

**Leadership and
Followership in a
Changing Public Service**

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SUMMARY

Public services are under political pressure to transform the nature of their relationship with the public. It has often been argued that such change requires strong leadership and there is much literature on appropriate models of leadership. The other side of the leader/follower relationship, the perspective of the 'led', has received far less attention but is arguably as important to the success of change programmes.

The objective of the dissertation is therefore to examine the leader/follower relationship, primarily from the perspective of the follower, in public services that are undergoing radical change. This was perceived to be an approach to leadership research and theory which instinctively appeared to be as significant as that based upon the perspective of the leader, but which was currently under-represented in the literature. The relative lack of follower-centric studies was confirmed by the review of the literature I undertook.

The research took place in two very different local authorities, one in the UK, one in South Africa and comprised semi-structured interviews of senior politicians, of officials drawn from all levels within the organisational structure and of representatives of organisations working in partnership with the local authority. The focus of each study was a specific change programme.

The research findings challenge much of the existing leadership literature, particularly with regard to the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers, the participatory nature of followership, and the role of leaders in an organisational development programme. The findings resulted in a tentative alternative approach to leadership, which is recommended for further development and research.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The public appears to have enormous interest in leaders and leadership, at least if the media is adequately reflecting demand. A search of the Guardian/Observer archive for 2002 revealed 2,105 articles that mentioned leadership, an average of almost six per day, most often, I suspect, identifying its perceived lack; an inability to provide leadership is often cited as a failing of politicians and other public figures. However, attempts to analyse the meaning of 'leadership' in this context expose it as an elusive concept. It sometimes seems to be merely a synonym for decisiveness. More frequently, its stated lack in an individual serves simply as an insult. This itself is revealing; if 'leadership' is such a vital personal commodity, the natural response will be to seek a source of it that can be tapped into.

My interest in researching leadership and followership was initiated by a rather vague dissatisfaction with the academic and management development literature that I was introduced to during the taught modules of the Master of Public Administration course of which this dissertation forms a part. This literature did not seem to reflect my own experience of leadership. At worst, it seemed to perpetuate a notion that leaders were people who were blessed with the ability to see a better future and had the skills to direct their followers – or subordinates – to deliver this vision. At the other extreme, leadership skills or behaviours were described as being so contingent on environmental factors as to have no applicability in any other setting, in which case their study seemed to verge on the pointless. One feature that struck me forcibly was that nearly all the theories of, approaches to and studies of leadership of which I was then aware focused almost exclusively on the leader. This was true irrespective of the source of any empirical data: leaders were asked about the characteristics or behaviours of effective leaders or leadership, 'subordinates' were asked about the characteristics or behaviours of effective leaders or leadership. No one appeared to be studying the characteristics or behaviours of effective followers or followership.

Given that, by implication, a leader must have at least one follower – and generally more than one – this struck me as odd. I have undertaken an extensive literature review and have been unable to find any research which examines leadership and followership from the perspectives of both leaders and followers. There is an overwhelming quantity of literature on leadership, but virtually nothing on followership. My belief was (and remains) that an understanding of leaders and leadership would only be achieved if research were also directed at understanding followers and followership. This dissertation is an attempt to make a small contribution to this.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Approaches to Leadership Theory and Research

The sheer number of studies on leaders and leadership makes a literature review problematic. The modern study of leaders and leadership has a history stretching back over seventy years. To establish realistic objectives, I have limited my review to organisational leadership, primarily though not exclusively in the civilian rather than military spheres, and concentrated on the last thirty years, with occasional glances further into the past.

Various authors have identified trends in the theoretical approach to leadership. Yukl (1994), for example, identifies four distinct historical approaches, categorising, then into trait, behaviour, power-influence and situational. Grint's (2000) classification is slightly different: trait, contingency, situational and constitutive. Hiefetz's (1994) proposes a classification based on trait, situationist, contingency and transactional (the last being concerned with relationship between leaders and followers). Bryman's (1992) approach has some overlaps with these but also some differences, identifying trait, style, contingency and 'New Leadership' as the distinctive trends in leadership theory and research.

As Yukl (1994) notes, whether leadership is the property of particular individuals or a property of a social system is a major controversy in theories of leadership. With this in mind, and as my interest is in both leadership and followership, I have adopted a somewhat different classification. In this section, I examine the literature in which leadership is seen primarily as a personal characteristic, be that innate or behavioural. Here, whilst by implication if not always by definition, the existence of a leader suggests the presence of others – 'the led' – followers are primarily perceived as passive recipients of leadership. In the second section I consider those approaches that perceive leadership as (more of) a social phenomenon, where the role of followers as active participants in the leadership process is acknowledged to a greater or lesser extent.

Trait Approaches to Leadership

The trait approach to leadership emphasises the personal attributes of leaders; they have personal characteristics not possessed by others, whether these be aspects of personality, specific abilities or physical factors. Often leaders are presented to be almost superhuman, possessing "extraordinary abilities such as tireless energy, penetrating intuition and irresistible persuasive powers." (Yukl, 1994, p.12). The implication is that leaders are born not made. Bryman (1992) suggests that this approach is historically located in the period before the late 1940s, although he does acknowledge that it is by no means dead. Indeed, as Rosenfeld and Wilson (1999, p.198) note, selection criteria for senior management positions often include personal characteristics such as "a strong desire to achieve" and "self-confident and self-disciplined." Piasecka (2000, citing Goleman, 1998) argues that 'emotional intelligence' (comprising self awareness, self regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill) is a characteristic of all successful leaders. Direct links between such attributes and organizational success (or between lack of such traits and business failure) are common in the popular business press. For example, Teather (2002) reports that

the reasons for directors seeking the resignation of the chief executive of media group Vivendi included disapproval of his flamboyance.

However, empirical studies have failed to identify any particular trait or group of traits that could be linked directly to leadership success. As Yukl (1994, p.255) reports, in the period 1920-1950 there were over 100 studies that

...failed to support the basic premise of the trait approach that a person must possess a particular set of traits to become a successful leader. Although some traits appeared widely relevant for different kinds of leaders, these traits were neither necessary or sufficient to ensure leadership success.

Behavioural Approaches to Leadership

In the identification of behavioural (or style) approaches to leadership the emphasis shifts from the characteristics of leaders to their adopted behaviour and style, with the implication that, rather than being innate, leadership was a skill that could be learnt. Yukl (1994) reports on the Ohio State University leadership studies of the 1950s which, through seeking views of subordinates from both the military and civilian sectors, identified two dimensions of behaviour content categories. First, what is classified as consideration – the degree to which the leader acts in a supportive manner, demonstrates trust and treats subordinate as an equal. The second dimension is initiating structure, the degree to which the leader defines his or her role and that of subordinates, how the work content is structured and work organised. These dimensions were found to be relatively independent of each other.

Yukl (1994) and Bryman (1992) identify several significant problems with the Ohio research. The hundreds of studies based on the approach have been inconsistent and inconclusive, with the only relationship fairly consistently revealed being the effect of consideration on satisfaction criteria; subordinates are usually more satisfied with a leader who is at least moderately 'considerate'. Second, there is an assumed causality, that behaviours produce outcomes. They note that it would be equally valid to argue that it is group performance that influences leadership style. Third, the studies failed to take into account situational variables. Fourth, by averaging the response of individuals within a group to the leader, the possibility that leaders adopt different approaches to different individuals is not considered.

Studies undertaken by Michigan University, also in the 1950s, identified three types of leadership behaviour that differentiated between effective and ineffective managers: task-oriented behaviour, for example planning and scheduling work; relationship-oriented behaviour, for example showing trust and confidence in subordinates; and participative leadership, for example involving subordinates in group decision making. The first two of these have clear parallels with the consideration and initiating structure dimensions of the Ohio studies.

Yukl (1994) reports that these approaches resulted in an attempt to develop a universal theory of leadership, identifying a style of leadership that would be optimal in all situations. Effective leaders were those who scored highly on both task and person dimensions. However, empirical research provided only limited support for the theory.

In their practical application, trait and behavioural approaches differ significantly. From a trait perspective, effective leadership arises from selecting the person with the necessary qualities. A behavioural approach suggests that leadership skills can be developed. From a theoretical perspective, however, there is little between them. Yukl (1994, p.72) concludes that, "Like the trait research, the behavior research suffers from a tendency to look for simple answers to complex questions." It attempts to isolate individual behaviours rather than explore the possibility that effective leaders use patterns of specific behaviours to accomplish their objectives. Moreover, it fails to take into account that different patterns of behaviour can be used to achieve similar outcomes.

Contingency Approaches to Leadership

The major limitation of both trait and behavioural theories is that they assume that leadership qualities are universal and ignore the context in which leadership is operating. This failing resulted in the development of contingency theories of leadership, where the emphasis is on the leader's responsiveness to the situation: "leadership effectiveness is dependent on the leader's diagnosis and understanding of situational factors, followed by the adoption of the appropriate style to deal with each circumstance." (Ogbanna and Harris, 2000, p.767) The contingency approach will be illustrated by considering two different theories, path-goal theory and the theory developed by Vroom and Yetton (1973).

Path-goal theory, developed by House (1971), proposes that the behaviour of the leader is impacted by variables drawn from expectancy theory. Expectancy theory explains motivation in the workplace by postulating a rational choice process whereby an individual decides how much effort to devote to a task at any given point in time by taking into account the probability of its outcome (expectancy) and its desirability (valence). House identifies four styles of leadership behaviour: supportive (for example, being aware of needs of others); directive (e.g. letting subordinates know what should be done and how); participative (e.g. consulting others regularly); and achievement-oriented (e.g. setting challenging goals). Which style is most successful is contingent on one of three situational variables: whether subordinates are close-minded or flexible; whether they are internally or externally oriented (those who are internally oriented believe an event is a consequence of their own actions, whereas those externally oriented consider that it is largely due to circumstances beyond their control, such as other people or simply luck); and their to deal with the current task and to learn how to handle future tasks. The leader has a motivational function which consists of "increasing personal pay-offs to subordinates for work-goal attainment, and making the path to these pay-offs easier to travel by clarifying it, reducing road blocks and pitfalls, and increasing the opportunities for personal satisfaction en route." (House, 1971, p.324)

Rosenfeld and Wilson (1999, p.201) summarise House's empirical results:

Directiveness is positively related to subordinates' satisfactions and expectations when the task is ambiguous...The reverse is true when tasks are clear and well-defined. Supportiveness is an appropriate style for highly repetitive tasks...Achievement-orientedness is appropriate for groups who face non-repetitive tasks that are also ambiguous... Participativeness is appropriate where the group comprises largely internally oriented individuals who are engaged in non-repetitive tasks.

Yukl (1994), however, levels the following three major criticisms at path-goal theory. It is dependent upon rational human behaviour, which is unrealistic; it concentrates solely on the motivational aspects of leadership; and the effects of each leader behaviour type are considered in isolation. Smith and Peterson (1988, p.22) conclude that the results of empirical tests of path-goal theory have resulted in highly variable findings: "Predictions of performance measures have been particularly unsuccessful, while relations between leader styles and satisfaction measures have sometimes been as predicted."

