

Becoming *phu nam* and other stories: Researching leadership practices in Laos and the ethics of cross-cultural engagement

Title and abstract for the Lincoln Research Day keynote (16th June 2022)

Peter Case

This keynote lecture offers a co-constructed auto-ethnographic account of the researcher's journey toward 'passing' as a leader (*phu nam*) within a state-run service in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The researcher was a foreigner in Laos employed to lead a series of international development initiatives designed to improve agricultural productivity and assist the Government of Lao meet Millennium Development Goals with respect to food security and poverty reduction. Particular attention is paid to processes of learning about the politics, sociomateriality and the embodied enactment of leadership in particular places and spaces. Three phases of 'becoming *phu nam*' are identified and illustrated with reference to auto-ethnographic data. The keynote seeks to communicate three core messages: firstly, to offer anthropological insight into leadership practices in a non-Western and non-Anglophone context; secondly, to explore the ethics of engagement in development settings; and, thirdly, to illustrate how spaces for participatory research can be created even under politically austere conditions.

Biographical Note for Peter Case

Peter Case is Professor of Organization Studies at the University of the West of England. He also holds a part-time position as Professor of Management and Organization Studies at James Cook University, Australia. His research interests encompass leadership studies, organization theory and philosophy, international development and global healthcare. He has ten years' experience running rural development projects in Lao People's Democratic Republic and acts as a consultant to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-funded Malaria Elimination Initiative, advising on infection disease programme management in the Greater Mekong Sub-region and southern Africa. He is currently co-leading a project in Zimbabwe designed to improve HIV prevention services nationally. Peter has published widely in academic journals and his books include: *Worldly Leadership, Belief and Organizations* and *Origins of Organizing*. He holds editorial board positions on several journals, including: *Culture & Organization, Leadership, Leadership & the Humanities* and the *Leadership & Organizational Development Journal*.

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