AH ANALECTA HERMENEUTICA
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HERMENEUTICS / INSTITUT INTERNATIONAL D'HERMÉNEUTIQUE

ISSN 1918-7351
Volume 18 (2026)

Organizational Leadership: Building a Deeper Sense of Community in the Workplace Through Calvin O. Schrag's Communicative Praxis

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Abstract
Community, from a philosophy of communication perspective, offers and opens understanding that assists with designing specific organizational practices to create not just any community but a sincere community. Calvin O. Schrag's philosophy of communication perspective that underlies his emphasis on communicative praxis opens a discussion for communication ethics implications situated in an applied context of organizational leadership and leads this endeavor. This essay offers a pragmatic application of Schrag's work that assists with understanding the phenomenon of organizational practices around community building in the workplace. Because many organizations and those leading them focus on community, or say they do, examining the nature and quality of community helps to clarify the quality of experience within them. In this essay we explore Schrag's understanding of community and offer a hermeneutic entrance for application to organizations through his discussion of rhetoric in community. This essay also identifies Schrag's emphasis on praxis as a condition that situates four coordinates of community as polysemy, discourse and action, being-with-others, and responsibility. Additionally, in the spirit of Schrag's philosophical pursuit, we discuss the betwixt and between of hermeneutic humility and transversal rationality which leads to identifying communication ethics

implications of communicative praxis. Finally, the essay ends with an application of the praxis approach specifically for organizations and its leaders.

Keywords: communicative praxis, polysemy, being-with-others, communication ethics, hermeneutic humility, transversal rationality, community

Community, from a philosophy of communication perspective, offers and opens understanding that assists with designing specific organizational practices to create not just any community but a sincere community. Community within an organization can be seen through employees working together for a common purpose (e.g., a meaningful goal).[1] A sincere community is marked by a common center.[2] A common center builds an infrastructure for being-withness that makes someone feel "home" even in difference. The common center allows for trust to be built and sustained. Also, individual actions are attentive to the common center and trust in everything one says and does. This is a deeper connection that allows for and honors continued engagement even in disagreement; however, the disagreement does not lessen the deep connections in the relationship. Even in disagreement there is trust. Using Calvin O. Schrag's philosophical framework of communicative praxis leads this endeavor.[3] Our focus in this essay is on the communication ethics implications that emerge from an organization and its leader's words and deeds used to connect people and more importantly to build a workplace community that is sustainable. The question guiding this inquiry is how do we know if community is sincere or insincere, especially in organizations? So, how does community arise in organizations, and how can a workplace community be sincere and sustainable? Coming from a philosophy of communication perspective, Schrag's understanding of community and his emphasis on communicative praxis provides an opportunity to discuss those communication ethics implications in an applied context of organizational leadership. By starting with a question in this historical moment, we offer a pragmatic application of Schrag's work that assists with understanding the phenomenon of organizational practices. Because many organizations and those leading them focus on community, or say they do, examining the nature and quality of community helps to clarify the quality of experience within them.[4]

In this essay we first explore Schrag's sense of community. Second, we offer a hermeneutic entrance through Schrag's application of rhetoric in community. Third, we identify praxis as a condition that situates four coordinates of community as

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[1] O. C. Tanner, "Your Company Culture Depends on a Thriving Workplace," updated April 24, 2026 https://www.octanner.com/articles/your-company-culture-depends-on-a-thriving-workplace-community

[2] Ronald C. Arnett, *Communication and Community: Implications of Martin Buber's Dialogue* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1986).

[3] Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity* (Yale University Press, 1997).

[4] George Manning, "Organizational Culture: Building Community," McGraw Hill. January 2, 2025. https://www.mheducation.com/highered/blog/2025/01/organizational-culture-building-community.html

polysemy, discourse and action, being-with-others, and responsibility. In the workplace, polysemy is demonstrated through the collaboration of teams on projects, committee work around governance or policy, team building exercises, or development of community connections and collaborations. Discourse and action in organizations occurs when individuals have agency that allows them fuller or full participation in the life of the organization. From decision making, to connecting with constituents, to discussing and deciding with co-workers the issues inherent in organizational patterns and life. Participating in discourse and action means people must be fully attentive to other engaged vocabularies and their implications upon or toward others. From department to department or team to team, when engaging in discourse and action together, organizations grow together and grow apart—this is an organic process. These agents in discourse and action are always embedded in the life system of the organization and believe that they are all 'in it together' in both word and deed. Embedded agents create new policy together and adhere to the traditions (e.g., mission or values) that have come to represent the organization. This does not mean that things never change but the changes that do occur are results of embedded action agents engaged with one another (e.g., setting policy, adding employee wellness programs, developing new avenues for client engagement). In an organization, being-with-others manifests through interdepartmental communication and behaviors. Perhaps identifying ways in which different departments collaborate or exchange data that will enhance the outcomes for each department or the overall success of the organization. Reflecting on how intertextuality comes together across departments or communities of constituents in ways that shape and reshape meaning for those engaged. Consider departments as different narratival neighborhoods or clusters of interests, knowledges, epistemic communities, and discourses that are dynamic, fluid, and responsive to others within the field or neighborhood. Not allowing neighborhoods to become silos unto themselves occurs by looking for overlaps and noticing how different perspectives can enhance the neighborhood. Using language across departments and sections that is inclusive and not derogatory enhances relationship building and minimizes pecuniary emulation by acknowledging and demonstrating a responsibility to others. Responsibility to others could include observing fairness in resource distribution and understanding how that can impact department functionalities across the organization, independently and collaboratively. Through upholding a responsibility to others, organizations exemplify a concern that moves beyond financial gains by also focusing on the human being. Fourth, we discuss the betwixt and between of hermeneutic humility and transversal rationality leading to

communication ethics implications of communicative praxis. Finally, we end with an application of the praxis approach for organizations and its leaders.

Connecting people is often grounded in a dialogical and ethical commitment made by a person to act in the way that will create the condition for building community. This is often the case with communication by organizations and its leaders; however, while intentions might be good, the communication surrounding developing an organizational community often creates a false sense of community. To consider how to avoid creating a false sense of community, Schrag's understanding of community provides coordinates that will guide organizations and its leaders to foster a deeper/fuller, sincere, sense of community with others. Additionally, exploring these coordinates point to the need for hermeneutic humility and the acknowledgement of transversal rationality as precursors to understanding the communication ethics implications of the self and community. This leads to a set of recommendations for organizations and its leaders for developing and sustaining "community" in the workplace. In the spirit of community, we first offer a tribute and acknowledgement of Professor Schrag's work and its significance.

Acknowledging Calvin O. Schrag

Purdue University holds space for Calvin O. Schrag on their website. He is identified as the George Ade Distinguished Professor of Philosophy Emeritus/Philosophy and his scholarly specializations are listed as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and postmodernism. Schrag was an amazing teacher, and we know this because he produced some of the top scholars and teachers for the next generation of philosophical thinkers in communication, rhetoric, semiotics, phenomenology, and hermeneutics in the United States and abroad. Schrag's philosophical odyssey exemplified transversal rationality, as did his approach to teaching and by extension, his intellectual generosity toward those of us who did not have him as a teacher because we could connect with him any time on the phone, over email, and socially at conferences. Professor Schrag was always teaching to and for someone, about something. His modeling of transversal rationality spread betwixt and between the academy, institutions, and in all kinds of dialogic encounters around the ideas that interested him most.

Schrag passed away March 11, 2024, leaving a legacy that will continue to inspire, transform, and innovate the practice of reasoning and how we understand rationality in application, especially in community. Schrag provides a rich overview of

community that acknowledges the historical moment and opens opportunity for practical applications through communicative praxis.

Calvin Schrag's Sense of Community

Historically, community offers an invitation for a group to carry out the standards of the community. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "community" derives from the French "communité," meaning "joint ownership."[5] Communities have common centers. These common centers can involve geographic coordinates or qualities, value-based environments, or shared interests. Communities have a *sensus communis* or an understanding that is counter to individualism and that recognizes the significance of a human community that is co-constructed, co-driven, and co-experienced.[6] By having this type of common sense, communities have shared understandings and customs that allow for collaboration, adaptation, and imagination leading to shared governance that opens to forging new insights through collective communicative behavior.[7] This could be when a community needs a new fire truck, but the town budget does not have the funds. Town council, chamber of commerce members, and local churches might collaborate and organize a day of giving designed to facilitate major fundraising events across the town and with participation from local businesses, schools, and nonprofits. Members of all of these organizations come together to support the local fire department and the larger needs of the community through collaboration, adapting schedules and agendas, and using imagination collaboratively to reach success. A community involves the practice of communicative engagement around common sense or the notion of sensus communis.[8] A community does not automatically have common sense but all human beings have the capacity to develop it through experience and practice. It is a collaborative experience when speaking of community.