The second illustrative contingency theory is that developed by Vroom and Yetton (1973), which focuses on leadership acts that require an explicit decision. Five main types of leadership style are identified: two types of autocratic style, distinguished by whether or not information is required from subordinates before a decision is made; two types of consultative style, with the differentiation being whether the consultation is with subordinates individually or as a group; and collective (or group) style, where problems are shared with the group and resolution is a group decision. The model has seven types of environmental variables, and the appropriate behavioural style is arrived at by a series of binary decisions based on questions testing these variables (for example, the availability of information and the likelihood of conflict amongst subordinates). The Vroom and Yetton model is particularly striking in that it explicitly recognises that subordinates are not merely passive receivers of leadership; the likelihood of subordinates accepting decisions is one of the environmental factors that may be taken into account.

The model is represented by a flow chart through the use of which it is possible to rule out certain decision-making approaches that are likely to prove ineffective. It is therefore a more prescriptive approach than that of path-goal theory. Guest (1996, pp.261-2) summarises the results of tests of the model by Vroom and Jago (1988), which indicated some support for the theory. In the light of this, the model was refined to identify the preferred decision-making model of a leader rather than ruling out specified options. Further, the original binary choices were replaced by a continuum and more situational variables. The result was "to make an already extremely complex approach even more complicated and virtually unusable without a computer program." (Guest, 1996, p.262)

Contingency models of leadership are refinements of either trait or (more often) behavioural models of leadership that are intended to better reflect the complexity of real world situations. However, as Vroom and Yetton's and similar models illustrate, ongoing development may well result in a model that is so complex as to be both unusable and untestable.

Leadership and Management

The recognition that there is a distinction between leadership and management is currently being increasingly recognised. Only eighteen months ago, for example, reflecting this awareness, the British Educational Management and Administration Society added Leadership to its title, changing it from BEMAS to BELMAS. The Vroom and Yetton model exemplifies the difficulties one of the most significant issues in leadership theory and research, the difference between leadership and management. The model is based on an assumption that an identifying, possibly primary, characteristic of group leaders is their decision-making capacity and practice. It is arguable that – on its own – this is in fact a

management, rather than a leadership, activity and that Vroom and Yetton and many of their predecessors were studying managers, not leaders.

Yukl (1994) notes that a person can be a leader without being a manager and vice versa. Leadership and management are therefore clearly not the same; the issue is the degree of overlap. Yukl uses the terms almost interchangeably. Sadler (1988) sees leadership as a process whereby a person knows what he or she wants and influences or persuades others to help make it happen. This is not dependent upon having a position of managerial authority. However, he argues that to be effective, leaders in organisations need to exercise managerial functions such as planning and budgeting. This is similar to Schein's (1992) argument that, whilst leadership can occur anywhere in an organisation, if it is to result in significant change then the chief executive or other very senior manager will need to be leader.

Bennis and Nanus (1985), however, emphasise the differences between leadership and management, arguing that the problem with many organisations is that they are underled and overmanaged: "*Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do right things.* The difference may be summarized as activities of vision and judgement – *effectiveness* – versus activities of mastering routines – *efficiency*." (p.21, emphasis in original)

Bryman (1992) cites Kotter's (1990) perspective that management is concerned with activities designed to produce consistency and order whereas leadership is concerned with constructive or adaptive change. Bryman (1992) concludes that there is no excuse any more for treating management and leadership as synonyms; they refer to different types of activity. This perspective is in line with personal experience that leadership and management are two different things (albeit that one person may well offer both). Work colleagues do draw a very clear distinction, often categorising an individual as a good manager but a poor leader or vice versa. There is often less clarity concerning the specific role or roles that organisational leaders undertake, but they often include recognition that it involves organisational change, often of a radical nature – transformational leadership.

Transformational Leadership

The emphasising of the distinction between leadership and management appears to have become prevalent in the mid to late 1980s, concurrent with the emphasis on leaders delivering transformational change, sometimes called the 'New Leadership' (e.g. Bryman, 1992). It is probable that these parallel developments are different facets of the increasing awareness that organisations had to change to meet the demands of a changing world. Bryman argues that one factor was the increasing level of pessimism with leadership theory and research, a perspective that Smith and Peterson (1988, pp.11-12) share:

[t]here has been a period of around 70 or so years during which researchers into leadership acted as though they were medieval alchemists in search of the philosophers' stone. Repeated attempts to distil the 'essence' of leadership yielded no great insights...It is tempting to presume that they [persisted] for similar reasons to those of the medieval alchemists: they knew that what they were seeking was really there, even though it was not visible.

Sarros and Santora (2001), in the tradition established by Burns (1978), draw a distinction between transformational and transactional leadership. Transactional leadership is characterised by contingent reward (promoting compliance by tangible rewards) and management by exception, and appears to share at least some common ground with the leadership theories in the trait, behaviour and contingency approaches addressed above. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, is characterised by considering subordinates as individuals, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and idealised influence (leaders as role models). Bass (1999, p.9) neatly summarises these as:

The transformational leader emphasizes what you can do for your country; the transactional leader on what your country can do for you.

I will argue in the discussion chapter that the distinction drawn between transactional and transformational leadership may be a false dichotomy, but it is indicative of conceptualisations of leadership since the mid-1980s as an activity primarily concerned with transformational change.

Related to this, Bryman's (1992) contention that the 'New Leadership' theories are part of a historical narrative in which trait, behavioural and contingency theories were the precursors is unconvincing. The theories that have emerged in the last two decades are as concerned with identifying traits and/or behaviours as their predecessors. (This is well illustrated by Krishnan's (2001) study of the value systems of transformational leaders with the explicit aim of assisting with the recruitment of such people.) What *has* altered is that leadership has become primarily perceived to be concerned with radical organisational change rather than more minor adjustments to improve organisational efficiency or effectiveness.

Organisational transformation will of necessity involve changing people (in terms of their attitudes, behaviours or values). Given this, many of the newer theories and approaches perceive leadership to a greater or lesser extent as a social phenomenon, explicitly considering the leader's relationship with his/her followers. However, this is not exclusively the case. Barnes' (1996) approach, for example, draws upon Japanese Kaizen strategies, a management method in which progress is achieved through unceasing small changes. He distinguishes between two types of leader: the team leader who is "primarily a coach, communicator, trainer, motivator and a resource which his or her team can use to intercede with senior management on its behalf" (p.21); and the company leader, who creates the vision, defines the strategy and establishes professional standards of performance. Whilst Barnes stresses that teamwork is an essential component of Kaizen, the emphasis is on identifying the skills of leaders – communication, training, motivation, empowerment and recognition of achievement.

Sadler (1988) argues that the need for new forms of leadership is an outcome of the development of the post-industrial society which he considers to have four facets: social change, involving changes in attitudes, values and social institutions; a move from manufacturing to service industries; the development of a knowledge economy; and the increasing importance of information technology. In such turbulent times, "The feelings of uncertainty and insecurity which accompany rapid change cause people to seek reassurance and a sense of direction from those who know where they are going and can inspire confidence and trust." (p.146) Followers are primarily perceived as passive recipients of

leadership delivered by “men and women of vision, creative and innovative people, capable of getting others to share their dreams and to work with them to reshape and redirect the strategies and tactics of organizations.” (p.146)

Unlike Sadler, however, in many of the newer theories of and approaches to leadership followers play a more active role. These theories and approaches are considered in the next section.

Leadership as a Social Phenomenon

A sociological interpretation of leadership is not new. Selznick (1957), for example, argues that the role of leadership is to turn an organisation into an institution, a process that happens over time as values are infused: “As an organization acquires a self, a distinctive identity, it becomes an institution.” (p.21) The identification of leadership with organisational transformation has resulted in many of the approaches to the role of leadership having of necessity a sociological or social psychological basis. This has not resulted in any perceivable consistency or convergence; indeed, quite the opposite, as a seemingly never-ending stream of competing theories continues to emerge. These can each be considered to fall into one of six categories: leadership as exercise of power; leadership as creation of identity; leadership as community development; leadership as social exchange; leadership as event management; and leadership as social construct.

Leadership as Exercise of Power

As Yukl (1994, p.1) notes, leadership is a term that “connotes images of powerful, dynamic individuals who command victorious armies, direct corporate empires from atop gleaming skyscrapers, or shape the course of nations.” Power is an implicit component of many definitions of leadership, which assume that it involves intentional influence exerted by one person over other people in a group,. In some of the social phenomenon approaches to leadership, power moves much more to centre stage.

For example, Bennis and Nanus (1985, p.17) argue that power is the reciprocal of leadership: “power is the basic energy needed to initiate and sustain action or, to put it another way, the *capacity to translate intention into reality and sustain it*. Leadership is the wise use of this power” (emphasis in original). Their research design involved interviews with ninety leaders from both the private and public sectors (though it should be noted the latter included, for example, football coaches and Neil Armstrong). They claim that there were four major themes that all ninety interviewees embodied: attention through vision (articulating a credible, attractive future); meaning through communication (changing the organisation’s culture to institutionalise the vision); trust through positioning (leader’s actions must be consistent with vision); and the deployment of self (perpetual learning). Despite this focus solely on leader attributes, Bennis and Nanus argue that what they term transformative leadership “is collective, there is a symbiotic relationship between leaders and followers, and what makes it collective is the subtle interplay between the followers’ needs and wants and the leader’s capacity to understand, one way or another, these collective aspirations.” (1985, p.217)

Pfeffer (1981) argues that power characterises relationships amongst social actors, with power defined as the capability of one social actor to overcome

resistance in achieving a desired objective. He considers power a neglected area in the literature of organisational theory, arguing that this is a result of power's often irrational nature which contradicts the rationalism that readers of such literature are seeking. In answering the anticipated criticism that power and politics produce sub-optimal decisions, Pfeffer points out that this is dependent upon being able to identify an optimal decision, which is generally not possible.

One particular aspect of leadership perceived as exercise of power is leader charisma. Most analysts (e.g. Yukl, 1994; Bryman, 1992) draw upon the work of Max Weber who perceived charisma as a form of influence based not on tradition or formal authority but on the followers' perception that the leader is endowed with exceptional qualities. Yukl (1994) examines the controversy around whether charisma is primarily the result of leader attributes, of situational factors or of an interactive process between followers and a leader. He concludes that all three play some part:

Most theorists now view charisma as the result of follower perceptions and attributes influenced by actual leader qualities and behavior, by the context of the leadership situation, and by the individual and collective needs of followers. (p.318)

Bryman (1992) argues that many business leaders described as charismatic often do not deserve the designation; whilst they may have a vision and/or a mission, and can command high levels of personal loyalty, they often lack the necessary ingredient that they should also be perceived as exceptional or extraordinary.

Leadership as Creation of Identity

Selznick (1957) is an early advocate of the role of leadership in defining the identity of an organisation. For him, leaders fulfil four roles: the definition of institutional mission or role; the institutional embodiment of purpose, building policy into the organisation's social structure and shaping the character of the organisation; the defence of institutional integrity, maintaining values and a distinctive identity; and the ordering of internal conflict by permitting interest groups a wide degree of representation.

Schein (1992, p.5) argues that "the only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and manage culture and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to understand and work with culture." Unlike Selznick, Schein does not consider that this culture need be all embracing; different subunits within an organisation may well have different cultures. Culture is defined as shared basic assumptions that were learnt by the group as it formed and worked well enough to be considered valid and are therefore taught to new members of the group as the correct way to perceive, think and feel. Different kinds of leadership are needed at different times in the organisation's development. In a further distinction from Selznick's approach, Schein argues that the creation of culture is not reserved solely to the leader but is a process in which other group members may be actively involved.

