding of how leadership matters.

The chapter began with a vignette taken from our current empirical studies on digitalisation, leadership and organising. In the following, we will use this vignette as an illustration of the theoretical argument we make. The argument will be presented in three steps. First, we will reread the vignette and pose some critical questions. Second, we will delve deeper into the perspective that leadership may be understood as process, and what this means for understanding leadership for change. Third, we will present a processual conceptualisation of ethics that is not centred on individuals, but focused on what is produced, re-produced and not-produced in the doing of leadership for organisational change. This leads us to introduce the concept of care and propose the idea of *care-ful co-directing change*. We conclude by summarising our argument and discussing what it means for further theoretical development, and what ethical leadership for organisational change may entail.

Re-reading the vignette – what happened in the change initiative; was the leadership performed unethical?

The vignette with which the chapter starts tells the story of a change initiative that involved the design and implementation of a digital technology: a new IT application. Such change initiatives are commonplace in organisations today, in particular as white-collar work becomes more and more subject to automation. The change initiative was organised and managed as a project and followed a traditional project management plan, but also added components from the practice of managing planned change, for example by involving the organisational members that were to be affected by the digital technology developed. A first set of workshops was organised where exercises were performed with a facilitator moderating a discussion in which the employees mapped the tasks they performed in relation to a specific part of their work. Later, further workshops were organised where the employees were asked to give feedback on the outcome of previous meetings.

Involving the employees was deemed important since the digital technology that was to be developed through the project was intended to take over parts of the work carried out by some of them, meaning that their work would undergo a change as the digital tool was implemented. From the perspective of planned change, the involvement of stakeholders in a

change process is key and increases the likelihood of a successful change (Burnes, 2007). By involving stakeholders in the change process from an early stage, especially those that are most affected, they are expected to become more prone not only, in traditional terms, to accepting the change, but also to advocating, and possibly even driving it.

As the vignette also illustrates, however, the project had unforeseen consequences. Although a success in the sense that the technology developed and implemented led to more efficiency with regard to the particular tasks that it was designed to do, it also changed the way in which public servants came into contact with the needs of citizens and formed relationships with them. This means that even though the person in charge was (and still is) a skilled and experienced project manager, acting in line with the best practices of change management, the project still led to the re-construction of an important point of contact between citizens in need and the municipal authority tasked with providing care in a way that lead to poorer quality from the perspective of the care receiver. This raises a number of questions, such as: Was the initiative a success or not? Was it ethical? How did the unforeseen effects emerge?

Leadership for organisational change as process

In order to explore these questions, we will delve into the leadership-as-process literature, first by introducing the idea of leadership as process and then by discussing it in relation to change (see, for instance, Alvehus, 2021; By, 2021; Crevani et al., 2021; Uhl-Bien, M., 2021). After that, we will turn to ethics and offer a way of making sense of ethics in relation to leadership as process and change (for other approaches, see also By, 2021; Burnes & By, 2012).

Leadership is commonly understood as *a process of influence moving a group towards a certain goal* (see, for instance, Northouse, 2018). The leadership expressed in the vignette entailed the achievement of employees' participation in realising the new technology through phases of design and implementation. According to much of the literature, the "leadership" expressed in the vignette would be the result of the activities performed by the project manager and of his personal characteristics and intentions. This, however, not only provides a limited understanding of what happened in the story, but also does not do justice to the definition of leadership provided above, which describes it as "process". This is why we turn to a processual approach.

In the academic study of leadership and organisations, *process philosophy*, *process ontology* or *process studies* imply moving away from considering *entities* as what is foregrounded as the site for explaining phenomena. Instead, *process*, i.e. the ongoing *becoming* of what comes to constitute reality is brought to the fore (eg. Chia, 1995; Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). Priority is given to relations and how relations constantly make and remake the world. This means that people, plans,

objects, organisations etc, are constantly made and re-made in unfolding processes of relating and interacting (cf. Dachler & Hosking, 1995).

The inspiration for these ideas comes from philosophy and social sciences. Often, Heraclitus' saying *panta rhei* – everything flows – is referred to, as possibly the first time this perspective was articulated in ancient Greece. Illustrating this idea with the vignette above, it could be argued that the technology was in constant change. With every interaction, it was re-constructed. The rationale for why the tool was to be implemented, why it was good and what it could be used for, what has been done so far and what needs to be done next, are elements that were articulated, negotiated and reformulated as the implementations progressed. This affected what the automation tool became and how the implementation developed. In fact, from a processual point of view, the technology is still in the process of becoming today – although that story is not covered in the vignette presented here.