In community a person has concern and care for what is valued and communicated within the group (e.g., common characteristics and goals). A community, or place composed of a common center, includes developing language to

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[5] "Community," n., Etymology. Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed January 25, 2026, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/community_n?tl=true.
[6] Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Arneson, *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age: Community, Hope, and Interpersonal Relationships* (SUNY, 1999).
[7] Ronald C. Arnett and Annette M. Holba, *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication: The Carrier of Meaning* (Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2012).
[8] Arnett and Holba, *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication,* 2012.

include community in interpersonal communications.[9] This perspective is grounded in habits of the heart and three important ideas surround developing communal language.[10] First, "community does not rest primarily on feelings, but rather one a commitment to story-centered values that bond people together."[11] Second, "relationship cannot be considered the most important term in communication and a community perspective. Story-guided values, not just positive feeling and utility, are needed to bond relationships."[12] Third, "language of interpersonal communication sensitive to community is grounded in a 'community of memory.'"[13] Through these ideas, a person can see story-guided values, the proper evaluation of relationships, and a community of memory are greatly needed when cultivating interpersonal communication within community.

There is also an account of the self when one is part of a community. According to Schrag, "[t]he intentionality and intelligibility of particular human action have their sources in the social practices that structure the life of a given community."[14] Accordingly, community can also exist in organizations.[15] Factors of building a strong workplace community include "shared commitment to goals," "communication feedback," "camaraderie trust," and "adaption unity."[16] Community becomes necessary within the workplace to motivate people, too, and to encourage them toward caring for other communities.[17] People are driven by a desire to make a contribution to something important to them or to be involved in something larger than themselves. In organizations, people are most productive when they feel like they are a part of something important or that helps others.[18] The biggest motivation driver that inspires people is a sense of connection. Building a deeper sense of community in organizations

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[9] Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility,* 1999.
[10] Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility,* 1999.
[11] Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility,* 272.
[12] Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility,* 272.
[13] Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility,* 272.
[14] Schrag, *The Self*, 76.
[15] Sean Hamill, "Corporate Community Involvement: A Case for Regulatory Reform," *Business Ethics: A European Review* 8, no. 1, (January 1999): 14-25; Paul Tracy, Nelson Phillips, and Helen Haugh, "Beyond Philanthropy: Community Enterprise as Basis for Corporate Citizenship," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 58 no. 4 (June 2025): 327-344.
[16] O. C. Tanner, "Your Company Culture."
[17] John A. Davis, "Market Basket Shows the Best and Worst of Family Business," last modified August 4, 2024. https://hbr.org/2014/08/market-basket-shows-the-best-and-worst-of-family-business
[18] Yuliya Shymko and Theodore A. Khoury, "From Community Rootedness to Individual Entrepreneuring: The Development of Entrepreneurial Motivation Through Temporary Community of Practice," *Journal of Business Venturing* 38, no. 3 (2023): 10.1016/j.jbusvent.2023.106300.

leads to a deeper sense of belonging.[19] This inspires and motivates employees to trust the organization and care for the life of the organization. Studies suggest that the relationship between belonging/community and motivation should be studied across organizational environments.[20] When employees lack engagement (e.g., motivation to do more than the minimum job functions), organizations risk occurrences such as quiet quitting where employees are "'not engaged' at work.'"[21] A strong community in the workplace becomes meaningful for employees.[22] Consequently, increasing employee productivity and overall loyalty to the organization.[23] Thus, community sustains organizations.

Schrag considered how the self engages in the world after postmodernity.[24] He begins with the term, "praxis," because it provides a particular vocabulary to investigate and understand how human beings exist together in the plurality of spaces.[25] Through praxis as an overarching concept, one understands "the communal character of human existence."[26] Praxis focuses on skills, habits, customs, and public functions that create the context of "intelligibility for individuated bodily motility."[27] Schrag said, these elements of praxis lead to a rhetoric of communal action.

Schrag's use of the term praxis sets up a natural connection between the individual and the community because praxis occurs within the context of polysemy and polysemous vocabularies.[28] These vocabularies are necessary to bring together people, society, spaces for socialization, governance, development of a statehood, and ultimately culture(s). This is why Schrag said that looking at these polysemy in context enables the exploration of community, what it is, how it works, and why it is important for ontological wellness.[29] Additionally, "the polysemy that travels with the notion of community can direct us to the phenomenon of being-with-others."[30] This is

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[19] "Building Community in the Workplace: 15 Ideas for a Connected Team," Plus One, accessed June 15, 2026, https://www.plusoneworkplacewellbeing.com/building-community-in-the-workplace/.
[20] Shymko and Khoury, "From Community," 2023.
[21] Jim Harter, "Is Quiet Quitting Real," Gallup, accessed June 16, 2026, https://www.gallup.com/workplace/398306/quiet-quitting-real.aspx.
[22] Aditya Gupta, Vishag Badrinarayanan, Linda Alkire, and Indu Ramachandran, "The Countervailing Effects of Job Crafting on Salesperson Ethical Behaviors: The Role of Meaningful Work and Organizational Interventions," *Journal of Business Ethic,* 203 (January 2026): 425-451, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-025-06003-y.
[23] Gupta, Badrinarayanan, Alkire, and Ramachandran, "The Countervailing Effects," 2026.
[24] Schrag, *The Self*, 1997.
[25] Schrag, *The Self*, 1997.
[26] Schrag, *The Self*, 76.
[27] Schrag, *The Self*, 76.
[28] Schrag, *The Self,* 1997.
[29] Schrag, *The Self*, 1997.
[30] Schrag, *The Self*, 77.

important because it suggests that it is not enough to live in an environment with others and think that is community. There is another, deeper, understanding of community that is both phenomenological and ontological, this is what Schrag means by "being-with-others."[31] The sense of "withness" is different from sharing the same space with others. Being-with-others reflects both an ontological and phenomenological aspect that Schrag situates within communicative praxis. He states, "the self that is called into being through discourse and action is at the same time called into being within a community" and this allows for a "self-implicature of the human subject in its manifold concretions."[32] The ontic aspect here is the idea that one is constituted—called into being—in community through discourse and action with others. The phenomenal aspect is the awareness one brings to the experience as the self is fleshed out by shifting one's focus of attention from the self "as present to itself to the self as present *to*, *for*, and *with* the other."[33] The term, withness, reflects the phenomenological focus of shifting one's attention around the aspect of "with." Schrag clarified what else is needed as an organic aspect of sharing space with others that emerges from a full, intimate, caring, and empathetic ego with which the self "is called into being through discourse and action" that is at the same time an interconnection acknowledging the fullness of the experience to include not only the content but also the interhuman connection and care that develops and is shared.[34] He indicated that a true community occurs when there is a concrete "we-experience" whereby the "I-experience" is recursively activated.[35] This means community emerges through a sense of selfhood that "fleshes out the portrait of the self by engendering a shift focus from the self as present to itself to the self as present to, for, and with the other."[36] It is the shift from self to other that is key for a sincere sense of community to emerge and exist. Some people answer this call to community and others do not– they keep their distance and do not become connected. Intersubjective connections are deeply tied to the ontological nature of being-with-others but as with the whole of human experience, there are different experiential dimensions that all human agents move through. Some dimensions are deeply ontological and phenomenological, and others are pragmatic and situated within a transactional dimension that does not share the deeper, more intense depth of qualities as the more intersubjective realm. These different dimensions are not mutually exclusive.

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[31] Schrag, *The Self*, 77.
[32] Schrag, *The Self*, 77.
[33] Schrag, *The Self,* 78.
[34] Schrag, *The Self*, 77.
[35] Schrag, *The Self*, 78.
[36] Schrag, *The Self*, 78.

Schrag pointed to the notion of community as being either empty or full. When community is empty, it is simply more than one person (there are at least two people) together with another person, physically or virtually. However, there is no interconnection experience or acknowledgment of interconnection on the part of all the subjects. This community is empty and after the experience disperses, there is nothing left other than perhaps a distant memory that fades over time. For example, people attend music concerts because of their interest in a specific genre, but when the show is finished and everyone leaves the venue there is nothing left other than the memory of the experience. A fuller experience under the same circumstances that has a deeper sense of community involves praxis, sincerity, time, and deeper interconnections that are woven through vocabularies forming dialogue, sharing experiences, and being inter-engaged. Consider the same example of people attending a music concert; however, add the factor that the concert is a Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, or Lady Gaga concert and suddenly there is a fuller experience and deeper sense of community as a fan is collectively known as "Beyhive," "Swifties," or "Little Monsters." Thus, polysemous language is a thread that weaves together interconnections that build toward deeper meanings. The use of language is not limited to creating nicknames or the act of naming itself; rather, language opens the possibility of dialogue, and it is also the tool that is used to build and support interspaces of engagement. The act of naming inspires and solidifies identification and a coming togetherness around the identification and shared knowledge experience.[37] Language allows people to have conversations, reminiscences, and reflections.[38]

Schrag pointed toward elements that might be considered coordinates of a deeper sense of community that highlight the deeply woven fabric between living beings. These four coordinates are polysemy, discourse and action, being-with-others, and responsibility. These coordinates occur and reoccur in hermeneutic (interpretive) fashion organically in response to the ongoing, emergent, and serendipitous experience; they are interconnected and coexist, and they occur within a framework of a praxis orientation. These terms have multiple meanings from philosophical usage over time. Therefore, it is important to consider how Schrag used them in his own philosophy of communication. Before focusing on the four coordinates, Schrag's discussion of rhetoric situates the relationship between the self and communication within community.