Grint (2000) argues a slightly different approach, with leadership perceived as primarily concerned with the construction of identity and rooted primarily in a vision that is a product of the imagination, considering what the goal is and when, where and why it will be achieved. It is therefore predominantly future-oriented, establishing hopes of a better future, though it may well reference a past golden

age. The leader creates group identity by establishing a narrative (or myth) for the community: “A leader without a persuasive account of the past, present, and future is unlikely to remain a leader for long.” (Grint, 2000, p.14) Implied in this argument is that followers, whilst they may not establish leaders, have the power to disestablish them.

Leadership as Community Development

Several interpretations of leadership explicitly incorporate consideration of and reference to its role in relation to the development of the organisation as a community. Servant leadership, for example, is characterised by Spears (1998) as a mode of leadership based on teamwork and community, that seeks to involve others in decision-making, is based upon ethical and caring behaviour and which seeks to enhance the personal growth of workers. Servant leadership takes place “when leaders assume the position of servant in their relationships with fellow workers.” (Russell and Stone, 2002, p.145) It draws heavily upon the Judaeo-Christian tradition; Blanchard (1998) posits Jesus as an exemplar of servant leadership. Indeed, the spiritual element has a high profile in servant leadership, to the extent that Wicker (1998, p.246) feels it necessary to describe it as “a management philosophy catching on at companies across America [that] sounds so much like a religion that adherents are sometimes at pains to make the difference clear.” Its emphasis on the role of personal values is central: Russell (2001) suggests that servant leadership is based on the values of humility and respect for others as these play a primary role in establishing interpersonal and organizational trust: “Leaders who show appreciation for others reflect appropriate, unconditional love for their followers.” (Russell, 2001, p.81)

Similarly, Plas’s (1996) person-centred leadership is also claimed to empower workers and put the individual worker at the centre of an organisation’s attention. Plas explicitly places her approach as part of ‘new leadership’, which she argues incorporates many varied approaches but have in common their participatory nature. Like servant leadership, it is predicated upon valuing others: “The changes that are sweeping through our corporate organizations allow people to be who they really are...*Heart, feelings, truth, values, spirit, giving, and even love* are no longer dirty words at work.” (Plas, 1996, p.21, emphasis in original) Developing a sense of ‘community of work’ is as important as belonging to a family. Plas suggests that person-centred leadership is particularly appropriate to American culture which she sees as characterised by “rugged individualism” and which does not equip people to work well in teams. This does seem to reveal something of a paradox, as this leadership approach comes across as highly paternalistic and, like servant leadership, mono-cultural. Neither is particularly supportive of individualism.

One further approach, based rather less on a specific cultural norm, is offered by Barker (1997). Rather than an approach to or theory of leadership theory, he proposes an alternative paradigm, which characterises leadership as “a process of change where the ethics of individuals are integrated into the mores of a community.” (Barker, 1997, p. 352) No single individual within the group need be identified as leader; leadership is a group process. Whilst interesting, as he recognises himself Barker’s paradigm is of limited practical utility when looking at organisational leadership as it requires leadership education to “be divorced from expectations of pragmatic application, even though it will eventually be

applied.” (p.360) It demands an approach to leadership education that concentrates on, amongst other things, organisational and social structures (and how these are developed) and the metaphysical assumptions of individuals regarding the purpose of life.

Leadership as Social Exchange

Arguably at the other end of a spectrum from leadership approaches such as servant leadership, social exchange theory uses an economic metaphor to describe social relations. In the summary provided by Green, Greenberg and Willis (1980), an individual is perceived as both rational and hedonistically motivated; all actions represent a search for pleasure and/or a reduction of pain. Actions which are successful in either or both of these objectives will be maintained. Applying this to leadership, Hollander (1964; 1980) argues that leaders receive approval in the form of status, esteem and the potential for greater influence, whilst the followers receive their benefits in the form of favourable group results. Both leaders and followers are therefore active participants; in particular, followers have the potential for counter-influence, a factor omitted in many traditional views of leaders.

Leadership as Event Management

Smith and Peterson (1988) perceive leadership as the management of conflicting demands within a social context. Conflict and choice are crucial and recurring elements in the situation of most leaders. Leadership which contributes to effective event management is defined as actions by a person which handle organisational problems as expressed in the events faced by others. Because the meaning of an event is defined by other members of the group, so too is leadership effectiveness. In practice, leaders must therefore guide their actions so as to satisfy to at least a minimal degree the evaluations of all members of the group.

Leadership as Social Construct

Finally, there are those who question whether there is such a thing as leadership as it is generally understood. Dachler and Hosking (1995), for example, argue that in the traditional narrative of leadership subordinates cannot, in principle, be as self-developed and as self-responsible as the leader: “the central concern is implicitly always that of how the leader/subject gets the follower/object to think, talk, or act in ways that reflect the leader’s perspective.” (p.11) The proposed alternative is to adopt a relational perspective in which knowledge itself is viewed as socially constructed and socially distributed and leadership becomes a coordinated social process in which an appointed leader is one voice among many. Gergen (1995) is aware of the implications of this kind of deconstruction, arguing (p.30) that the result may be that “Social analysis ceases to inform us about the world, for the object of discourse is none other than the discourse itself.”

One final analysis is worthy of mention. Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich (1985, p.100) argue that “a romanticized conception of leadership is an important part of the social reality that is brought to bear in our informal analysis of organizations – and perhaps in our more formal theories as well.” This romanticism involves creating an heroic vision of leaders and leadership, imbuing them with mystery

and mysticism, and in the process making them immune from scientific inquiry. The study of leaders and leadership, therefore, is only worthwhile for what it reveals about the beliefs and motivations of followers.

Followership

The theories of and approaches to leaders and leadership discussed above that share the understanding that leadership is a social phenomenon have in common the understanding that followership is, to a greater or lesser extent, an active component of the leadership process. This goes further than Grint's (2000, p.6) truism that "without followers there are no leaders." For example, Bennis and Nanus (1985, p.217) consider that 'transformative' leadership "is collective, there is a symbiotic relationship between leaders and followers, and what makes it collective is the subtle interplay between the followers' needs and wants and the leader's capacity to understand...these collective aspirations." Similarly, Schein (1992, p.389) states, "The leader must recognise that, in the end, cognitive redefinition must occur inside the heads of many members and that will happen only if they are actively involved in the process." Grint (2000) argues that the trick of leadership is to develop followers who, whilst publicly denying their involvement, privately resolve the problems that the leaders have caused. It is "followers that save leaders and therefore make them." (p.420)

Given this, the dearth of academic theories of or research into followership is remarkable. There are a few exceptions. For example, Kelley (1998) in the context of the servant leader model of leadership, considers that followership is potentially a specifically chosen role, actively engaged in assisting the organisation succeed whilst exercising independent and critical judgement of goals and activities. Ultimately, any power that the leader has is conditional on the followers' compliance: "Leadership authority is only on loan from the followers, who can demand its return at any moment." (Kelley, 1998, p.177)

Often, even when followers might be the subject of research, the conclusions are interpreted for their relevance to leadership, not followership. For example, Haslam and Platow (2001) report experiments using university students designed to test the hypothesis that support for leaders is enhanced when their decisions affirm a distinct social identity that is shared with followers. The findings suggested that "the leader's capacity to display true leadership...is itself contingent on the leader's ability to behave in a way that exemplifies the values and ideals [of the group]". (p. 1477)

Brown and Thornborrow (pp. 5-6) cite Kelly's 1998 typology of follower types: Sheep (passive, uncritical); Yes people (livelier than sheep but completely dependent on a leader for inspiration); Alienated (critical and independent in their thinking); Survivors (adept at surviving change); Effective/exemplary followers (able to think for themselves and operate with energy and assertiveness). This typology was used to investigate followers' perceptions in three UK organisations. However, no distinction was made between management and leadership (an individual's immediate superior was assumed also to be the leader). Nor was the issue of causality addressed; did organisational cultures produce the dominant follower type or vice versa? Whilst the study is a useful if limited attempt to conceptualise followership, its shortcomings call into question the conclusion that there is a correspondence between an organisation's

prevailing culture, dominant leadership style and the types of followers that are encouraged to develop.

The lack of literature on followership is even more remarkable given the repeated calls for it to be the subject of study. As Hollander notes (1980, p.105), such calls have a long history, citing Sanford's (1950) observation that there is some justification for regarding the follower as the most crucial factor in any leadership event and his argument that research of followers would yield substantial dividends.

To summarise, the literature on leaders and leadership is vast and still expanding. However, we seem to be as far from any clear understanding of leadership – at least one that achieves a significant level of acceptance – as ever. It is at least an arguable hypothesis that until there is equivalent attention paid to followership, leadership will never be understood, as we are currently theorising about and studying only half of the topic.

Leadership and Culture

In an attempt to identify the impact of national culture, one of the two local authorities in my own study was South African. There is little literature on the impact of national culture on leadership. Some theories suggest that national culture is likely to affect leaders and leadership operating within that culture. For example, Smith and Peterson (1998, p.14) locate the search for the 'essence' of leadership as "part and parcel of the culture of individualistic societies which until recently have comprised the advanced industrial nations of the world." They report that in non-Western cultures, research on leadership seems to indicate more consistent findings than when similar studies are carried out in Western cultures. But cross-cultural studies are problematic as meanings ascribed to leadership acts are dependent upon the specific cultural setting:

A supervisor who frequently checks up that work is done correctly may be seen as a kind father in one setting, as task-centred in another setting, officious and mistrustful in a third. The meaning of acts is given by the cultural context within which they occur." (Smith and Peterson, 1998, p.100)

Robie et al. (2001) report on a study that compared managers from US and seven European countries on the perceived competencies required in their current positions and the relations between the competencies they currently possessed to various managerial outcomes. Two skill dimensions – drive for results and capacity to analyse issues – emerged as critical across countries. The authors caveat their results as the sample were overwhelmingly drawn from managers, noting that the results may well have differed if subordinates' or customers' perceptions had been sought. It is also notable that some of the factors analysed seem more appropriate for measuring management skills rather than leadership performance.

Zander (1997) undertook a comparative leadership study of leadership which involved more than 17,000 respondents in eighteen countries. She concluded that there were significant differences in the style of leadership preferred by employees. However, the study focussed on four areas of what were classified as 'interpersonal leadership' but which, again, may be more closely associated with management than leadership. The study certainly assumes that an employee's

manager fulfils the leadership role. Moreover, all the organisations studied were part of a Swedish conglomerate, and the impact, if any, of organisational culture is impossible to extract.

Finally, Hofstede (1999) identifies four dimensions for describing national culture which are largely independent of each other: individualism versus collectivism; large or small power distance (degree of centralisation of authority); strong or weak uncertainty avoidance; and masculinity versus femininity. Hofstede considers that the most important dimensions for leadership are individualism and power distance. Taking the former as an example, he notes that leadership theories from the US (which is at the extreme of the individualism scale) are “about leading individuals based on the presumed needs of individuals who seek their ultimate self-interest” (p. 476), with no obligations towards others or towards society. (The servant leadership approach must be considered an exception.) On the other hand, leadership in a collectivist society is a group phenomenon. However, Hofstede’s approach is to infer the impact on leadership from the dimensions of national culture; there is no empirical evidence to support his conclusions.