Understanding leadership from a processual view thus means understanding how moving is accomplished and we thus propose to build on the literature that defines leadership as the process of accomplishing direction in organising (Crevani, 2018; Drath et al., 2008; Simpson, Buchan, & Sillince, 2018). Of specific interest here is the accomplishment of direction for organisational change – in order to foreground the distributed nature of this phenomenon we will talk of *co-directing organisational change*. If everything flows, the "object of organisational change" itself is constantly moving and being re-shaped, and it is in the movement and the re-shaping that direction is produced, sustained and re-produced. Plans may be a resource for such constant re-shaping of direction and formal leaders may be involved as actors, but it is in action and interaction that the "new" takes shape.

This way of understanding leadership is quite different from the way leadership is understood in the planned-change approaches. Rather than focusing on individuals with plans, aimed at changing formal structures and formalised processes, we shift our attention to actions and interactions gradually producing a different configuration of work practices. The actions and interactions described in our vignette resulted in a specific way of providing a service, different from what was previously done, made possible by a number of work practices performed by certain humans and non-humans in specific relations. By work practice we mean, simply put, proper ways of doing things together. Work practices are, in other words, to be understood as the texture of organising – they sustain organising in specific ways given how they are performed in relation to one another (Gherardi, 2019). *Leading organisational change is about co-directing the gradual production of a re-configuration of work practices*.

Change is thus the result of actions situated in material as well as social circumstances. In the case accounted for in the vignette, the project manager planned for user-involvement workshops, based on change management practices deemed to lead to better results. The workshop leader organised and moderated the workshops in the same way as she had previously performed similar workshops: focusing on the detailing of tasks in a particular part of the work process aided by the use of specific objects such as post-it notes and a

specific organisation of space in a conference room. The employees involved collaborated by sharing reflections and providing details about their work, leading first to a visual representation produced in the workshop with, for example post-it notes, pens and a whiteboard, and later to the programming of an algorithm.

Through these series of activities, the service was described and understood in a new way compared to earlier. Previously it was thought of as part of a complex web of activities constituting the work practices of the employees. Now, it was reduced to a linear and detailed series of tasks that matched the functioning of the algorithm of the technology. Following this, the work practices through which the service was delivered changed as the technology was implemented – one could say that the work practices were re-configured.

The re-configuration meant that the new technology to some extent enabled *other* practices compared to before the technology was implemented. Some practices disappeared – for example, talking to the citizens on the phone as a first point-of-contact – while other practices emerged, for example, receiving requests for benefits via the web application. Furthermore, the relations between humans and various technologies were organised differently, as well as the relation between different work practices – for example, making decisions on social care benefits and providing the citizen with information on social services of relevance were previously closely related and later became separated.

Understanding change as emergent and situated thus means acknowledging that change occurs as a result of the interaction and relations among all the actors involved in the change process, and these actors need not only be humans (e.g. the project manager, the workshop leader and the employees), but could also be technologies (e.g. pens, post-its, whiteboard, computer), as well as environments (e.g. the workshop). Plans and formal leaders may also be seen as actors involved in the process, often endowed with authority that makes their contribution important, but a simple focus on them will not explain how change actually emerges.

In conclusion, *leadership for organisational change may be understood as co-directing the re-configuration of work practices, resulting in a certain configuration becoming enacted, rather than other possible ones*. Such an accomplishment takes shape in relations and interactions which means that it is a distributed effort also including objects, technologies and places, all taking part in the production of a new configuration of practices.

Leadership for organisational change in the interplay of purposive and purposeful re-arrangement of plans and work practices

So far, we have established that *organisational change is the result of a shared and distributed effort – not the result of actions guided by a leader and undertaken according to plans*, and that *leadership is not found in entities such as individuals, but in actions and interactions.*

To **Organisational Change, Leadership and Ethics**

We now need to expand the question of how to relate the processual nature of reality that we build on to the idea of intentionally changing certain work practices. The processual understanding of leadership we propose builds on the idea that change is at the core of reality and of organising. In that sense, change is always going on. As Tsoukas and Chia (2002) proposed, change may be understood as "the normal condition of organisational life" (p 567). Deliberative interventions to achieve change, what we call *organisational change*, may thus be understood as *negotiations and enactments of new configurations of practice and relations in which several actors participate* (both humans and non-humans). Such interventions may provide the occasion for amplifying what is already being constructed, but they may also take radically different directions. In any case, they are never only in the hands of the formal leader. The formal leader has a privileged position for framing and giving sense to the initiative, but she is only one of the many actors involved. Hence, rather than seeing the leader as in charge of the organisational change initiatives, and co-workers as either embracing or resisting them, we propose to see *organisational change as happening in a continuum between purposeful and purposive change*. Leadership for organisational change, more specifically, operates at the *interface between "purposeful" and "purposive"*.