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[37] Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (University of California Press, 1969).
[38] Calvin O. Schrag, *Doing Philosophy with Others: Conversations, Reminiscences, and Reflections* (Purdue University Press, 2010).

Rhetoric

Schrag identified a rhetorical turn in relation between meaning, understanding, explanation, and interpretation. Related to this, he also re-examined and re-situated the notion of subjectivity, with the implicature of the self. This enabled him to reposture rhetoric within the space of communicative praxis, and this highlights the need for word and deed to come together and align.[39] Additionally, Schrag emphasized discourse in the play of communicative praxis. We are not alone, we are with the other, which leads him to the recognition of communication being **about** something, being made **by** someone, and being **for** or **to**, another person.[40] He also used communication **toward** someone as well. Schrag situated the couplet communicative praxis as word and deed. It is the combination of word and deed that sketches out a rhetorical turn designed to make explicit under the study of rhetoric. This turn intentionally acknowledges both self and other. It brings together the encoder and decoder into a different relationship. Schrag wanted to acknowledge that not only is the sender there, the *by someone*, but the receiver is also there, the *for someone*, the *towards someone*, and the *to someone* of our messages, of our praxis. Schrag stated, "there is thus in the rhetorical turn an accentuation of discourse and action as being for and toward someone."[41] This is important. He did say that in rhetoric we cannot forget that the persuasion is directed toward the other, whether you are a hearer, a reader, or some other kind of recipient of the rhetoric.

Schrag's reposturing of rhetoric, expands awareness of how we think about rhetoric and how we study it. It also informs how rhetoric can be received and how it impacts others. According to Schrag, we rarely put an accent on the hearer or the reader, but this was important to his understanding. This is an integral core of communicative praxis and it is operative in the expressivity of discourse and action, and in the self-implicature of a speaking and acting subject, "this self-implicature appears against a backdrop of discursive and social practices in which the insertion of the other is an accomplished event.[42] Schrag's perspective "cultivates a rhetorical consciousness in which there is a hermeneutical reference to the world, a hermeneutical self-implicature to the subject, and a disclosure of the other."[43] While situating the other back into our understanding of rhetoric in a healthy way, Schrag

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[39] Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Purdue University Press, 2003).
[40] Schrag, *Communicative Praxis*, 2003.
[41] Schrag, *Communicative Praxis*, 2003, 179.
[42] Schrag, *Communicative Praxis*, 2003, 180.
[43] Schrag, *Communicative Praxis*, 2003, 180.

elevated the other in the space of communicative praxis as being integral in the space of communicative praxis.[44]

Praxis

Praxis is generally considered as theory-informed action.[45] Aristotle distinguished it from theory (a body of knowledge that one comes to by skilled reasoning and truth) and *poiesis* (a creative making or bringing something into existence—the process not the product) in *Nicomachaen Ethics*; it is grounded in action. Praxis is essential for understanding and articulating the "communal character of human existence."[46] Thus, by communicating with other humans, one cultivates skills, habits, customs, and public functions that can serve and assist others. This is mainly how people interact and make their collective way through environments. It also points to the role of rhetoric and its impacts to and outcomes from language and its implications. Schrag tied praxis to ethics in that the ethical individual must strive for fitting responses within contexts and applications in one's engagements and actions instead of seeing ethics as only theoretical principles.[47] The space of engagement that Schrag referred to as communicative praxis is also as an ethics and "phenomenon of the gift."[48] Not only did Schrag identified a rhetorical turn he also identified a turn to "the ethical–[a] return to responsibility."[49] Schrag described this turn as a "call to the other," a responsibility to provide, in a responsible manner, a fitting response and a return to decision, to action, and to motivation.[50] Schrag tied this to our social practices in community. In this space of communicative praxis, it is our word and deed that matter and it is what advances the historical becoming of humanity. Praxis highlights "the amalgam of discourse and action, speech and behavior, and thought and perception."[51] A space of communicative praxis comprises not only speech as an act and event but is also filled with gesture, facial movements, facial proxemics, body motility, locutionary and illocutionary performances and writing.[52] It is the full space of human subjectivity in

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[44] Schrag, *Communicative Praxis*, 2003.
[45] Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and Poetics* (Modern Library, 1984).
[46] Schrag, *The Self*, 76.
[47] Schrag, *The Self*, 1997; Schrag, *Communicative Praxis*, 2003.
[48] Calvin O. Schrag, "On the Ethics of the Gift." *Symposium*, 8 (2004): 197
http://doi:10.5840/symposium20048223
[49] Schrag, "On the Ethics," 108.
[50] Schrag, "On the Ethics," 108.
[51] Schrag, *Reflections on the Religious, the Ethical, and the Political* (Lexington Books, 2013): 109.
[52] Schrag, "On the Ethics," 2004.

action and interaction. Communities then must be composed of people grounded in praxis that embodies ubiquitous ethical underpinning which weaves together a deeper/fuller sense of connection as each person is undeniably interconnected with-the-other. According to Schrag, first, ethics must be grounded in the situated human and negotiate the discourse and action that people engage. Schrag states that meanings in discourse and action occur in holistic space that has multiple textures which means there are multiple ethics at play.[53] In Schrag's re-situation of rationality, he aligns ethics and ethos suggesting a new humanism.[54] In Schrag's space of communicative praxis, the subject is decentered, making room for acknowledging the other as an ontological necessity within a praxial space of discourse and action. Language is used for this purpose and it is this triangulation of discourse, action, and language that Schrag admits rhetoric as "the directedness of discourse to the other, soliciting a response, [and] is destined to slide into ethics."[55] Because of the interconnections of language and discourse, ethics disrupts and decenters the self, allowing for an ethical relation to emerge. It is the space of communicative praxis that Schrag discusses that creates a blueprint for the organizational life-world to cultivate a deeply penetrating sense of community. Schrag suggests that the "coupling of expression with the metaphoricity of texture and its displayed reference has to do with the announcement of its role in the dynamics of human action, in the patterning of social practices, and in the institutional life of a culture."[56] Without praxis you cannot have the intersubjectivity. Then, your community is not a deeper sense of community. You are part of the community, but there is no allegiance to the community. If a person wants to have a deeper sense of community that also the community to thrive for people, then praxis must exist. Without praxis, for organizations, it is most likely that the enterprise will fail, because it is not a sustainable model. Change in social, political, economic, etc. are changes that can impact the overall viability.

Praxis is also crucial for organizations and its leaders. An example of this is when an organization clearly demonstrates its mission through its strategic and organizational decision-making and its pledges to audiences. For example, Patagonia consistently maintains that its "in business to save our home planet" through its decisions and how its leaders and employees represent the organization.[57] Embedded in a praxis approach is a dialogical and ethical commitment to an organization's

[53] Schrag, *Communicative Praxis,* 33.
[54] Schrag, *Communicative Praxis,* 2003.
[55] Schrag, *Communicative Praxis,* 197.
[56] Schrag, *Communicative Praxis,* 197.
[57] Yvon Chouinard, "Earth is Now Our Only Shareholder," Patagonia, accessed June 15, 2026, https://www.patagonia.com/ownership/

audiences, including all its constituents. A praxis approach exemplifies a commitment to the self and the other about something, by someone, and to/for someone.[58]

A praxis orientation allows for the integration of the four coordinates–polysemy, action and discourse, being-with-others, and responsibility–into words and deeds and the creation of a deeper/fuller. sincere sense of community informed by and embedded in responsibility, accountability, and a care for and about the whole community and its relationships between constituents and to others outside the community. A praxis orientation also points to a transversal rationality that Schrag believed was necessary for a praxial environment.

We provided an entrance to our discussion of community through rhetoric and situated what is meant by a praxis orientation. We now turn to defining the four coordinates and afterward, we provide a synthesis of the coordinates that demonstrate hermeneutic humility, transversal rationality and its ties to communication ethics implications.

Polysemy

Polysemy, the many possible meanings and comprehensions of a word or phrase, can exist at the same time and coexist together. This understanding opens hermeneutic humility whereby one recognizes there are other meanings that coexistence and often invites convergence and divergence. Transversal rationality relies on polysemy and thus "emerges as a place in time and space where our multiple beliefs and practices, our habits of thoughts and attitudes, our prejudices and assessments, converge."[59] Schrag suggests that these convergences enable a "wide reflective equilibrium," that allows a communal space to emerge where personal commitments, disciplinary judgments, and all sorts of engagements coexist and thrive.[60] This understanding of polysemy enables deep understandings and interconnections with others.