The Public Sector Perspective

As the focus of my study is the public service, it is important to assess whether there are any specific leadership or followership issues in the public sector. Leadership in the public service has a high profile across many countries, focusing on change. The OECD notes potentially one significant difference from the private sector:

When we say we want more leadership in the public sector, what we are really looking for is (sic) *people who will promote institutional adaptations in the public interest*. Leadership in this sense is not value neutral. It is a positive espousal of the need to promote certain fundamental values that can be called *public spiritedness*. (OECD, 2001, p.7, emphasis in original)

The OECD study looked at four European and two North American countries, and identified four common trends: to define a competence profile for future leaders; to identify and select potential leaders; to encourage mentoring and training; and to keep leadership development sustainable.

Parry (1999) investigated the social influence processes of leadership in three Australian local authorities, analysing qualitative data using the grounded theory method, which aims to derive a core category, generally a social process, that explains the phenomenon being investigated. The subject of the interviews with staff drawn from all levels within the organisations was the nature of change incidents. It therefore bears some comparison to my own qualitative research described in this study. Parry’s study is also relatively unusual; most leadership research has either been approached quantitatively using questionnaires or through interviews limited to the perceived leaders. Parry argues that change is a variable that affects the leadership role and that the social process of enhancing adaptability (of followers as well as leaders) to change is an important way in which leaders can resolve the consequential uncertainty and confusion. He concludes, “Enhancing adaptability is a theory of leadership that will explain the

social influence processes at work during major change incidents at local government authorities.” (p.150)

Within a UK context, Hartley and Allison (2000) note the importance ascribed to leadership in the development of central government’s modernisation programme for the public service. Reporting on four local authority case studies, they conclude that the change leader was not always the person at the political or managerial apex, who, whilst their role is crucial, may empower others to foster organisational change. “Leadership is therefore no longer (if it ever was) solely about command and control from the ‘top’ of the organization.” (p.38) Leadership was distributed throughout the organisations. Hartley and Allison also examine the increasingly important role that local authorities are expected to fulfil of leadership between organisations, concluding that “inter-organizational leadership is complex and requires developmental and influence skills, as well as traditional hierarchical skills.” (p.39) Finally, and of broader significance, they conclude that against a backcloth of flux and uncertainty the required innovation demands different models of leadership than those traditionally applied within the UK public sector.

Conclusion

In summary, there is a large and expanding volume of literature on leaders and leadership. The recent trend in this literature has been primarily to perceive leadership as more a social relationship than a particular skill or set of skills. The literature on the other participants in this social phenomenon, the followers, and on followership constitutes a tiny fraction of that on leaders and leadership. The empirical element of this dissertation was intended to make a small contribution to addressing this imbalance, and the design of the research is described in the next chapter.

Introduction

As noted in the introduction, the motivation in carrying out my research was primarily to develop a fuller understanding of the leadership process by considering it from the perspectives of both leaders and followers. This was not without self-interest; a further aim was that the research, in addition to having a sound epistemological basis, ought also to provide an empirical underpinning for my own personal development as a manager whose entire career has been spent within UK local government. It was therefore appropriate that the locus of the study should be that sector.

This chapter presents an outline of my research design.

The Research Design

Specific aims and objectives

The main aim of the study was to investigate the theory of leadership with a view to providing a sound empirical basis for my own, and potential others', development of leadership skills.

Within this main aim I identified four specific objectives:

- (a) To examine the concept of followership: its existentialist status, its key features and its relationship to leadership;
- (b) to examine follower/leader dynamics in the context of the public sector;
- (c) to examine the influence of national culture on follower/leader dynamics; and
- (d) to examine the extent to which characteristics of followership impact on the implementation of change.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual basis of the study was that leadership was better characterised as a relationship between a leader and followers than a particular set of attributes possessed or activities undertaken by a leader. It follows from this conceptual basis that an individual follower's perception of the effectiveness of leadership will be based upon an assessment of the quality of the relationship. It may also be true that leaders assess the effectiveness of followership on their perceived quality of the same relationship.

This conceptual basis translates into a conceptual framework that incorporates leaders' requirements from and interaction with followers, followers' requirements from and interaction with leaders and the balance of influence and/or power within leader-follower relationships.

Research questions

Emerging out of this conceptual framework, the study was designed to seek answers to the following research questions within the context of a specific change initiative:

1. From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, what are identified as the characteristics of effective leadership and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?
2. From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, to what extent is there a consensual view on the identification of the leader(s) and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?
3. In relation to (2), what does the identification process involve?
4. From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, what are the reported actions that leaders take (i) deliberately and (ii) inadvertently that result in sustained followership and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?
5. From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, what are the reported actions or behaviours of leaders that result in follower desertion/dissension and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?
6. From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, what are the reported effects of leadership on the success of the change initiative and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?
7. From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, to what extent is it reported that leaders have actively sought leadership and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?
8. From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, to what extent is it reported that followers have actively sought followership and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?

Methodology

The study sought answers to the research questions listed above by means of semi-structured interviews with a total of eighteen individuals associated with change initiatives in two separate authorities, one in the UK, one in South Africa. The non-UK element of the study permitted not only the issue of the impact of national culture to be assessed but also mitigated the potential of my misinterpreting responses to due to my familiarity with local government in the UK.

SUB-SAMPLE 1 – UK-AUTHORITY

UK-Authority is a metropolitan authority on the outskirts of a major city in the North of England. Its origins are in the slum-clearance redevelopment projects of the early 1960s and there remains much of the borough that is characterised by the high density housing that has become associated with multifaceted social problems.

The borough was formed as part of a national reorganisation of local government in 1974 and was initially a district within a two-tier structure. The metropolitan county authority was abolished in 1986, at which time the borough became a unitary authority with sole responsibility for all local government functions, which in the UK include service delivery responsibilities for public education, a large element of social care, social housing, non-arterial highways, environmental

health, libraries and public leisure facilities such as parks. The borough has a population of below 200,000 and has high levels of deprivation. Racially, it is not very diverse with 98% of the population white.

The focus of the study in UK-Authority was the development of the local strategic partnership, a national government requirement on all local authorities to establish and develop a partnership of local public, private and voluntary sector organisations to determine local priorities and establish joint action plans to achieve them.

SUB-SAMPLE 2 – SA-AUTHORITY

Although it has a substantial urban core, SA-Authority was not one of the metropolitan authorities formed on local government reorganisation in 2000 and which operate in a two-tier system. SA-Authority is therefore the most local tier within a three-tier system of regional, district and local government. Many of the services are in theory jointly provided with the district; however, in practice the district council does not have the capacity to deliver and responsibility falls on SA-Authority. Overall, responsibilities are not dissimilar to those of a UK with two very significant additions: utilities (water, sewage, electricity) and primary health care.

The municipality has existed in one form or another for over one hundred years, although for much of that period it operated under the racially divisive apartheid system. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, it has seen the area for which it is responsible quadruple in size, now incorporating significant rural areas, and its population almost triple to in excess of 500,000. In common with much of South Africa, the major issues it faces are poverty and unemployment, HIV (18% of the population are infected), lack of access to affordable services, poor health and high crime.

The original intention was to study an initiative (Masakhane) that appeared to have similarities with that taking place in UK-Authority. However, it was clear at the commencement of the study visit that it was impossible to separate this initiative from a host of others, which together are perceived as transforming the municipality. The focus of the case study became this overall transformation rather than any particular initiative within it.

PROCEDURES FOR OBTAINING SAMPLE

Essentially, my sampling represents convenience sampling. The chief executive of UK-Authority and the municipal manager of SA-Authority were known to me personally and I approached them with a request to permit me to carry out a case study within their respective authorities. Each authority was asked to identify interviewees within a specific framework: they were to be associated with the particular change initiative and drawn from senior politicians, senior management, middle management, operational teams and external partner organisations. There was no vetting of the participants. The sample breakdown by authority and position was as follows:

Table 1: Sample analysis and interviewee identification codes

	UK-Authority	SA-Authority
<i>Position</i>	<i>Interviewee identification code(s)</i>	<i>Interviewee identification code(s)</i>
Senior politician	UK1	SA4
Senior manager	UK2, UK3	SA1, SA2, SA3
Middle manager	UK4, UK6	SA5, SA6
Operational team	UK5	SA7, SA8 (joint interview)
Partner organisations	UK7, UK8	SA9, SA10

DATA COLLECTION

The choice of semi-structured interviews as my method of data collection was based upon a concern to uncover, and enhance my understanding of, the complexities of the leader-follower relationship, as outlined in the conceptual framework presented above. I therefore needed to gather data which were, for the most part, qualitative, rather than quantitative.

Given that the conceptual framework was innovative, I was aware that I could not be certain in which direction the data collection might take me; there might well be unforeseen opportunities to explore, for example. This led me to select interviewing as an appropriate method, since it facilitated a two-way exchange between the interviewee and me which would allow me to probe, rather than simply accept responses. In this respect, the approach was considered superior to questionnaires, even though its time-consuming nature restricted the sample size. I rejected alternative, or supplementary, methods, such as diaries, which place the onus of responsibility for data collection upon research subjects, since I considered these to be too demanding of subjects' time, too dependent upon their sustained goodwill and commitment, and too susceptible to being neglected. Observation was also rejected as an alternative/supplementary method as it is far from clear on what occasions activities of 'leadership' or 'followership' would be taking place that could be observed. Ideally, I would have preferred to carry out longitudinal studies of the initiative in the authorities in order to study how perceptions of leadership and followership changed over time and the impact this had on the change programme. However, time and resource constraints made that approach impractical.

Although I wanted to encourage interviewee-initiated conversation, I designed an interview schedule of key topics and core questions. This was intended to ensure that answers to the research questions were sought and that data on certain common topics might provide the basis for comparison within, and between, the sub-samples. All interviews were tape recorded, with the interviewees' permission. Interviewees and the participating authorities were guaranteed

anonymity and, in presenting my findings, I have used codes throughout (see table 1, above). The average duration of interviews was one hour.

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

All interviewees received an introductory letter in advance of the interview. The letter is reproduced below.

Dear

Leadership & Followership in a Changing Public Service

As we all know, public service is going through a period of profound change against a backdrop of a society which is also changing. As a part-time student studying for a Masters degree in Public Administration at the University of Warwick, I am very interested in studying how change is being led at the local level, particularly from the perspective of those who are expected to follow. I am pursuing this interest in my third year project, which has the above title. As part of the project I am undertaking two case studies in different authorities, looking at a specific change initiative in each. *Name of authority* have kindly agreed to be one of these authorities. The key questions that the case studies will focus on are:

- (a) What makes a person an effective leader of change?
- (b) What is the impact of such leadership on the change initiative?

The core of the case study is a series of interviews and I am very grateful to you for agreeing to take part. I anticipate that the interviews will take between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews will be semi-structured: although I have questions to which I am seeking answers, I will not rigidly ask these in a particular order and I hope the interview will be more like a conversation than a question and answer session.

Unless you object, I would like to tape record the interviews; this will allow me to concentrate on the key messages without frantically trying to scribble notes. The interviews will be strictly confidential. No views will be personally attributed when the case study is written up and as a further precaution the names of the authorities will themselves remain anonymous. Each authority will receive a copy of my dissertation when it is completed early in January.