The concepts of purposive and purposeful were proposed by Chia and MacKay (2007) as a way of understanding how strategy takes place from a processual perspective. In their words, "to act purposively is to mindlessly cope and resolve an immediate demand at hand. To act with a purpose in mind, on the other hand, is to act according to a pre-defined desired outcome" (p 235). To act purposively is, in other words, to act from *within* a work practice; reproducing its collectively knowledgeable ways of doing (Gherardi, 2019). This is not necessarily something people are aware of, nor is it something purely cognitive. Rather, it is something that people have learnt to do; it is what feels right, and appropriate. *Hence, ubiquitous ongoing organisational change, the ongoing organising that takes place every day, may be understood as purposive change*. Purposive organisational change is about the continuous adjustments in the configuration of work practices that occur as organisational members engage in everyday activities.

Purposeful change, on the other hand, refers to organisational change that has been produced as necessary to pursue in a deliberate way, and for which plans are made stating one or several purposes (whether clear or not). Often it is the management of the organisation that produces such purposes and that plans how the change initiative should be undertaken. Participatory approaches may be used to involve several stakeholders in defining the need, the purpose as well as the plan.

It should be noted that "purpose" is a concept that, as Kempster et al. (2011) argue, is often taken for granted as central to leadership, but not really critically analysed. This is particularly important when discussing leadership and ethics, in order not to reduce leadership to a technicality, and to instead foreground its worthiness (By, 2021; Kempster & Jackson, 2021). While we share Kempster et al.'s (2011) and By's (2021) concern with the relation between leadership and societal purpose, particularly in times of crisis, we refrain

from discussing here leadership as purpose, since we want to introduce the complementary notion of *care-fulness* later in the chapter. We thus mobilise the concept of "purposeful change" here in order to refer to change initiatives that are produced as having a purpose.

From a processual point of view, we may understand leadership in relation to organisational change as being about *sustaining direction and movement in purposeful change to gradually become purposive change in relation to a specific issue*. Referring to our vignette, the purposeful change was the initiative to introduce the new technology, and leadership was found in the actions and interactions that made this technology part of the organisational practices to the point that it became part of the purposive change going on in everyday practices as further adjusting, repairing and becoming of the tool took place.

On the other hand, *purposive change can also gradually become purposeful change*, for example as ongoing adjustments in work practices are foregrounded in discussions, and subsequently become part of the adjusted plans and routines. This also shapes the direction that the re-configurations of practices is taking. Hence, *leadership for organisational change can be understood to happen when a deliberate change initiative is articulated, adjusted and moved forward through the everyday-way-of-working while both plans as well as work practices are re-configured.*

In order to better grasp the implication of understanding leadership for organisational change in this way, we also propose to think of “process” not only as a noun, but also as a verb. As a noun, we have already specified that process is not to be understood as a series of actions or steps (cf. the traditional way of understanding planning), but of ongoing becoming. If we look at process as verb, we add a dimension of leadership as not only working with representations of reality, but also with the material dimension of reality. To process means to both work at making sense of something, but also to materially change what is being made sense of: what is being processed. We would argue that in the moment-by-moment doing of leadership, work practices are not only being discursively re-configured, but also materially re-produced. Leadership is thus about directing world-making actions.

This leads us to the ethical dimension of leadership for organisational change and in the next section we elaborate on what happens to responsibility when leadership is understood as process rather than as the result of individuals’ characteristics and behaviours.

Entangling ethics: Leadership for organisational change as *care-ful* re-arrangement of plans and work practices

Having presented a processual and relational view on change and leadership, we now delve into the ethical dimension of leadership for organisational change. Chapters in this book explore ethical leadership as doing good; the chapter by Patzer and Voegtlin, for example, presents leadership ethics as the ongoing discussion on good leadership. Leaning on a processual approach, we propose a slightly different argument. We see leadership constitutively entangled with ethics. There is, in other words, no leadership that is *not* about

ethics, since leadership is about making the world, as anticipated in the previous section. Ethics may be considered to be about what kind of difference is being made in the world and in taking responsibility for it (Barad, 2007; Hollin, Forsyth, Giraud, & Potts, 2017). We therefore argue for the foregrounding of the process in which purposeful change becomes purposive, and conversely, in order to understand ethics. We develop this argument below, anchoring our reasoning again in the initial vignette.