Polysemy is essential to a thriving community that has a deep/full sense of community and commitment. To do so, organizations incorporate formal mechanism (e.g., focus groups, invite interdepartmental dialogues, retreats) to invite. For example, LEGO is a company often associated with creativity by employees and other internal and external stakeholders. The common polysemous vocabularies held by internal

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[58] Schrag, "On the Ethics," 2003.
[59] J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality: Toward Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science* (Eerdmans, 1999), 136.
[60] Van Huyssteen, *The Shaping,* 277-282.

(e.g., employees) and external stakeholders (e.g., consumers/users) around the notion of creativity fosters a deep/full sense of community and commitment. Schrag indicated humans should be attentive to "polysemous vocabularies" throughout the ages that have taken wrong turns toward creating problematic communities.[61] He is pointing to learning from this kind of situation. This is another reason ethics must be part of communicative praxis. Polysemous vocabularies have contributed to misunderstanding, and perhaps some forms of mistrust, greed, or threats due to the hermeneutical nature of language and changes over time. For example, an organization leader may offer to support an employee (e.g., interacting with a stakeholder), but the employee routinely finds themselves in an isolated situation and left to handle matters on their own. This contradicts the language used around support by the leader and results in employee mistrust around the notion of "support" not only from the individual leader, but also the organization. Schrag stated that when these vocabularies focus solely on politico-economic organization, the risk toward the development of a communist state is high.[62] Again, outside of ethics, polysemy has shown itself to be dangerous because there are not guidelines or contours to follow if not tied to ethics (and *common sense*). However, with attention and awareness, polysemies focused around community as interconnections between individuals instead of having a political or economic *telos* (aim, end, or purpose), "can direct us to the phenomenon of being-with-others" and this brings into focus a "self as discovering and constituting itself in relation to other selves."[63] These rightly-focused polysemy vocabularies create the fabric for ontological and phenomenological interconnections with others. Polysemy, therefore, impacts the organization by creating a space for the polysemous vocabularies to be shared, tested, built upon, and engaged through discourse and action.

In an organizational context, leaders must be attentive to the polysemy of the organizations they lead. There are many industry examples of leaders being attentive but also ignoring the polysemy of their organizations. For example, Elon Musk, as an organization's leader, demonstrates what happens when the polysemy of the organization is ignored. On the Tesla side, one perspective is to consider how Musk, CEO of Tesla, abandoned the organization for a while when overseeing the United States of America's (US) Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Consequently, his absence and focus on DOGE impacted the Tesla overall brand, including shareholders (e.g., stocks fell) and stakeholders (e.g., Tesla owners). Musk

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[61] Schrag, *The Self*, 1997.
[62] Schrag, *The Self*, 1997.
[63] Schrag, *The Self*, 77.

was not there running Tesla and his association with the US government also affected the organization (e.g., Tesla owners placed "I bought this before Elon went crazy" stickers on their vehicles). As a leader, you cannot just turn your back on the organization. On the DOGE side, Musk also rejected the polysemy of the organization. He was critical of the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" ("An Act to Provide Reconciliation Pursuant to Title II of H. Con. Res. 14") calling attention to its massive spending and impact it will have on Americans' debt and jobs.[64] In both cases (Tesla and DOGE), Musk rejects the vocabularies that do not align with his own experience and understanding. By tending to the polysemy connected to his organization, Musk would have exemplified praxis to his organization and connected both dialogically and ethically to the workplace communities that he connected with. Through this action, the disruptions Musk and his organization (Tesla and DOGE) experienced might not have occurred.

On the other hand, an example of a leader being attentive to the polysemy of the organization is exemplified by a former Market Basket CEO (Market Basket is a local New England grocery chain store). In 2014, a family dispute led Market Basket's Board of Directors, made up of mostly family members, ousted its CEO, Arthur T. Demoulas (Artie T.). Artie T. established such a strong connection with employees that news of his firing resulted in all employees (management and non-management) walking off the job and customers and vendors boycotting the store (see Market Basket Case Studies).[65] Artie T. treated employees with respect and demonstrated they were valued (i.e., fair wages, profit-sharing, low prices, knowing employee names). Because of this, the grassroots protest, not only provides an example of good employee relations, but also how when a leader is attentive to the polysemy of the organization a deeper/fuller sense of community is confirmed during a particular moment (e.g., organizational change).

Discourse and Action

The second coordinate is discourse and action. For Schrag, the self is called into being through discourse and action that engulfs ranges of polysemic vocabularies.[66]

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[64] Oliva-Anne Cleary, "Trump's 'Big Beautiful Bill' Faces Opposition From Musk and Some Republicans as The Senate Narrowly Votes to Advance It," Time, accessed June 15, 2026, https://time.com/7298552/trump-big-beautiful-bill-senate-advance-musk-criticism-opposition/

[65] Daniel Korschun and Grant Welker, *We are Market Basket: The Story of the Unlikely Grassroots Movement that Saved a Beloved Business,* (Amacom Publishing., 2015).

[66] Schrag, *The Self*, 1997.

Discourse and action is experienced through embodied agents within a setting of unity of contraries that enables agreement and disagreement, harmony and discord, liberation and oppression, mastery and slavery.[67] This means individuals should be attentive to and have an awareness of the vocabularies and their implications that brings people together (and apart). These experiences shape communities and build the deeper/fuller sense of community through words and deeds. Contraries provide ability to pull out more meaning, multiple levels of meaning and examples of meanings because you might consider a contrary a rhetorical device (i.e., a *topos).*[68] Here the notion of arguing from the negative might be useful and sometimes more effective than arguing otherwise. In community, contraries tend to happen all the time in election cycles, local, regional, and national. There are contrary perspectives and ideologies but if they collaborate through language, discourse, and action, they have a better chance to meet the needs of the people together, suspending their egos and focus on service to the other. In organizations, contraries can be seen between departments. As example, finance and marketing departments. Finance is about save spending and not lose money or spend more than you have; whereas, marketing's position is to expand to reach out to new audiences to meet annual budget income. On one hand, finance wants to spend less to save money when you are over budget before the new budget year, so you do not get more in the red and do not open new strategies when you have no money. On the other hand, marketing wants to increase marketing reach with more commercials and expand the audience base by adding more direct mail and promotional events. In this example, it appears that there is a conflict/contrary due to a shortfall. These are opposite actions but negotiating together and building in limits could provide leverage to bring in more people while trying to maintain a conservative margin. By communicating across departments, finance and marketing are more likely to come up with solutions and are able to collaborate on negotiated actions to take together. In government, we also see contraries. Police have a goal to protect children and separate them from their families if needed;/social workers, through child protective services, have a goal to protect children and reunite them with their biological families. These are two extremely different approaches to child protection. In dialogue, police and social workers want to keep children safe but they have different ways of thinking about what 'keeping safe' means and what it should look like. When police and social workers share more

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[67] Schrag, *The Self*, 1997.

[68] Christina L. McDowell Marinchak and Annette M. Holba, "The Importance of Topoi in the Business and Professional Communication Classroom," *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly,* 89, no. 2 (2026): 300-316.

deeply with each other, understanding of perspectives emerges and grows. Discussion can assist with building interagency respect and evolving and shaping meaning collaboratively. Solutions can involve more of the desires from each entity, and this creates a deeper sense of trust, perspective about the different agencies. Schrag indicated that individuals understand what is best for themselves is "always embedded in forms of discourse and projects of action that testify to the involvements with other selves."[69] These individual selves frame their engagement "in a social understanding of great temporal depth," which Schrag also refers to as tradition.[70] Tradition also leads toward developing that deeper/fuller sense of community and interconnection as well as interdependence.

The retail organization, Costco, taking its employees' call for unions seriously is an example of discourse and action. After learning of workers in Norfolk, Virginia voted to unionize, Costco's two CEOs (outgoing and incoming) exemplified discourse and action. In a joint letter sent by both of them to Costco employees demonstrated their attentiveness to the vocabularies of the union employees.[71] Moreover, instead of resisting union voices, the former CEO took full responsibility for not attending to the voices, which resulted in the union coming to exist. Additionally, the new CEO recognized the various employee voices and committed to working together with them side-by-side instead of being adversarial, as other organizations had done in the past (e.g., Trader Joes and Starbucks). The two CEOs' discourse and action exemplified a strong sense of dialogical and ethical practices with their organizational communities, both internal and external.