If you have any queries or concerns, please either ring me in advance on *telephone contact number* or raise them at the start of the interview. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed.

Yours sincerely,

Glyn Evans

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interview schedule is reproduced below.

Purpose of the Interview

Introduce self

Explain purpose of interview – a case study exploring the relationship between leaders and followers within a specific change initiative in a local authority; In name of authority looking at name of initiative. The study is being carried out as part of my MPA degree (explain) at Warwick University.

The key questions that the case studies are focusing on are:

- (a) What makes a person an effective leader of change?
- (b) What is the impact of such leadership on the change initiative?

Practicalities

Check how much time is available for person/group

Explain use of tape recorder and confidentiality

The person/people

Name

Organisation

Job (title)

Responsibilities

How long in that position

Previous experience

The change initiative

What is your understanding of name of initiative – what is its purpose, why has been done now, etc.?

When first became aware of initiative

Thoughts at that time about the initiative – purpose, relevance to self/organisation/ community

When and why became personally involved

How thoughts about initiative have changed over time and what are current thoughts – what is the attraction(s) of the initiative, are there aspects that are perceived negatively

The leader(s)

Who do you regard as leading the initiative (explore whether more than one identified and what elements of the initiative each is perceived to be leading – e.g. political v. managerial)?

What actions or activities indicate that this person is/these persons are leading?

How has this leadership affected the development/implementation of the initiative?

What specific actions has x taken that have demonstrated leadership?

Have there been occasions when there has been a lack of leadership – what should x have done?

What are x's characteristics that make her/him a good leader/not a good leader?

The followers

(Note: questions will need rephrasing if interviewee has identified her/himself as leader)

Do you see yourself as a following x's leadership in this change initiative – if not, who are followers?

What do you understand a good follower would do in this situation?

In relation to the change initiative, what are the characteristics of a good follower?

Are there different types of follower? Why? How are they distinguished?

Is there such a thing as a 'bad' follower? – if so, what are characteristics?

How have the followers influenced the change initiative – how has this been manifested?

What actions by x would reinforce her/his leadership role?

What actions would undermine it?

What actions by a follower would reinforce x's leadership role?

What actions would undermine it?

What would weaken or end your support of the change initiative and how would this be manifested?

Closing the interview

Ask for time to check interview questions to ensure everything covered

Ask if can contact in future if need clarification – if so, get phone number

Explain next steps and when study is expected to be completed

Thank interviewee

Analysis of data

Detailed notes were taken from the interview tapes and these notes were used as the basis for analysis. Data were analysed in the first instance by categorisation in relation to the research questions listed above and subsequently by comparison with the literature, as uncovered by the review. The research questions were subsequently aggregated into four superset categories incorporating one or more interview questions and the data re-categorised within these superset categories.

Limitations

I am aware of and acknowledge several limitations of the study, the most significant of which concern its scale, the sampling, and the implications of these for the generalisability and wider applicability of the findings. As a sole researcher, I recognise that reliability and validity may have been threatened by the absence of cross-checking of the specific bases of my analytical decisions. Clearly, there is scope for larger scale follow-up studies of different types of local authorities and other institutions within different national cultures. Such studies will have much to contribute towards presenting a more comprehensive picture of leadership and followership in a changing public service.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The majority of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews are more readily analysed by grouping the main research questions into sections. This approach better reflects the interviewees' responses; for example, interviewees did not generally distinguish between characteristics of effective leadership (research question 1) and actions that leaders take to sustain followership (research question 4) and these are therefore analysed in one section.

All but one (no. 3) of the research questions are explicitly directed at identifying any distinctions that may exist between the sub-samples (and no. 3 is implicitly directed at doing so). Such distinctions were found to be minimal and are equally applicable to data relating to all the research questions. I have therefore considered the discussion and analysis of those data in a separate section.

My research findings are presented and analysed below in five sections: *Characteristics of Leadership and Actions of Leaders; Who Are The Leaders?; Followers and Followership; The Impact of Leadership and Followership; and Sub-Sample Distinctions.*

Characteristics of Leadership and Actions of Leaders

It was not possible to identify a distinction between the characteristics of leadership and the actions that leaders take to sustain followership. In this section I therefore present and discuss evidence that relates to the following research questions:

1. *From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, what are identified as the characteristics of effective leadership and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?*
4. *From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, what are the reported actions that leaders take (i) deliberately and (ii) inadvertently that result in sustained followership and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?*

There was a very high level of agreement within the entire sample. Almost all interviewees reported future orientation, realising the vision, communication and interpersonal values as essential leadership characteristics. Moreover, with one exception, no characteristics mentioned by interviewees failed to fall into one of these categories. This exception was identified as charismatic or inspirational leadership, which was mentioned by three UK-Authority interviewees. The first interviewee clearly perceived charisma as a positive leadership characteristic:

he's, to me, a good leader – in one sense – in that he's got vision, he sees the way ahead before I do and...er...I get inspired and I can move forward through listening to him and through seeing the way that he sees things. (UK6)

UK3, on the other hand, whilst admiring charismatic leadership for what it could achieve in certain circumstances also considered that charismatic leaders were equally capable of making situations worse: for every New York mayor like Rudolph Giuliani "there's another six mayors of New York who've bugged it

up.” UK7 questioned the need for charismatic leaders in order to achieve deliver change:

Sometimes [a charismatic leader] can help to get things moving, but I think when the wheels are actually turning and moving along then I think everybody feels you don't need the charismatic leader. (UK7)

Given that the focus in both case study organisations was leadership through change, my sample's evident oversight of inspirational or of charismatic leadership is unexpected. Much of the literature in this field, in particular that on transformational leadership, places heavy emphasis on motivational charisma as an important characteristic.

Future Orientation

The most widely identified characteristic of effective leadership and one also recognised as important for sustaining followership is that it is future-oriented. In almost all cases, without my introducing the word, 'vision' was the term used for this future orientation. All but one interviewee (SA10) mentioned it. The following quotations are typical:

...the vision thing is desperately important...you can't be expected to be seen as leading something unless you have a strong sense of where you're going. (UK2)

Such a person would need to have a vision and a foresight about what needs to happen...(SA5)

I find it easier to identify what bad leadership is – I think it's this no sense of direction, umm, no clear vision, umm, almost, sort of, taking notice of the last person you listened to... (UK4)

Where it was not specifically mentioned, recognition of the importance of 'vision' was implicit in interviewees' responses:

GE: So what keeps them [colleagues] on board?

UK8: A proper attitude and concern about the future...what's going to be there for their children...

One of the South African interviewees (SA1), whilst agreeing that vision was important, manifested a very contingent attitude, arguing that different situations required different styles leadership: in the period of transformation currently in progress, vision – along with commitment and perseverance – were the key leadership attributes. Once the process of transformation was completed, different characteristics would be needed.

The emphasis on vision as a key characteristic of leadership and/or leaders echoes much of the literature, where vision (or an equivalent term) is frequently mentioned, particularly within the more transformational theories and approaches. Where there begins to be some discernible divergence from much of the literature is in how that vision is either initially created and/or maintained. Just over half of my sample (including those who were identified as leaders) emphasised that the vision is not simply the creation of the leader, but is something that is jointly developed with the followers or, at least, something which can be influenced by them:

I think, someone who's firstly prepared to accept that there's a diverse, ...er... opinions on issues...but who nonetheless believes we need to

pool our resources to tackle the problems we face. This must involve *negotiation* on the vision of where we're going. (SA9)

...but there is an issue about clarity and sense of purpose and I think that's what you need from a leader, really, need to feel that, ...umm..., they know what they're doing, even if it's about getting people together and finding out, you know, what the view is to the way forward. You need to have some sort of vision, I think. (UK5)

[Leadership is a combination of being] up front and, on the other hand, being quite reticent about listening, being empathetic, striving for consensus, umm, trying to reconcile and get everybody on board, umm, of course, and I think, I mean we all learnt a great deal from Mandela in that respect – one has this shining example of somebody who's doing it all day, every day. (SA2)

But certainly that vision should be open to change and influenced by a process of consultation and listening to people...I think that it's the responsibility of people to see if they can improve that vision. (SA6)

UK3 summarised this viewpoint well, arguing that what was needed in the leader was the ability to see others' perspectives, recognise the overlaps and create a joint agenda for everybody.

For those interviewees who did mention the importance of influencing the vision, the need to be engaged with the development of the vision seemed at least as important as the vision itself.

Realising the Vision

Mentioned as frequently as vision was the need to be able to make identifiable progress towards realising the vision if leadership was to be sustained. The consensus was that progress need not be rapid or dramatic, but there has to be a sense that actions are being taken that are moving towards the vision. The analogy of steps on a long journey was mentioned by several of the sample, for example:

Leadership is taking everybody plodding down that road with you... scared to look up because the distance is too far...[but] heading towards the horizon. (UK1)

The managerial interviewees from both sub-samples were consistent in emphasising the need to establish a performance management framework to support the delivery of the change programme:

The vision thing doesn't deliver – you've got to move it on and say, 'OK, what's the next stage?' (UK2)

The need for this performance management framework was also recognised by some of those involved in delivering the programmes:

By saying that [performance management] has to be the focus of meetings, he's really forcing the agenda, and I think that's an example of leadership really...in changing the way people are operating and changing their focus, by creating a milestone that people have to work towards. (UK5)

For some the issue was illustrated by commenting on what was felt to be insufficient progress. UK4, for example, felt that though the final objectives of

the change initiative were clear, there was insufficient understanding by those involved of how to effect that change and, because of this, there were changes of direction that were unsettling. SA3 saw problems arising from a deceleration of the pace of change. This interviewee argued, however, that failure to achieve progress would not necessarily seriously impact on a leader's position providing that he/she effectively managed people's disappointment. A combination of failure to achieve progress and failure to manage the disappointment would result in a leader not retaining the role.

However, delivery was not perceived to be a directive process originated by the leader. It was recognised that participants in the change programme are collectively moving towards the shared vision, but this is not a 'command and control' process effected by a leader directing his or her 'troops'. Participants expect, it was felt, if not autonomy, then involvement in determining the implementation activities:

UK5: Having said we should get a clear direction from the leader, what I mean is, they shouldn't be so, er, blinkered that nothing, anybody's ideas and suggestions can't be taken on board.

GE: So you're looking for a leader you can influence?

UK5: [Laughs] Probably, yes!

Indeed, one interviewee suggested that followers should discard aspects of the leader's proposals that were considered inappropriate:

It's learning to have people respect [the leader's] views and act on them and get them right...it's people having the ability to dissect and analyse [the leader's] views and take the positives out of it and hopefully ignore the negatives. (SA9)

These findings are somewhat inconsistent with the literature, which on the whole explicitly states or implies that leaders direct the implementation of the vision. This is as true in many contemporary models (such as those that see leadership in terms of exercise of power) as in earlier trait and behavioural approaches. There is some resonance, however, both with Grint's (2000) analysis that a key role of followers is to resolve the leader's mistakes and, possibly, with social exchange theory where leaders and followers are motivated by self-interest.