In the vignette, the new technology entailed a purposeful re-configuration of work practices. The stated purpose was to increase efficiency in order to make the best use of taxpayers' money in an area, social services, that suffers from lack of resources for several reasons. The aim was therefore to reduce the time that employees spend doing what seemed to be a menial task in a simple process. Instead, their time, it was argued, should be used for what was referred to as "more value-adding activities". Once the organisational change process commenced, a number of work practices were re-configured, introducing new elements and re-organising the relation between the humans and non-humans involved: technologies, citizens, employees, place, and the organisation. These re-configurations exceeded those that were originally intended and planned, since change always creates ripple effects and causes emergent re-configurations.

The change initiative resulted in a process where decision-making took place at a higher pace and a lower cost. But with the implementation of technology, an important point-of-contact with the citizens was also lost, meaning that the service fundamentally changed in quality and content. Establishing trust, making a holistic assessment of the individual's needs that could lead to other, related, services, is no longer part of the work done. The project was successful in several ways – but was this change in quality a sign that it was unsuccessful? Was it even unethical? And, if so, who bears responsibility?

Building on the approach we present in this chapter, we propose that, when discussing leadership, change and ethics, it is important to:

- consider the distributed nature of leadership: there are other actors and practices that also contribute to producing direction than those who initiate the purposeful change. These actors also play a role as purposeful change gradually becomes purposive change;
- treat ethics as performative rather than ostensive: nothing that can be defined in principle but rather something that is produced in action. We need to look at the fine-grained doings throughout the change initiative and not only at the intentions, plans and formal decisions;
- critically analyse leadership accomplishments and what kind of obligation different actors have to them by not only looking at what the change initiative has produced, but also at what has been excluded and which alternative worlds have not been produced.

In the following, we explain these three points in turn.

To **Organisational Change, Leadership and Ethics**

Starting with the first point about the distributed nature of leadership, the plan articulating the purposeful change envisioned at the beginning of the project can be understood as materialising a number of ongoing work practices and the normative values they sustain: the constant search for efficiency, providing citizens with care, following the principles of new public management, digitalisation as an imperative. A discussion of leadership and ethics needs to take such practices and values into consideration. Digital technology and its algorithmic way of ordering work is also part of producing direction in the change initiative. We could even argue that it is the algorithmic ordering that produces the largest effect, as work itself is re-constructed as described above. In a discussion about ethics we cannot ignore such a non-human actor. With the processual approach that we are proposing, therefore, the re-configuration of work practices is the result of not only the actions taken by the manager, but of situated actions and interactions involving both humans and non-humans.

In our view, ethics is therefore not a quality of humans, and in particular of the formal leader of this organisational change initiative. Our processual approach, inspired by a post-humanist tradition, does not conceive of humans as acting on non-humans (in our case, the project manager making sure a new technology is implemented). Rather, we conceive of humans and non-humans as both the results of ongoing relational practices in which social and material dimensions are entangled (Gherardi and Laasch, 2021).

This leads to the second point, ethics as performative rather than ostensive. We propose that rather than ethics being a framework in which leadership is practised, ethics and leadership are entangled. Ethics is not, in other words, a way of judging whether the practised leadership is good or not, but rather a way of understanding how leadership matters and what obligations come with it. Organisational members need to scrutinise the distributed and situated actions and interactions leading the change initiative in certain directions in order to engage with ethics. They need to see what kind of emergence they are contributing to and to engage with such an emergence. In our vignette, what emerges is not just a more efficient way of processing claims and providing a service, but a foregrounding of efficiency that comes at the expense of social workers' holistic knowledge about the citizens they are tasked to take care of.

Our third point is related to the critical analysis of what leadership accomplishes. Building on the understanding of leadership as directing world-making actions, we may conceive of leadership as not only about *how* to get from A to B, but about *getting* from A to B, rather than to C, D or F. That is, once we are part of constructing a certain reality, such as a specific algorithm, we are also participating in not making *other* specific realities.

The responsibility we share with humans and non-humans in the process is not only for what we have accomplished, but also for what such an accomplishment excludes, negates and make impossible (Barad, 2007; Hollin et al., 2017) – what kind of emergent ongoing purposive change will not be possible. Leadership is, in other words, a type of enactment of the world that purposefully re-arranges 'it'. It does not merely lead to a new state, but at

least temporarily closes off other potential states. We thus have an obligation not only to the world we are contributing to making, but also to the worlds we are contributing to *not* making.