Being-with-others

The third coordinate is being-with-others. Human ontology requires interconnections that constitute the self. Simply put, we cannot do it alone, singularly. In being-with-others, the use of multiple and unlimited modalities is central to providing most open and inviting sense of togetherness. Schrag talks about these interconnections through the metaphors of conversational horizons and narratival neighborhoods. According to Schrag, conversational horizons have a revelatory capacity for revealing interplay,

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[69] Schrag, *The Self*, 89.
[70] Schrag, *The Self*, 90.
[71] Dominick Reuter, "Costco's CEO Just Shared a Surprising Response to a Warehouse Unionizing," Business Insider, accessed Jun 16, 2026, https://www.businessinsider.com/costco-ceo-responds-to-warehouse-employees-joining-teamsters-2024-1.

exchanges, and interconnections of intertextuality that all come together to shape meaning of our own experiences.[72] They are comprised of multiple narratival neighborhoods or clusters of interests, knowledges, epistemic communities, and discourses that are dynamic, fluid, and responsive to others within the field or neighborhood. Within conversational horizons, we experience diversity, multiplicity, plurality, differences, and those polysemous vocabularies that build and bring individuals together that eventually become the weaving patterns of the community fabric. Schrag identified narratival neighborhoods as places, virtual or physical, where we engage and converse with others, weaving the community fabric by remembering, reminiscing, ruminating, and reflecting on communicative praxis transactions, exchanges, encounters, and outcomes.[73] The process by which meaning emerges happens through reading, thinking, and reflecting on ideas with others. This process is not always chronological or logically or spatially organized. The Coca-Cola Company's "Share a Coke" 2025 campaign is an example of being-with-others and weaving a community fabric. First started in 2011, Coca-Cola brought back its iconic campaign "in 2025 for a new Generation," targeting Gen. Z with "a focus on shareability and customization to engage a cohort of digital natives that crave authenticity."[74] The campaign is an attempt to tap into the original intent to "encourage fans to connect and make memories with friends and loved ones," tapping into the nostalgia of cracking open a Coca-Cola but also continuing to weave threads between others, a narratival neighborhood, a community.[75] In this way, Coca-Cola also invites the opportunity for conversations, reminiscences, and reflections that create nostalgia and community—a way for being-with-others. Coca-Cola's long history as a company also exemplifies the crossing of historical moments, which adds an additional layer to its community (internally and externally) and the conversations between and among others. In narratival neighborhoods, illumination occurs that is dynamic, fluid, and responsive to others and to the self. The fabric of interconnection is woven together by participating in narratival neighborhoods and having awareness of the conversational horizons.

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[72] Schrag, *Doing Philosophy*, 2010.
[73] Schrag, *Doing Philosophy*, 2010.
[74] Chris Kelly, "Coke Refreshes 'Share a Coke' to Reach Gen Z With Digital Experiences," MarketingDive, accessed June 16, 2026, https://www.marketingdive.com/news/coca-cola-share-a-coke-campaign-refresh-gen-z-digital-experiences/743648/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CShare%20A%20Coke%E2%80%9D%20originally%20launched,4.63M.
[75] Kelly, "Coke Refreshes."

Responsibility

The fourth coordinate is responsibility. Schrag stated, "the amalgam of communication and praxis has been designed to orient reflection on discourse and action as being *about* something; as being initiated *by* someone, and as being addressed *to* and *for* someone."[76] Being-with-others requires connection and interconnection that is cultivated within narratival neighborhoods against the backdrop of conversational horizons, with there always being discourse and action about, by, to/for something or someone.[77] Within this setting, there is a moral accountability to-the-other situated as a responsibility. Responsibility means individuals are situated within an ethicality; a delineation of the ethical as a fitting response to the alterity of discourse and the action of those with whom the self shares a concrete lifeworld.[78] Schrag suggested "[r]esponsibility, nurtured by the call of conscience, supplies the moral dimension in the narrative of the self in community."[79]

For audiences, an organization's practices matter. Practice impinges upon people, making us pay attention. Sometimes practices happen within understanding in life. When an organization ignores practices a "broken covenant" happens, exposing a lack of responsibility to others.[80] Consider The Honest Company, as an example. The Honest Company was started with the mission of providing clean products for babies and young children, and then, allegedly, the organization turned around and put an enormous amount of chemicals in their laundry detergent to make the product at a lower cost.[81] While the organization (including its leaders) disputed the claims, at the moment the company was under scrutiny, its public responsibility and promise to others was ignored (e.g., parents). For Schrag, responsibility communicates a public accountability. For Schrag, responsibility communicates a public accountability. A public accountability, therefore, engages and influences others. When public accountability is ignored, so is the responsibility.

Together, these four coordinates–polysemy, discourse and action, being-with-others, responsibility–that are situated within the praxis framework open one to

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[76] Schrag, "On the Ethics," xi.
[77] Annette M. Holba, *Philosophy of Communication Inquiry: An Introduction.* (Cognella, 2022).
[78] Schrag, *The Self*, 100.
[79] Schrag, *The Self*, 100.
[80] Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *The Good Society.* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1991).
[81] Eun Kyung Kim, "Jessica Alba's Honest Company Under Fire for Laundry Detergent Ingredient," Today, accessed June 16, 2026, https://www.today.com/home/jessica-alba-s-honest-company-under-fire-laundry-detergent-ingredient-t7955.1.

consider words and deeds from a communication ethics perspective. In the following section we discuss the betwixt and between of hermeneutic humility and transversal rationality leading to communication ethics implications of communicative praxis.

Hermeneutic Humility, Transversal Rationality and Communication Ethics Implications

Schrag emphasized humility in general and in specific circumstances, such as in academic research and scholarship. Schrag and Ramsey opened their thoughts around humility in academic research or scholarship by warning against methodolatry or having an excessive preoccupation with rules governing research and thinking in the academy that created boundaries and limits in gathering and interpreting data.[82] Schrag and Ramsey agreed with Gadamer's critiques of scientific research methods in that there was an "excessive preoccupation with methodological rules and criteriological postulates" and they advocated for researchers or scholars to suspend methodological preconceptions, obsessions with rules, criteriological postulates, and pointed them to get to the data itself, directly without prejudging data and even within data constraints in order to let the datum/data speak for itself/themselves.[83]

This discussion pointed Schrag and Ramsey to overall phenomenological humility and led them to a conversation around narratival interpretation and transversal comprehension. Organizations are structured similarly to the life system of our personal lives. There are leaders/parents/elders, employees/subordinates/children/other relatives/neighbors and everyone has a space, plays a role (e.g., sometimes roles are hierarchical and other times merit based). Thus, having phenomenological humility as an individual who is a leader/supervisor/manager means that those individuals will listen more, and listen more deeply, when others communicate an issue to them or a new idea. Humility creates a boundary for one's ego and will not allow an individual to place limits on other people's good ideas or their curiosity. Humility teaches one to suspend their judgments and allow other people's ideas solve a problem or lead in a given situation, even if a leader was expected to lead. For example, in a monthly meeting with a leader where an employee recommends a solution to a problem that is better than the leader's

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[82] Calvin O. Schrag and Ramsey E. Ramsey, "Method and Phenomenological Research: Humility and Commitment in Interpretation," *Human Studies*, 17 (1994): 131-137.
[83] Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Continuum 2002); Schrag and Ramsey, "Method and Phenomenological Research: Humility and Commitment in Interpretation," *Human Studies*, 131.

initial plan, hermeneutic humility allows the leader to embrace the employee's recommendation publicly and moves forward with it. A lack of hermeneutic humility might lead to a leader taking ownership of the employees' idea by not acknowledging the employees' contribution to the situation. Schrag suggested that humility opens one to not only understanding and explanation but to a deeper level of comprehension that penetrates the density of discourse and action.[84] While one can understand something and even explain its process, left to a complete mental act, which Schrag described as coming from "a lonely cognitive subject," meaning is incomplete without action.[85] Schrag advocates for "conversational and communal endeavors" that invites action, interactions, and even transactions between people and vocabularies.[86] These interconnection endeavors remind one of the value of the other and their vocabularies. Hermeneutic humility begins with this endeavor.[87]

Schrag and Ramsey bring together the metaphors of narratival interpretation and transversal comprehension in their discussion of phenomenological and hermeneutic humility.[88] Narratival interpretation illustrates having a holistic understanding and an analytical explanation when seeking meaning. In transversal comprehension, one observes multiple lines of phenomena dynamically coming together/colliding and managing any conflict in those interpretations that arise, there comes a deeper, holistic understanding tied to praxial rationality. Schrag and Ramsey suggest that in that moment of holistic understanding in narratival interpretation one experiences the economy of the "hermeneutic as," which is the taking of something "as something."[89] We can use the same or similar process when we try to recognize the world around us. We suggest that the same elements of narratival interpretation and transversal comprehension, situated within a space of communicative praxis, allow people to find meaning in their world through transversal coming togetherness as well as coming apart. In the workplace, messaging at a town hall meeting during organizational change, as example. The engagement of transversal rationality across disciplines is a type of praxial rationality that involves a critique of something, an articulation of something, and a disclosure of something that provides a hermeneutical understanding, a narrational implementation, and rhetorical engagement of ideas,

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[84] Schrag, "On the Ethics," 2003.
[85] Schrag, "On the Ethics," 85-86.
[86] Schrag, "On the Ethics," 85.
[87] Schrag, "On the Ethics," 85.
[88] Schrag and Ramsey, "Method and Phenomenological," 1994.
[89] Schrag and Ramsey, "Method and Phenomenological," 1994.