Leader-Follower Communication

Maintaining leader-follower communication was identified as a further important characteristic of leaders and/or leadership by almost all interviewees. This was seen by some as primarily the giving of information by the leader, for example:

"er..., I think it's about being very clear in your own head what your priorities are, giving very clear communication to the staff your responsible for, in terms of what you want and what you see their role as...(UK4)

Part of the success of any leader is the ability to communicate almost continually so people who are working for you know almost as much about things as you do (SA3)

However, in most cases communication was seen to involve an exchange of views. UK1, for example, stressed the importance of dialogue between participants, whilst recognising that this takes time; patience was definitely

required and it was difficult on occasions to keep frustrations under control. Similarly, SA10 stressed the importance of communication that is interactive:

GE: Is that communication one-way?

SA10: No, it's two-way, definitely two-way.

One South African interviewee saw this two-way process as being a distinctively African approach, distinguished from more superficial forms of consultation:

When we debate...everyone must have their say, and if you bring a community in, you can't bring in a community and say, 'Right, you've got three minutes. Cheers, we've heard you, now bugger off and we'll tell you our decision.' So that idea of sitting down literally under a tree discussing matters, working through them, until everybody feels like (a) I've got it off my chest and secondly the chairperson, the mayor, is actually a good listener and he weighs it up and he says, 'OK, what I'm hearing here is two plus two equals four' and everybody is very happy because everybody has now come to...of course, it takes time, it doesn't provide necessarily the most effective, quickest decision making process. (SA2)

In both case studies, communication was identified as the one characteristic of leaders and/or leadership where there was a strong sense of there still being room for improvement. In UK-Authority, this was true at all levels in the council hierarchy and for external partners. Both senior managers independently mentioned their recent conclusions that more effort on communication was needed. This was repeated at lower levels in the hierarchy. UK6 commented, "Communication is always not good enough." Similarly:

GE: Do you think that there's been adequate dialogue in developing a shared vision?

UK7: Mmm (nodding). They've gone a long way towards doing that. But people are still not wholly in line.

In SA-Authority, the sense of inadequacies in communication only occurred below the senior management level and was voiced more critically than in UK-Authority and with less sense that the issue would be resolved:

There have been lots of meetings with staff, but the staff tend to get talked at as opposed to listened to...er...so it's a one-way communication process. They are told roughly...vaguely...what the vision is, vaguely what the processes are going to be, although not in any depth, not in any specifics, there is no detail. There is very ad hoc listening - *very* ad hoc - it's not been happening in a structured way and the staff have not *really* been able to feel they've been heard in any sense." (SA6)

GE: If you went to [the municipal manager] and said, 'This isn't going to work,' he'd listen to you?

SA5: [Laughs] Because, he's very strong, it would then depend on the other party, how strong is the other party in terms of being able to move him from the direction he was going, whether he would swing the other way. Umm...some of us are not as strong as the municipal manager.

SA7: The [new structure] discussions are a hush-hush process. Yes, other members of the department were part and parcel of the process, others not.

SA8: And in an organisation of this kind, it's not good, this.

The identification of – and emphasis on the importance of – communication as a characteristic of leaders/leadership is not unexpected. Clearly, any theory of or approach to leadership demands communication with followers; as a minimum, leaders would need to issue orders. I have noted in the sections on future orientation and realising the vision the conviction of interviewees that leadership needs to be an inclusive process. By implication, to achieve this leader-follower communication will need to be two-way and it is therefore unsurprising that this aspect was highlighted by those interviewed. There is a measure of congruence here with much of the literature, particularly that which presents and interprets leadership as a social or social psychological phenomenon. By definition, two-way communication must be a component of such theories and approaches and it is indeed often highlighted, for example in the servant leadership model.

Interpersonal Value Framework

Interviewees consistently mentioned specific values. These were sometimes personal, in particular consistency with the vision:

The big thing for me is about being consistent and *living* whatever it is you claim to be changing. (UK4)

It's [the vision] got to be something that meets your values. (UK6)

However, the values most frequently mentioned were trust, honesty, respect and a sense of equality. Broadly, these can be seen as relationship-associated values:

There's got to be trust, hasn't there? (UK4)

It's about accepting that when you enter a partnership all the stakeholders become relatively equal and you've got to get agreement on the table from all of them to move forward – you've got to give and take. (SA9)

...one of the measures for me in the future will be how equal are the partners. (UK7)

And I think some of the style we see are not...umm...I think there is a degree of disorder, I think there is a haphazard way of working, I don't think there is sufficient respect for the time of the people below them. (SA6)

UK6: Mutual, yes, mutual respect.

GE: Is that important to you?

UK6: Yes, it is, yes, very important. And you need to feel that that person is going to be respectful with you when they're with you and also when they're not with you.

The values most frequently were therefore those that support the inclusivity that was considered so important. They are not, in the main, values that are attributable to an individual but rather those that are descriptive of a relationship

There is some convergence here with much of the leadership literature, such as the Ohio State University leadership studies of the 1950s reported by Yukl (1994). This research categorised one of the dimensions of leadership as ‘consideration’ and it is marked by the how much the leader demonstrates trust and treats subordinates as equals. However, my sample placed more emphasis than the literature on this being mutual, for example on followers trusting leaders as much as leaders trusting followers.

I have not referred in this section to the differences between the perspectives of leaders and followers, an issue that the research questions were seeking to address. There were minor differences in emphasis but these appeared more related to hierarchical position and experience, than to whether an individual was a leader or a follower. However, the major reason for failing to address distinctions between leader and follower perspectives is that it proved extremely difficult to identify specific individuals as leaders, as the next section demonstrates.

Who Are The Leaders?

In this section I will address the following research questions:

2. *From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, to what extent is there a consensual view on the identification of the leader(s) and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?*
3. *In relation to (2), what does the identification process involve?*
7. *From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, to what extent is it reported that leaders have actively sought leadership and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?*

When initially asked to identify who were perceived to be the leading the change initiatives, interviewees in both sub-samples were consistent in identifying either the political leader (the leader of the council in the UK, the mayor in South Africa), the most senior official (the chief executive in the UK, the city manager in South Africa) or both. This was equally true when the interviewee was the incumbent of either of these positions, although in such cases interviewees identified themselves, not their political or official colleague, as the leader.

However, probing on my part during interviews revealed a much more complex picture. This complexity was expressed in different ways, but can be summarised as suggesting that leadership was a function that was not carried out by any single person or small group; that it is a cumulative, recursive, process effected by individuals in such a way as to produce something akin to the ‘domino principle’ – perhaps even a kind of ‘snowball effect’ Thus, SA1 spoke of a “cascade of leadership” down the organisational hierarchy. UK2 phrased it slightly differently:

Once you’ve got the shared vision, then hopefully leadership of that vision becomes shared. Leadership does become slightly diffused, if that’s the right way of thinking. (UK2)

Similarly, UK3 considered that it was a group that was leading the change initiative in UK-Authority; this was considered to be a healthier situation than

charismatic, single-person leadership. UK8 went further, arguing that effective leadership cannot rest with an individual:

The trouble with councils is things change, we have different people, like in economic development, it's changed over the years, you know. You can't put the onus on one person. (UK8)

An alternative description of this diffused leadership was to identify leadership as coming from an organisation, rather than an individual. This perspective was one that seemed particularly pertinent from those interviewees who were not part of the councils' organisational structure:

GE: Do you think there is an identifiable leader or leaders in this process?

UK7: Quite clearly, it's the local authority, they're driving it.

The most common way of describing the leadership, however, was for the interviewee to see her/himself as both a follower of the broad initiative but a leader of her/his own section of it. Below the most senior positions this was true irrespective of the interviewees' hierarchical level.

In this role we would have to play both [follower and leader] roles. OK, we've got the municipal manager as *the* key leader, but we then get the input from us...umm...kind of following him but leading the rest of the municipality. (SA5)

We're [interviewees line manager and interviewees' own team] leading the community engagement role...We have picked up on the issues that need to be addressed, hence we are leading on communication strategy, we are leading on the community engagement strategy, we're really leading on the whole community engagement agenda. (UK5)

They are definitely aware of the leaders above, yes. But I think they would see me as a leader of [my] function, but as someone who interprets [that] function within the context of the direction set at a higher level. (SA6)

The diffuse and complex nature of leadership was summed up well by UK7: "But the leadership of the [change initiative] is such a vague thing." This diffuse nature of leadership is not borne out by most of the literature; Barker (1997) perhaps comes closest to identifying it in his argument that leadership is a group process, but his perspective is that there are no, rather than many different individuals who are, leaders. My research data indicate that the identification of a leader of a specific change programme therefore appears to require the fulfilment of possibly two conditions: recognition on the part of at least one person of an individual as a leader and recognition of his or her leadership role on the part of the individual recognised by others a leader. This latter condition is more debateable, but within my sample all interviewees were aware of their leadership role. Leadership of a specific initiative need not, however, be confined to an individual; there may be several leaders fulfilling the role.

Since they are drawn from only two small sub-samples my findings have very limited generalisability and fail to provide evidence from which it is possible to reach firm conclusions as to whether there are limits to the number of individuals who might fulfil a leadership role. Within the two sub-samples, leaders were generally also superiors in the organisational hierarchy. However, the emphasis

on the importance of the equality and reciprocity in the leader/follower relationship referred to elsewhere in this chapter suggests that it is not a necessary condition that the leader(s) enjoy superiority in relation to status within the organisational hierarchy. I return to discussion of this issue in the next chapter. Certainly, my findings identify one example of apparent leadership by someone who was not in a superior position to the interviewee in the organisational hierarchy:

We cut corners, you know...we've got a wonderful person who's in Social Services, working with children, and she just knows how to get money out of Health, out of Police and out of Education, cobble it all together and get something happening that she knows she wants to get done, and...umm...it might not be doing things by the rules, but we trust her, and she knows she's going to get something good in place, and we'll bend the rules for her, because...er...you know, it needs to happen ...and it's cutting corners and getting on with it that...er...we're doing quite a lot...which is really quite exciting. (UK6)

Interviewees did not report actively seeking leadership, even those drawn from the political leadership. UK8 considered that leaders emerge from a process; that they do not actively seek that role. One South African participant felt that individuals came to show leadership because of the position that they are in:

[Talking about how leaders emerge] You see, what I've seen in my experience is that the role that you play or the position within an organisation tends to push you to do certain things. (SA1)

One of the South African interviewees had been at different times both a senior politician and city manager. His perspective, certainly with regard to the former role, was that the leadership involved in that role resulted from chance, or opportunism; it was a case of being in the right place at the right time. This perspective was echoed by the UK politician. These views are, however, hard to reconcile with the conventional wisdom that assumes leadership to be a worthwhile activity, with cachet, if not status, associated with being considered a "good" leader. There is a need for further investigation to attempt a reconciliation of these perspectives.

Followers and Followership

The discussion thus far has of necessity needed to consider followers, but it has done so from a predominantly leadership determined viewpoint. In this section, I will concentrate on examining followership as a concept and the specific roles that followers are seen to fulfil. Two research questions are addressed:

8. *From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, to what extent is it reported that followers have actively sought followership and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?*
5. *From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, what are the reported actions or behaviours of leaders that result in follower desertion/dissension and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?*

In both sub-samples, my interviewees were often apparently uncomfortable with the concept of followers or followership because of its implications of subservience and meek acquiescence:

I suppose people feel uncomfortable with 'follower' because it sounds like sheep and, you know, it's not got a very positive connotation, has it, really? (UK7)

Perhaps followership's not the right word, because the word 'followership' perhaps suggests something a bit sheepish, but really what you're looking for is people who are going to participate and people who are going to be prepared to hold the leadership to account. (SA4)

It was therefore often necessary in the interviews to speak of 'following a lead' rather than 'being a follower'. I take the view that these are equivalents (except that the former does not have the same negative connotations) but I have not attempted a detailed analysis of this.