In our vignette, the introduction of an IT application for automating the contact with citizens meant producing a social care service deprived of personal contact and thus un-making the possibility to construct trust and produce a more holistic assessment of kind of support and care the client needed. The result was affirming algorithmic logics *instead of* practices of care and co-being. We are not arguing that efficiency is unethical per se, but that ethics of leadership for organisational change is about seeing what exclusions are produced in the pursuit of the purposeful change that managers are part of, and in taking responsibility for such choices.

We suggest that ethical leadership for change is about the *care-ful re-configuration of practice*. “Care-ful” should be understood here as “well-prepared” and “detailed”, and thereby as conveying the idea of purposeful change, but also as “paying attention” and “being prudent”, conveying the idea of taking care of and being obliged to what is being produced. By spelling the concept “care-ful” (with a hyphen), we want to further emphasise the latter meaning, adding more focus on commitment and obligation.

Following the argument of de la Bellacasa (2011), who builds on a feminist tradition in science and technology studies and related disciplines to expand the understanding of “concern” and “care”, we argue that “purposeful” expresses a sense of thoughtfulness that pertains to the individual, as does careful, also adding a sense of worry. But when foregrounding the “care” in “careful”, the distributed sense of attachment, embeddedness and commitment is underlined: not only to the “large” questions often found in change plans, but also to the “small” things, the ones we may not pay so much attention to or take for granted (de La Bellacasa, 2011).

Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher define care as “everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair ‘our world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible”, a world that is understood as a complex “life sustaining web” (Tronto, 1993, p 103 as quoted in de la Bellacasa, 2011). As de la Bellacasa points out, one important aspect of care is that, at least in the Western world, some people are paid to carry out care so that others can forget about it (2011). Bringing *care* to the forefront is thus about contributing to *generating* care and affirming the need for *all* actors involved in a change initiative to pay attention to, and have an obligation to, how work practices are re-arranged and with what consequences. What we propose is not an idealised version of care as moral disposition, but a committed way of participating in organisational life – something we just should not take a break from. Care-ful thus also helps us in making the argument that we cannot only focus on what is being produced, what kind of change is being realised, but also on what is excluded from existence and what kind of work practices are no longer possible, and with what effects.

Hence, taking a processual approach and moving our focus from leaders to leadership as a process does not result in diluting the ethical aspect of leadership and change, nor in a naïve understanding of power and power relations as unproblematic. Instead, it leads to the notion of acting care-fully throughout the organisation, recognising the distributed nature of leadership, the emergent nature of change, and the world-making character of actions and interactions in which change develops. It also points to the need for a commitment to caring for what is being produced while it is produced, including considering the consequences of the alternatives not engaged in.

We therefore propose that ethical leadership for organisational change is to actively engage in the becoming of organisational life and to create occasions and means for analysing the direction produced through the change initiatives. This is about how this emerges (taking into consideration both humans and non-humans), with what consequences, and what can be done about it. Care-fully co-directing change is doing so with attentiveness towards needs; a proclivity for providing care, not only for humans but also for non-humans; and a sensibility for how exclusions made in the pursuit of change affect the potential to care.

Conclusion

Ethics is too important to discuss only a formal leader's role. This is what this chapter is about. Naturally, formal leaders are positioned in a way that renders them a privileged space for action. But we argue that leadership for organisational change is distributed and that change is emergent and situated. Leadership and change are ongoing; they exist as they are done – as does ethics. With the approach outlined in this chapter, we do not have the option of not be involved in ethics, since our actions are shaping the world in a certain way, producing some trajectories, excluding others.

The question is whether we are prepared to care and to engage with what we are contributing to giving shape to, and hence, if we are able to answer to the obligations that our world-making leads to. Understanding ethical leadership for organisational change as distributed thus means recognising the accomplishments that move organising forward, critically scrutinising what such accomplishments create and what they exclude and raising the question of how to act in a care-ful manner in this process.

The vignette we have presented is a specific case, in which social care services for citizens are in focus, providing a particularly suited context for putting forward our argument. Hopefully this sparks the reader's interest in opening the door to a discussion on what this means in other contexts. With this chapter, we hope to start a theoretical conversation on ethical leadership as care-ful co-directing of change and to invite practitioners to develop ways to continuously care for what their doings do, without delegating such obligations to their formal leader and/or to a plan, but rather seeing them as two important actors. We also want to invited them not to limit such an obligation to a specific point in time (the start or/and the end of the change initiative), but rather consider it as an ongoing matter of care.

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