which Schrag stated is a "performance of reason."[90] For Schrag, transversal rationality provided one with a way to understand praxial accomplishment. He provided a pathway for understanding how various disciplines discussed transversal rationality.[91] For example, in the discipline of mathematics, transversality is defined as a generalization of orthogonality, or a generalization of the geometric idea of perpendicularity which enables one line to intersect with other lines, perhaps two or more without, achieving any kind of coincidence. Another example in physiology might be how the grammar of transversality is used in describing the networking of bands of fibers; or another example can be in physics as they refer to it as a concept to transverse mass in figuring out the ratio of accelerating forces.[92] In the workplace, an example could be overtime pay or time and a half for a staff employee or using an extra compensation rate card for activities outside of normal duties. Schrag pointed out that notably, in philosophy, the concept of transversality describes and orients people to the dynamics of consciousness and how it interplays into our social practices.[93] In each of these approaches, Schrag observed there is an interrelated sense of lying across, extending over, intersecting, meeting and converging without the occurrence of some kind of coincidence or concurrence without causal connection.[94]

Transversality opens awareness of interrelated senses to realize and explain geometrical spaces, occurrences in nature, the body's anatomical structures, varying physiological processes, overall human behavior, and cultural-historical frameworks. Schrag used this idea to explore how reason is "transversal to the multiple configurations of discourse, perception, human emotions and actions, and institutional complexes."[95] Transversality lies across the varied forms of personal, social, and organizational experiences diagonally and occurs betwixt and between the diagonal forces to be able to more fully critique, articulate, and disclose without coincidence in a recognition of the interrelated senses of discourse, thought, and action. Schrag suggested that the "dynamics of transversal rationality falls out as a convergence without coincidence, an interplay without synthesis, an appropriation without totalization, and a unification that allows for difference."[96]

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[90] Calvin O. Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge*. (Indiana University Press, 1992): 148.
[91] Schrag, *The Resources*, 1992.
[92] Schrag, *The Resources*, 148.
[93] Schrag, *The Resources*, 1992.
[94] Schrag, *The Resources*, 1992.
[95] Schrag, *The Resources*, 158.
[96] Schrag, *The Resources*, 158-159.

Schrag believed that transversality reveals or discloses a window to the wider world of thought and action that shows how a "praxis-oriented rationality, a transversal dynamics in the interdependent workings of discernment, articulation, and disclosure, meets this wider requirement" of general rationality.[97] From Schrag's perspective, he warned that there should be vigilance over having this sense of imperialism, of privileging one concept or metaphor over another. He suggested that the task in seeking understanding is to discern how the use of each concept or metaphor encountered plays without reducing it to something else. For example, consider the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace. People are using AI daily to produce work, but Schrag might warn, depending on the use of AI for work production, if a leader focuses on AI instead of the human being (e.g., employees), the risk is there for the leader to implement imperialism in the workplace—privileging AI over the work of the human, and, eventually, the human will be pushed aside. Schrag suggested, for understanding transversal rationality, the diversity of vocabularies of transversality should not become imperialized and when all of the vocabularies are interplaying and interconnecting, the interdependent notion of transversal rationality emerges.

Therefore, instead of thinking we are standing at the beginning of a discourse, we must acknowledge that the discourse is already there, it is already in session, and we are entering into the discourse with already existing vocabularies that might have some import to the ongoing nature of the discourse. A leader enters the discourse and its existing vocabularies of a new department when taking on a new role or the organization when starting to work at a new enterprise, as example. This means we are picking up on a story that has already been told. It is not ours and ours alone. Instead, we have entered into a space that already is engaged in conversation, in dialogue, in a narratival structure and when we enter, it is kind of like the hermeneutic circle, when we enter that space, the space then undergoes a refiguration. For instance, when a person begins working in a new leadership role, there must be a willingness to adjust by both the new leader and those working for them.

Transversal rationality involves an interrelation of senses that acknowledges what is there but also resists what is there so that one can build on what the vocabularies in existence that creates a chronotopal field, or conduit for meaning across time and space, across multiple disciplines and possibilities (e.g., an external person hired to lead an organization must acknowledge the current practices of the organization but will also engage in a level of resistance to implement necessary

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[97] Schrag, *The Resources*, 179.

changes to improve the workplace environment). This allows for appropriation of the vocabulary of presuppositions as not permanent parts of the architecture of communication or conversation but as temporal touch points that constantly evolve. Having a praxis-oriented rationality and illustrating a transversal dynamic in the interdependent workings of our discernment, articulation and disclosure, we get to the wider requirement of knowing or interpreting from our hermeneutical awareness of the world around us.

Current times call people to look at differences in philosophical assumptions that guide them in their everyday interactions with the other(s) (e.g., people, places, organizations). In the workplace, an openness to difference is essential for cultivating an inviting environment (e.g., leaders invite employees to participate in organizational functions; however, the level of engagement is for the employee determine). This creates challenges when one realizes the set of assumptions that we carry tell us what is good but when we no longer agree on what is good, when our assumptions compete against those of another, the challenge becomes learning how to continue to interact and engage despite the differences that might stand between us.[98] An employee joins an organization only to learn that what was communicated to them during their job interview by leadership was a façade and the collaborative environment that was promised is in reality nonexistent. Today, we must also negotiate with emerging new technologies and ethical frameworks (e.g., generative AI). Therefore, we must be willing to look at difference as an opportunity to learn more and not remain stagnant in our current understandings and approaches in life (e.g., leaders take the opportunity to make a change and/or to make a workplace better by supporting a group that has historically been marginalized by others). Communication ethics, approaches based on philosophy that guide people in communicative engagement, is a way forward, as they are a way to understand how ethics are formed, how our assumptions impact other human beings.

People's ethical frameworks are shaped by what is important or what matters to them. Arguably, embracing difference is even more of a necessity as society is faced with global political, social, economic, and even technological implications and uncertainties. Today's organizations and its leaders are more susceptible to be impacted more than in the past and there are a variety of examples that support this claim (e.g., trade policy and tariffs, tax legislation, shifts in federal regulations in the United States). This requires people to not only recognize the ground upon which they

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[98] Ronald C. Arnett, Janie M. Fritz, and Leeanne Bell McManus, *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference* (Sage Publication, Inc., 2009).

stand, but also a willingness to learn from others.[99] Moreover, communication ethics can be applied to everyday life and has practical impact. People dislike, loathe, care, love others because particular things (e.g., common interests) either pull them together or pull them apart. Thus, there is no communication without sets of assumptions that underline communication.

Communication ethics does not always provide a direct or straight pathway or response pertaining to the good or the right action. Instead, it guides a person from a unique standpoint, recognizing that standpoint may not be congruent with others. Communication ethics responds to questions of a given historical moment in which specific goods are in contention, which means one's response may change as the historical moment changes.[100] In fact, the question usually changes as the historical moment changes. This means that communication can be temporal in nature and is dependent upon the "weight" and "height" about what matters for and within the human condition from a particular perspective."[101] Having a communication ethics perspective means that one is responding to a question or questions of a given historical moment. There is always an interplay between history and ethics. In fact, "[d]ialogical and dialectical engagement, performative praxis of ethics, and the intimate relationship between historical moments and ethical reflection provide a background for understanding the diversity of perspectives as goods in contention change in any given historical moment."[102]

It is important to presuppose that there are positions not necessarily in agreement with our own. This stance provides a way to contend with the diversity that exists today. Issues of difference are then driven by fundamentals of communication ethics. In our interactions, we are trying to understand not only our own ethical position, but others' as well. Communication ethics do not emerge out of the abstract; rather, they are connected to narrative structures.[103] This requires leaders of organizations to acknowledge the ground on which they stand but also that those individuals standing on the same ground (e.g., other senior level employees in the organization) could have different approach for working with others. From a communication ethics perspective, the focus is on the difference in the communicative approach and not whether one approach is better than another.

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[99] Ronald C. Arnett, Annette M. Holba, and Susan Mancino, eds., *Communication Ethics: Goods in Contention* (Peter Lang, 2018).
[100] Arnett, Holba, and Mancino, eds., *Communication Ethics*, 2018.
[101] Arnett, Holba, and Mancino, eds., *Communication Ethics*, 1.
[102] Arnett, Holba, and Mancino, eds., *Communication Ethics*, 3.
[103] Arnett, Holba, and Mancino, eds., *Communication Ethics*, 2018.

Communication ethics are tied to community, as there are ethical implications of being in any community. As previously noted, community is broadly defined as having common characteristics as well as goals and activities, which is why community can also exist in organizations.[104] Individuals who are part of an organizational community should have an appreciation for others in the same organization. To communicate ethically there must be a focus on the community and not of the individual self. This represents community because not everyone in community within an organization offers a sense of community or togetherness by that common characteristic (difference is present). Common characteristics are enough to force a person into particular communities; however, there is more than having common characteristics that bind a community together (e.g., mission, values, strategic priorities, initiatives, etc.).