However, individuals' reluctance to consider themselves as "sheep" meant that answering the question posed in research question 9 – the extent to which followers have sought followership – proved problematic. Was I enquiring whether individuals sought to be a submissive adherents to a cause? If so, then the answer was that they did not. Or was I asking the extent to which a person willingly and freely actively participated in supporting a cause. This was a position that people were much more comfortable discussing. This lack of clarity threatened to turn the interviews around this issue into a semantic debate, and I therefore never satisfactorily resolved whether *seeking* followership – that is, seeking to take on followership roles for oneself – was an active process.

However, there was unanimity amongst all interviewees that followership involved active participation; indeed, SA10 stated, "I would call it [followership] participation." There was also substantial agreement into the nature of that participation, being concerned primarily with shaping both the development and delivery of the vision. This was sometimes described as providing input, but most frequently it was described more as challenging the leadership:

Even if the leader has the vision...umm...I think the leader does need the input from the followers because...umm...you're dealing with people with their own views. As a leader you might think, 'This is right' but the followers may have a different view that you don't hold... umm...in discussion with the followers, they will benefit from that. (SA5)

...but part of what made that [being led] work was that I *knew* I was being listened to and I *knew* that the leader was willing to, if they thought what I was saying was...actually challenged what they were saying, effectively, they'd change. (UK2)

It's about being able to play a part in the delivery of whatever it is – the vision, the actions, the objectives. (UK5)

A good follower is someone who's coming brimful of ideas, who's always one step ahead...er...and pushing to move things on. (UK6)

If you ask me, that's what makes a good follower, that they don't just blindly follow, they keep the leader...they make the leader accountable. (SA2)

Followers have to see that there is a point at which they can hold the leader accountable for what he or she is doing, instead of just being a one-way process. (SA9)

This perspective that followership is an active process was emphasised when interviewees considered what constituted 'bad' followers. Generally, the initial response was that bad followers were people who were either sycophants or those who merely complied unquestioningly. After further discussion of this, however, interviewees often shifted their position to one of an assessment of such people as non-followers, rather than bad followers:

Bad followers are the ones who never, ever come to terms with the vision of the organisation, that don't accept it and that continuously, to the people they're involved with, undermine it, run it down, criticise it, say it's wrong. (SA6)

There are some people...who can be quite obstructive. They're not followers because they're not engaged...so they don't share the vision, they're not committed to being part of the delivery, so they're not followers in that sense. If you're a follower, you're a follower...there'll be different ways in which you deliver that but, I suppose, all followers are contributory. (UK4)

I don't think there is such a thing as a bad follower – there's a non-follower and they're characterised by having strong views that don't conform with where the organisation is going. (SA3)

The other characteristic of followership that was universally acknowledged was that it involved choice; even within an organisational setting with its defined authority relationships, individuals had a choice whether or not to follow:

I often used to say I'm not a Pied Piper and...er...I think it was very true because, well, you had to be singing the right tune, playing the right tune in the first instance but people weren't going to follow you blindly. (SA2)

GE: It seems to be basically a two-way relationship between leader and follower – is that what you're saying?

UK5: I think so, otherwise someone's not going to follow you, are they?

If anything, this factor of follower choice was even more explicit when the follower was not part of that formal organisational structure:

So, it's great for me, I can...what they can't do is walk away from it, but I can if I want it, I can, therefore my input has to be listened to because they know I'm doing it with a genuine...probably the wrong word...but affection for the area. (UK8)

The *basis* of that choice of whether or not to become a follower seems to be the extent to which the specific activities of followership within a specific context matches the individual's own needs or views on how the specific initiative expected to be followed should develop:

The vision is not clear enough for everybody. It's talked about in general terms, in terms of everything must restructure, everything must change, everything must become more efficient, we must all become more

customer focused, which are nice general terms, but the specifics nobody knows, so you can't decide whether you're buying in or not buying in. (SA6)

It's about [long pause] whether you think you will achieve the objectives that you want to achieve in the work you're doing through following them, I think. That's what would make me follow them. (UK6)

The first question that any group is saying to us is 'What's in it for me?' and, if you don't offer them something, they don't want to be there, (UK7)

Failure to continue to meet an individual's own objectives was one of the two reasons given for follower dissension and ultimately desertion. The other was a breakdown in the relationship with the leader:

[In extreme situation] one would have to resist the changes that would not be beneficial to our communities...and obviously all we're doing, we're doing on behalf of our communities, it would have to be ideas that go contrary to the needs of communities. (SA5)

I think it would be disappointing if we were not able to...er...sustain the community involvement in this. (UK5)

"Being inconsistent, not appearing to value around them, in terms of their contribution to the agenda, also a lack of trust, not developing a trusting relationship... (UK4)

GE: So you'd fight to keep [the change initiative] if you felt it was being undermined by others?

UK6: Well, only if it was continuing the way that it's going at the moment which is us increasingly working across sectors.

As SA9 noted, desertion need not necessarily mean leaving the organisation, which in the South African context of very high levels of unemployment might not be a feasible option. However, as this interviewee suggested, "You can stay where you are, do nothing, disengage from the process." Whilst they had by no means reached the desertion stage, one of the UK and two of the South African interviewees expressed some reservations, either about their ability to influence the process or about difficulties surrounding interpersonal relationships:

I'll be honest with you as well, I don't think it's the day job getting in the way so much as...umm...egos, personal agendas, other agendas within the organisation. (UK4)

GE: Do you think that you as a follower have or will have the opportunity to influence the direction; do you feel your voice is being heard?

SA5: [long pause, sighs] Umm...I did say earlier that he [the municipal manager] is a very busy man [laughs]. That's been a difficult one.

The idea that followers influence the leader and help determine the vision and the steps to achieve it is relatively common in the literature. However, the concept that followers have choice about whether or not they follow, both initially and at any subsequent stage, is less frequently examined. Of the literature I reviewed,

only Kelley (1998) is explicit in recognising this perpetual follower choice, though it is implicit in others, for example, social exchange theory. The primary reason why this issue apparently receives little recognition may be that the overwhelming majority of the literature perceives leadership as a hierarchical function; indeed, followers are most commonly referred to as 'subordinates'. Implicitly, and often explicitly, there is a power relationship in which the leader has the dominant role. This is true even in such approaches as servant leadership: the leader is still in principle superior (and can therefore resume that role at any time) even if in practice he or she is attempting to adopt an inferior position. This perspective may have been reinforced by much of the empirical research, which often adopts a quantitative approach. As I noted above, the initial response in my research to the identification of leaders was to identify the political leader or the most senior official; it required further probing to reveal and illuminate a subtler and more complex situation, which is not possible in quantitative research. When the literature reports qualitative approaches, perceived leaders have generally been the interview subjects; the follower perspective is unlikely to be prominent in these circumstances. Evans (1998; 1999) also highlights this omission – within an educational leadership context – suggesting that her studies represent the few that present and analyse the perspectives of what she refers to as 'the led'.

The subjects of my research (in general, both leaders and followers) do not share this perspective that those taking on followership are fulfilling a subordinate role. They recognise and acknowledge that the leader/follower relationship is one characterised by equality and is distinct from the manager/subordinate relationship. So, too, do they recognise and acknowledge that the choice of whether or not to follow (in the active sense that is the only meaningful one for my sample) a particular lead *always* lies with the follower, implies that the power in the relationship is under the control of the follower; in essence, that leadership is an attribute granted by the follower to the leader(s) which can at any time be withdrawn.

The Impact of Leadership and Followership

This section addresses the remaining research question:

6. *From the perspectives of (a) leaders and (b) followers, what are the reported effects of leadership on the success of the change initiative and what, if any, distinction is evident between and within the two sub-samples?*

This proved the most difficult research question to answer, primarily because in both UK-Authority and SA-Authority it was still unclear whether the change initiative or programme was going to be successful; several interviewees in both sub-samples referred to it being "early days." The perception in UK-Authority was that the leadership of the start-up phase had been successful, with the participative approach yielding dividends in terms of commitment by those involved. It was, however, recognised that it remained a relatively small group (of leaders and followers) who were actively participating and that one of the next stages would be to widen involvement.

In SA-Authority, two of the interviewees expressed some doubts as to whether the approach being followed would deliver the outcomes that were required. This was expressed in terms of the level of influence on the direction of the initiative,

either by them personally or by a wider group of staff. This shortcoming was perceived as a failure of leadership. Others, however, highlighted the environmental factors that were undermining the potential for the success of the change programme: the enormous social problems created by an explosion in the urban population in a country with “one foot in the first world, one foot in the third world” (SA4); the need to build democratic participation in municipal affairs against a history, under apartheid, of resistance to local government; and the political need for visible change to occur quickly, which meant that whilst, “Participation is encouraged, the municipality is under a lot of pressure to deliver against a particular deadline.” (SA9)

Sub-Sample Distinctions

The identification of the impact of national culture on leadership and followership was one of the objectives of the research and all the research questions sought to identify whether or not there were distinctions – and, if so, what was their nature – between the South African and the UK samples. However, as I have already indicated, contrary to my expectations, distinctions were minimal. Indeed, there was a remarkable degree of congruence between the perspectives of interviewees. Such differences in emphasis that were identifiable occurred in both sub-samples and seemed more to reflect seniority and experience than national culture. That is not to say that there were no identifiable cultural differences, although there is insufficient evidence to categorise these as being due necessarily to differences in national culture. In both samples, the most senior politician and most senior officials were often referred to by their organisational titles. When referred to by name, however, in UK-Authority this was always by forename alone or by forename and surname, whilst in SA-Authority it was invariably by title and surname. Another distinction, possibly linked, is that there was greater acceptance in SA-Authority of language implying a subordinate position; for example, there was generally (although not universally) a far higher degree of comfort with the term ‘follower’ than there was in UK-Authority.

A third noticeable distinction was that, probably arising from the struggle against apartheid, the community-based voluntary sector in South Africa appeared significantly more confident than in the UK. This last was only realised after the conclusion of the study visit and further research is required to assess its impact.

The lack of cultural distinction is perhaps unsurprising. SA-Authority has existed in one form or other for over one hundred years and for a substantial part of that period the municipality has formed part of a British colony. Further research in other municipalities in South Africa, for example those which have been only recently created, or in countries which have had differing cultural influences is required before a more definitive analysis of the impact of national culture on leadership and followership can be made.

Conclusion

Many of the research findings were unexpected. I had anticipated that there would be a higher emphasis on the role of followers than that found in most of the leadership literature, but the importance afforded the degree of equality within the relationship, the distinction drawn between leader-follower and manager-subordinate relationships, and the high level of awareness that followership

involves choice were unforeseen. Whilst it would be inappropriate to draw firm conclusions from such a small-scale study, these findings do fundamentally challenge the conceptualisation of leadership found in the overwhelming majority of the literature. The next chapter will consider the implications of this.