Robert Bellah et al. suggested that through community human beings, as a society, can navigate through personal and social differences or contention.[105] The way to do this is to "find a narrative background that can offer guidance without dictating."[106] The author's connect language to the development of community which must go beyond the ego, beyond individualism and must include a moral dimension of communication.[107] A community story involves having a vocabulary that is grounded in commitment, sacrifice, loyalty, and principle.[108] Experiencing a sense of community involves "dialogic civility" that is situated in a constructive hermeneutical space that lays the groundwork for public respect while co-constitutively discovering the shared ground from which dialogue can occur.[109] This space of difference and diversity should be guided by respect and care for the other, an opening for us to take a communication ethics approach in a given situation.[110] To stabilize a community, people must work within the story and participate in what is going on around them as a person. The call is to engage a given charge or task that is set for a person to better the community.

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[104] Hamill, "Corporate Community Involvement: A Case for Regulatory Reform," 1999; Tracy, Phillips, and Haugh, "Beyond Philanthropy: Community Enterprise as Basis for Corporate Citizenship.," 2005.
[105] Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, *The Good*, 1991.
[106] Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility,* 271.
[107] Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (University of California Press, 1985).
[108] Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, *Habits of the Heart,* 1985; Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility,* 1999.
[109] Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility,* 1999.
[110] Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility,* 1999.

Considering how to foster a deeper/fuller, more committed sense of community in an organization can be challenging; however, using Schrag's framework of praxis can be a responsible approach for organizational leadership. Combining this with the framework, the following recommendations provide the potential for a more successful pathway toward community building in organizational culture and practices. Especially at a time when there is caution and a lack of trust between the individual and many organizations, finding a way to build a healthier, deeper/fuller community is necessary to ensure a dialogical and ethical commitment between self and others.

The Praxis-approach for Organizations and its Leaders

Applying the four coordinates of polysemy, discourse and action, being-with-others, and responsibility, offers recommendations for organizations and its leaders. The application considers the polysemy of the organization, demonstrates discourse and action with others, fosters being-with-others in multiple modalities, and accepts responsibility to the organization and to others. If leaders want to embody praxis lived out within the organizational community, they must engage dialogical and ethical practices. A person's phenomenological attention should be toward the other and not to the self. Consequently, organizational leaders must be willing to set their egos aside and focus on the other/others–the people, the place, the organization.

Consider the Polysemy of the Organization

Leaders should consider the polysemy of the organization. At the center of this call to action is knowing there is diversity in language and diversity in perspectives between and among internal and external stakeholders as well as audiences beyond. Even in the organization infrastructure, recognizing the language used has an impact on how employees think and feel. For example, default referencing the financial challenges an organization is facing and noting the current financial austerity when responding to employee inquiries [e.g., addressing pauses on promotions, filling open positions, or adding additional responsibilities to roles] will impact employee thoughts and feelings by, about, and to/for the organization and its leaders different from if an organization and its leaders acknowledging previous mishandling of finances to employees (i.e., taking responsibility for past/previous actions). Considering the polysemy of the organization, can also be useful to leaders when communicating. This means being

consistent with language that should be embedded with respect and dignity with the other (e.g., employees, shareholders, consumers), consistent between language used and actions a leader takes.

In considering the polysemy of the organization, leaders reflect on who the organization is, who they want to be, and how do we work together. This could be as simple as creating a new policy. Leaders must consider the language they use around making the policy (e.g., gender or diversity of employees). For example, how will employees understand the policy's meaning and how will meaning emerge for them. We see such reactions in organizational roll backs of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives/programs and policies (e.g., enthusiastic support to active and passive resistance). Notably, with polysemy, organization culture and practice plays a part.

Imagine a situation where a leader has in mind an organization restructuring. Leaders may think through what a restructuring may look like on their own, but to do the actual work they must move to work with others, move to dialogue. In dialogue, you recognize the polysemy of the organization. This action-oriented approach provides others the opportunity to respond (e.g., to the organizational restructuring). Taking the communication to the workplace community then invites other voices into the conversation. In this way, all the other voices of the organization participate (e.g., a representative from each department). Each participant, then, can share with everyone in the room their perspectives as well as to hear those of others. The diversity in language and perspectives of those around the table demonstrates where you recognize polysemy.

So often organization decisions are made in a closed-door environment without recognizing what challenges may arise (e.g., decrease in productivity, low employee morale, increase in turnover). Consequently, people feel offended and do not buy-in. While considering polysemy will not eliminate all organizational challenges, it will have a significant impact on the organization's community. When leaders consider the polysemy of the organization, they communicate an openness to difference and through their actions demonstrate community exists within a particular organization.

Demonstrate Discourse and Action with Others

Discourse and action links word *with* deed. Starting with the voice (speaking), the speaker moves what is being said into action—words align with actions. Leaders should demonstrate discourse and action with others. With discourse and action, there

must be some type of action associated with what is being said. When the voices of others do not see action taken by the speaker, what is said will be ignored or disregarded. For example, many organizations implement a total quality management (TQM) process. TQM "is the continual process of detecting and reducing or eliminating errors in manufacturing."[111] The purpose of TQM is "to hold all parties involved in the production process accountable for the overall quality of the final product or service."[112] During the TQM process, employees are open and honest with the hope changes will occur. There must be some attention to making sure that there is some kind of action at the conclusion of the TQM process, especially if people are devoting time to complete some type of task. If nothing else, to validate the time people spent going through the process. If nothing happens at the end, future requests for employee engagement will not be taken seriously. Moreover, employee cynicism will surely develop throughout the organization impacting employee productivity and leaving employees feeling undervalued.

As noted earlier, discourse and action is experienced through embodied agents within a setting of unity of contraries including, agreement and disagreement, harmony and discourse, liberation and oppression, and mastery and slavery. Leaders keep people in dialogue. Intuitively, leaders can do so (action) by providing and asking for feedback, taking serious input from others, creating open and safe spaces, having conversations to explain decisions, building trust with others, etc.[113] We selected agreement and disagreement and liberation and oppression by Schrag as a setting for discourse and action to provide an example for leaders.[114] Workplace agreements and disagreements could be task-related, interpersonal or procedural. A common agreement and disagreement that occurs in the workplace, and could also include liberation and oppression, is change.

Recently, there is much debate about a post-COVID action taken by organizations and its leaders—return to office (RTO) mandates. Organizations are requiring employees to RTO and the implementation of these policies has been met with a mix of emotions. On one side, company leaders believe bringing people back

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111 The Investopedia Team, "Quality Management: Definition and Example." *Investopedia*, July 23, 2025, https://www.investopedia.com/terms/q/quality-management.asp#:~:text=Quality%20management%20is%20the%20act,process%20of%20evaluation%20and%20improvement.

112 The Investopedia Team, "Quality Management," 2025.

113 Expert Panel, "20 Smart Ways Managers Can Foster More Open Dialogue in the Workplace," *Forbes*, May 31, 2023. https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/2023/05/31/20-smart-ways-managers-can-foster-more-open-dialogue-in-the-workplace/.

114 Schrag, "On the Ethics," 2003.

to work will allow employees to build relations, boast morale, and rebuild engagement.[115] On the other side, some employees are reluctant about the RTO mandates, stating such factors as long commutes, less flexibility, a way for the organization to get the most out of lease agreements, even toxic work environments.[116] Presumably, if an employee wants to keep their job, they will comply with the RTO mandate, acknowledging they disagree with the employer's decision. In this case, the phrase "agree to disagree" is appropriate. However, if leaders and employees both recognize they have a disagreement, it is easier to come to a compromise. A flexible work agreement, hybrid work option (e.g., employees must be in the office at least three days a week), or a 4/10 work schedule could be a suitable course of action.

Liberation and oppression enter the RTO conversation when considering the leader and employee relationship. It is easy to see the cause-and-effect argument here. For example, if the leader who implement the RTO mandate is trusted and respected by employees, the response from employees may not be as dissenting. Consequently, the leader is seen as a liberator (e.g., a champion) to employees and their professional success. Whereas leaders who are viewed as oppressors by employees will most likely have greater pushback.

In the end, people disagree multiple times a week. The probability that we hear at some point during our professional career, "this is how it has always been done" is high. Human nature reveals that we get stuck in our ways and resist change. As leading expert on leadership and change John Kotter points out, change can significantly help organizations; however, drawbacks are to be also expected.[117] In the RTO example and many other organization decisions about change (e.g., resources, technology, teams, mergers, acquisitions), the idea is also that bringing people back to the office, back together, will build community. Leaders and their employees will benefit when mandates (e.g., top-down decisions) move to dialogue with those most impacted–demonstrating discourse and action.

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115 William Arruda, *Why Return to Office (RTO) Mandates will Backfire,* Forbes. (January 7, 2025). https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamarruda/2025/01/07/why-return-to-office-rto-mandates-will-backfire/.