Introduction

Taking into account both the literature and the findings of my research, there appear to be three issues which deserve discussion. These are: to consider the reasons for the lack of research into, theories of and approaches to leadership that could be categorised as follower-centric; to reflect on current approaches to and theories of leadership, specifically with regard to their practical utility; and to explore whether there may be an alternative approach to leadership theory that could be fruitful. This chapter addresses these issues and concludes with a consideration of their organisational implications.

Suggestions for lack of follower-centrism in leadership studies

I have noted elsewhere in this dissertation that there is a surprising lack of leadership theory and research which adopts a follower-centric perspective, despite numerous calls for such an approach. It is not the case, of course, that there is no recognition of the existence of followers; a leader needs followers to be a leader. However, followers are often only present by implication. Where they are more visible, their role generally is to inform the development of theories of or approaches to what makes an effective leader, or to test these. With rare exceptions (for example, Barker, 1997; Parry, 1999) I have been able to find only a few studies that address the existence and nature of followership or the characteristics of effective followers.

I can identify two possible reasons for this situation. The first lies in the origins of the study of leadership in the early decades of the twentieth century, when there was a growing realisation that the supply of 'natural' leaders in a military context, traditionally in Europe drawn from the aristocracy, was insufficient to meet the demands of modern warfare. Military success was dependent on identifying the characteristics of effective leaders so that individuals matching those characteristics could be placed in positions of authority. The very rigid hierarchy of the military and the very different conditions in which leadership might have to be exercised probably made drawing lessons for industrial and commercial organisations a flawed exercise at the time. The very different social conditions in which we now found ourselves – as Giddens (2001) notes, characterised in the UK by a strong belief in equality and rights of the individual – makes the military experience of leadership of very limited relevance to organisational leadership. Indeed, the military itself is reflecting on the impact of these changes in society: Norton-Taylor (2003) reports the view of the UK deputy chief of defence staff that recruits come along "with little deference and no respect. If a corporal shouts at them, they say 'Stuff you. I'm on my way'." However, most organisational leadership studies, with their continuing narrow focus on the leader's attributes or behaviours, remain imbued with the legacy of the military leadership of a bygone age.

The second reason for the dearth of follower-centred studies is linked to the first, in the sense that it too arises from the understanding that leaders occupy a superior hierarchical position in comparison with followers. Leadership is

perceived to be a desirable characteristic and the role of leader one to aspire to. This perspective is reinforced by the enduring myth of the 'great leader' who achieves remarkable deeds, perpetuated both in common parlance and in the media. The audience for studies of organisational leadership is therefore people who believe that one day, given the right training and, possibly, with a bit of luck, they will become a leader, and therefore will have achieved a measure of greatness. Newman and Chaharbaghi (2000, p.65) sum this up well: "The literature of leadership perpetuates a myth that by consuming this literature, the consumers can take on this symbolic role." There is no such status associated with followership and therefore a lack of potential audience for any studies of it. In an almost subliminal fashion, then, researchers are directed to study leaders, not followers.

The Inadequacies of Existing Leadership Studies

This focus on leadership and on leader traits and behaviours, to the almost exclusion of studies of followership and followers, sows the seeds of its own inadequacies. Because only one half of the subject is being studied, and arguably the half ignored is of at least equal importance, only part of the whole picture informs the development of theory and practice.

The aim of leadership study ought to be the development of a universal theory together with assessments of the implications of theory for practical application – there seems little point in it otherwise, other than as an abstruse academic activity. However, in practice we are moving further and further from universality, in two respects. First, theories of organisational leadership are becoming divorced from those of political or social leadership, although there seems no reason in principle why this should be so; leadership is something that might be thought to have applicability in all these different contexts. Second, every theory of and every approach to organisational leadership becomes contingent in one or more respects – dependent upon a myriad of individuals' biographical factors, such as personal traits or behaviours, dependent upon personalities, dependent upon economic or social conditions, or dependent upon national or organisational culture. No theory developed in one context has gained more than limited empirical support in other contexts. In practice, leadership theories become so contingent that they have no practical application outside the very particular circumstances in which they were first developed. We can draw no meaningful lessons from them, as they are inapplicable to other situations. This is a failing indeed for such a high profile area of study within a social science discipline.

A Tentative Alternative Approach

Fairly obviously, one way to attempt to address this failing is to work to complete the picture, to develop theories of leadership (or followership) that are more fully informed by the followers' perspectives.

Glimpses of what such an approach might look like are visible from my own study. The critical components appear to be: the existence of a shared understanding within a social group of a better future; that decisions and actions are taken that can be interpreted as steps towards achieving that better future; and that the relationship between leaders and followers is one characterised by

equality, trust and mutual respect. Emerging from these components is the potential, at least, for a more universal theory of leadership. Leadership becomes the combined activities of articulating the vision for the future and the decision taking that will help achieve it. Leadership is an emergent property of the social group; the vision for the future will be a consensus position achieved through discourse incorporating, or giving the appearance of incorporating, individuals' own perspectives of a better future. Leaders are individuals in the group who are perceived by the group to be most capable of articulating and/or realising the vision and who offer to take on the role of embodying leadership.

This alternative understanding of leadership addresses several of the issues that other approaches do not. First, it offers an explanation of the apparent contingent nature of leadership. Individuals' aspirations for the future will change over time and they will therefore come to define different leadership requirements within the group. For example, it would seem reasonable to suppose that after a period of significant social upheaval, such as a major war, the vision is one of stability and leadership emerges, and leaders are chosen, who will deliver that stability. Over time, the vision changes to one of a better future requiring social change, and an identical process will deliver the leadership and the leaders best sought to deliver this. Within an organisational context, this would readily translate into the transforming/transactional leadership styles identified by Burns (1978); neither leadership style is in itself superior, and either one may be more appropriate dependent upon the shared aspirations for the future of the group.

More broadly, it explains why the same terms (leader/leadership) are used in very different circumstances. People are as comfortable speaking of leadership within a life-threatening situation (a fire, for example) as they are of leadership within an organisation, although there are likely to be few activities of leadership that are common in these situations. However, they do share the existence of an understanding of a better future; what has changed is the detail of the vision and the timeframe for its delivery. In a life-threatening situation the vision may simply be survival and the timeframe a matter of minutes. The leadership style and the leader's activities that are then required may be very different from that needed in a corporate setting, but they have emerged from the same considerations.

The second advantage of such an understanding of leadership is its broad applicability within the social structure. There is no implied maximum or minimum group size, and it can therefore be applied as much to national leadership as it can to work or social group leadership. This is supported by the apparent recursive nature of leadership within the two organisations that were the subjects of my own study.

Third, it offers a satisfactory explanation as to why, if leaders are the equals of followers, in practice leaders within organisations are most often associated with positions of authority, as indeed they were in my own study. In this revised understanding of leadership, leaders are selected as those most capable of and willing to deliver the vision. It is highly probable that in an organisational setting the group will select as leaders from within themselves those that have the greatest power within the organisation, as these will have the greatest potential for delivering the aspirational future.

Fourth, it explains the apparent fickleness of leadership change. This is well illustrated by Smith (1983) who narrates the true story of survivors of a plane crash in the Andes, who survived ten weeks of freezing conditions in the wreckage by resorting to eating those killed in the crash. During this experience, leadership of the group changed frequently; in the early period, it was carried out by those who possessed a rudimentary medical knowledge, soon after it passed to someone who was thought to be capable of maintaining social cohesiveness, later it was transferred to the person who articulated the need to eat the dead. My proposed approach to the study of leadership explains this dynamic leadership as arising not from a changed vision of the future – in the Andes plane crash example this remained focused throughout on survival – but a changing identification, as the days passed without rescue, as to who could best deliver that vision.

The one issue not readily assimilated within this alternative understanding is that of charismatic or inspirational leadership. Often charisma is proposed as an important, or at least desirable, attribute of leaders, although as Bryman (1992) notes, charismatic leaders tend towards authoritarianism and have the potential for delivering catastrophic outcomes. Superficially at least, charismatic leadership seems to be much more concerned with a leader imposing his or her will on followers than individuals selecting a leader from amongst their group. It may be that in practice this is not the case. Alternatively charismatic leadership might be better considered a pathological form of leadership. This topic would merit further study.

Indeed, if this is truly an alternative understanding of leadership the whole topic will require much more detailed study and testing than I have accomplished. It is offered very tentatively in the hope that it will stimulate debate, and for this reason I have not attempted a formal definition of what leadership is under this alternative understanding.

Organisational Implications

Superficially, my alternative understanding of leadership might be considered to share the major flaw of other theories of and approaches to leadership – it is so contingent that it has no implications for organisational leadership; visions of the future may change and changed circumstances may demand different leaders. However, by proposing that leadership emerges from a process of discourse in which there is participation by all those within the group based upon the principle of equality, it suggests that organisations that establish the structures and capacity to facilitate this process will generate leadership capacity. Leadership becomes, in effect, part of the social capital of the organisation. There is some empirical evidence to support this approach; for example, Graetz (2000, p.553) reports on the success of an Australian organisation that established a rule that “all people who would contribute to realising a decision or a plan, and those others who would be affected by the decision or plan, must participate in the making of the decision or plan.”

The alternative understanding of leadership also creates some challenges for organisations because it means that neither leadership and management nor leader and manager are any longer inextricably linked. Leadership may become associated more frequently with those of lower status in the organisation if those

of higher status will still bring their power to bear in supporting it. Overcoming the resistance that may arise from this perceived challenge to status may well prove the greatest problem in attempting to establish such an approach to leadership development within an organisation.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The major research findings of this dissertation can be summarised as:

- There is a high level of agreement on the characteristics of effective leadership, with four features gaining widespread acceptance: future orientation (the need for a vision), implementation (the need to take steps to deliver the vision), two-way communication, and a relationship with followers based on values such as trust and mutual respect.
- Inspiration (or charisma) is not regarded as an essential, or for some a desirable, characteristic of leadership.
- Leadership can be diffused amongst several leaders.
- Followers and leaders expect followers to participate actively in shaping the development and delivery of the vision.
- Followers and leaders believe that it is a role for followers to challenge leaders and to hold them to account.
- Followers see the relationship as one of equality, not in terms of superior/subordinate. There was less stress on this by leaders, except when they were reporting their own experience as followers.
- Followers and leaders draw a clear distinction between the follower-leader relationship and the manager-subordinate relationship.
- Followers were aware that they could cease supporting a leader at any point. The reasons for this occurring would be if the direction of the initiative no longer sufficiently matched their own objectives (or if they felt that their influence was insufficient) or if there was a breakdown in the trust relationship with the leader.

Whilst some of these were expected, others challenged my preconceptions, for example, the role of followers in holding leaders to account and the understanding that the follower-leader relationship is one of equality. Many of these findings are at odds with the existing theories of and approaches to leadership, where a status or power relationship between leader and follower, when not stated explicitly, is implicit.

This has led me to question the nature of leadership and suggest in the Discussion chapter a tentative alternative understanding of what leadership involves and the process whereby leaders are selected. It seems to address many of the weaknesses that are revealed upon analysing other approaches found in the literature, not least in that it has broadly applicable organisational utility. It may itself, of course, be fundamentally flawed but I consider it a sufficiently robust proposal to merit further development and research.

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