116 Thomas Chamorro-Premuzic, "The Real Reasons Companies are Forcing you Back to the Office," Forbes, February 28, 2025. https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomaspremuzic/2025/02/28/the-real-reasons-companies-are-forcing-you-back-to-the-office/.

117 John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2012).

Foster Being-with-others in Multiple Modalities

Surrounding ourselves with people from different backgrounds and experiences from our own signals an openness to learning. Asking leaders to value different perspectives is not new; however, arguably, it is more important than ever. From varying social and economic viewpoints to opposing political stances and embracing technological advancements, leaders should foster being-with-others in multiple modalities. Being-with-others in multiple modalities suggests an appreciation of others in trying to further the collective group—community is being-with-others.

Conceptually, togetherness is critical to group effectiveness, and, as Schrag also points out, the interconnections through conversational horizons and narratival neighborhoods. In the workplace, the notion of a team (functions and dynamics) provides for a good example.[118] Being-with-others in multiple modalities at work is seen through actively collaborating with and supporting others, not simply designating tasks for each person. The polysemous vocabularies (expertise, interest, capabilities, etc.) of the team reveal the conversational horizon, the meaning behind the team and its creation. Consequently, teams, units, departments, or sections are narratival neighbors. Structures—identified based on geographic, function, role, or other typologies—have their own microcultures within the larger organization become narratival neighborhoods that participate in interconnected conversational horizons on the whole organization. One example might be how each division contributes to development of a strategic plan or implementation of new policies. Team unity is therefore dependent on its members working towards one goal or purpose, and, through "habits of the heart" (social practices that shape community) each person realizes their value to the team.[119]

When leaders support being-with-others in multiple modalities it is more than focusing only on productivity, it is about cultivating connection and presence with others. This means not just doing work but doing work in a meaningful way. Even in times when leaders find themselves in a situation where they demonstrate support of the other (e.g., a direct report), but the other does not believe they are supported, it is necessary for leaders to continue focusing on the work. For example, a leader decides an employee must build on a skill before they are put up for promotion; however, the employee believes they are ready for the next level. Instead of focusing on the disagreement, the leader responds by recommending professional development

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[118] Schrag, *Doing Philosophy*, 2010.
[119] Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life,* 1985.

opportunities for the employee to complete, so the next time they will be ready for the promotion. In doing so, the work becomes the place where the affirmation happens.

If leaders can find meaning in the most difficult times, through their vocabularies, they can begin to shape who you are not only as leaders, but "otherwise than being."[120] Leadership then is not outcomes; rather, response to whatever outcomes occur. An example here is how organization leaders provide guidance to a manager for addressing internal conflict between coworkers. While the advice is genuine and makes logical sense (e.g., worked in the past to address similar situations), the outcome in the current situation is not successful (e.g., other factors are at play, such as different communication styles, unclear role responsibilities, dissimilar values or work ethics). In this instance, the opportunity opens for the leader to being-with-others in multiple modalities by responding to the failure (the outcome that occurred) through working with the manager to identify another approach for addressing the conflict. To solely focus on the failed outcome, would be to ignore being-with-others. What matters then is the response/doing/action. In these moments, leaders not only acknowledge what is taking place/happening but also demonstrate a sense of responsibility to the other through their actions. This understanding is grounded in the notion that "I am my brother's keeper." Even in the most stressful, uncertain moments, there is a sense of being in this together as a community.

Accept Responsibility to the Organization and to Others

The moment a person steps into a leadership role they must accept the responsibility they made to the organization and to others. Leadership and responsibility are inseparable. In essence, a leader has a moral accountability to those they lead.[121] This can be challenging. When you are in a position of leadership, you must navigate between a "multiplicity of goods."[122] In doing so, leaders must decide what direction they will take related to such facets as organizational structure, culture, tone, and change. Accordingly, leaders make a public announcement of what they accept as their responsibility to the organization and to others.

Leaders will also inevitably be tested by others. Maybe it will be by the new employee who immediately challenges the status quo without taking the time to learn

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[120] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence* (Duquesne University Press, (1998/1974).
[121] Schrag, *The Self*, 1997.
[122] Arnett, Fritz, and Bell McManus, *Communication Ethics,* 2009.

the organization's culture, the human resource department that is to provide support when navigating a difficult situation between coworkers but in reality protects the organization and not its people, or the stakeholder who places blame before gathering and grasping all the facts. In such moments, it is the response that matters. Regardless of how challenging a situation becomes, leaders must accept the responsibilities they have publicly announced by stepping into the leadership role.

When leaders accept responsibility, they also give others (internal/external audiences) the opportunity to recognize the ethicality of the organization's practices. The ethicality of an organization, for instance, could be seen broadly in its mission statement, code of ethics, policies, or more narrowly how leaders (or the organization) respond during crises. The well-known 1982 Tylenol case is a good example of leaders and an organization demonstrating public accountability and its ethicality through a positive lens and accepting responsibility during a crisis moment.[123] When an organization and its leaders do not accept responsibility for actions, a level of public backlash will occur and in some cases not accepting responsibility could lead to legal ramifications, as was the case with Phillip Morris in the 1990s when the organization face scrutiny over its knowledge that nicotine was addictive since the early 1980s (see Master Settlement Agreement [MSA]). No matter the consequence, good leaders accept responsibility and avoid blaming and/or proposing mediation when managing the situation is necessary. When leaders choose to shift blame away from themselves, they are privileging their own egos and not accepting responsibility for their own action and that is demoralizing in the organization (others see it).

Praxial Integration of the Four Coordinates

Strong leaders accept responsibility for challenges facing their organization. Thereby, demonstrate an ethical approach within the organization. There are times that leaders must have the courage to accept responsibility for the organization when things go wrong. Leaders first take the responsibility publicly, but then they must take an action to counter what went wrong (i.e., discourse and action). Consequently, in their public accountability, leaders use different vocabularies to communicate with multifaceted audiences (i.e., polysemy). Engaging in discourse and action and using polysemy enables leaders to connect with others inside and outside the organization (i.e., being-

[123] Howard Markel, *How the Tylenol Murders of 1982 Changed the Way we Consume Medication,* PBS. September 29, 2014). https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/tylenol-murders-1982.

with-others). This is how a leader accepts public accountability to the organization and to others (i.e., responsibility). Together, leading from a praxis framework organically builds a deeper/fuller sense of community in an organization.

To be clear, in the engagement of communicative praxis, hermeneutic humility is the glue that creates and sustains the fabric of the community. Without hermeneutic humility, recognizing transversal rationality can be quite challenging. Hermeneutic humility allows one to be open to, acknowledge, and embrace polysemic vocabularies in the encounter betwixt, between, and within the community. Leaders can work to cultivate a deeper/fuller sense of community, and through a practice of hermeneutic humility and with an understanding of transversal rationality, leaders find their ethical compass which can define their communication ethics framework from which to continue cultivating and sustaining a deeper sense of community. Schrag's space of communicative praxis is a holistic space that acknowledges the community is a multifaceted, multiperspectival, and multiactionable space where encounters are always experienced betwixt and between spaces inhabited by textured lives of interconnected human beings.

Conclusion

Communicative praxis offers a sound framework from which community emerges. Focusing on the other/others—the people, the place, the organization—lays a foundation for building a deeper/fuller sense of community. Building community as part of developing, sustaining, and nourishing organizations has its challenges today. The optimum sense of community is the choice that provides a deeper/fuller sense of being-with-others that enables the organic emergence of community that is a dwelling place for organizational members—home for professional engagement. A space of communicative praxis exemplifying trust and care that emerges within a praxis framework, powered by the four coordinates of polysemy, discourse and action, being-with-others, and responsibility, and enkindled with passion in engagement within conversational horizons and narratival neighborhoods thus creating a sense of home and a place of trust for human engagement to flourish. Organizational leaders can build their skill sets around these coordinates and reimagine what they ascribe to their understanding of community and how to manifest it in their interactions with others. In building skills around these coordinates, leaders need to allow humility to undergird their disposition and approach to personal-professional development. In allowing humility to guide their learning, self reflections, observations, and reasoning, they

begin from a position of acknowledging the other(s), understanding that their leadership is not really about themselves, and, therefore, any training, development, and actions ought to begin with the other(s) in mind first. Making this a practice in their leadership, ensures that leaders set their own biases and perspectives aside to make room for other and different perspectives. This allows the community to emerge in an integral fashion where transversal rationality opens the pathway for the four coordinates to flourish.

Schrag lays out an integral roadmap for creating the conditions to build an authentic sense of community through communicative praxis. He created this road map over the course of his lifetime through his concern for community, inquiries into rhetoric, and praxis including the discussed four coordinates. Schrag also identified how hermeneutic humility and transversal rationality can be the guide to identifying a communication ethics approach for engaging in the space of communicative praxis in community. As a leader, Schrag's road map can serve as a guide for leadership well into the 21st century.