



Educational Leadership

Context, Strategy and Collaboration

Margaret Preedy, Nigel Bennett and Christine Wise



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Educational Leadership

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Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
About the Editors	x
Introduction	1
<i>Margaret Preedy, Nigel Bennett and Christine Wise</i>	
Part 1: Leadership theories and values	9
1 An overview of the leadership discourses <i>Simon Western</i>	11
2 From successful school leadership towards distributed leadership <i>Leif Moos</i>	25
3 Leading with moral purpose: the place of ethics <i>Paul T. Begley</i>	38
4 Emotional intelligence, emotional labour and affective leadership <i>Sam Held and Judy McKimm</i>	52
Part 2: Strategic leadership and managing change	65
5 Concepts of leadership in organizational change <i>Gill Robinson Hickman</i>	67
6 The nature and dimensions of strategic leadership <i>Brent Davies and Barbara J. Davies</i>	83
7 The strategy lenses <i>Gerry Johnson, Richard Whittington and Kevan Scholes</i>	96
8 The practice of leadership in the messy world of organizations <i>Jean-Louis Denis, Ann Langley and Linda Rouleau</i>	115

Part 3: Leadership in context	129
9 Reframing the role of organizations in policy implementation: resources <i>for practice, in practice</i> <i>James P. Spillane, Louis M. Gomez and Leigh Mesler</i>	131
10 Contextualizing leader dynamics: how public service leaders endeavour to build influence <i>Mike Wallace and Michael Tomlinson</i>	145
11 Stories of compliance and subversion in a prescriptive policy environment <i>John MacBeath</i>	159
12 Evaluation, accountability, and performance measurement in national education systems: trends, methods, and issues <i>Katherine E. Ryan and Irwin Feller</i>	173
13 ‘Blended leadership’: employee perspectives on effective leadership in the UK Further Education sector <i>David Collinson and Margaret Collinson</i>	189
14 Leadership for diversity and inclusion <i>Jacky Lumby</i>	201
Part 4: Partnerships and collaboration	213
15 Reconfiguring urban leadership: taking a perspective on community <i>Kathryn A. Riley</i>	215
16 Networks as power bases for school improvement <i>Tessa A. Moore and Michael P. Kelly</i>	227
17 Inter-professional work and expertise: new roles at the boundaries of schools <i>Anne Edwards, Ingrid Lunt and Eleni Stamou</i>	240
18 Approaches to system leadership: lessons learned and policy pointers <i>Beatriz Pont and David Hopkins</i>	253
Part 5: Looking to the future	267
19 Leadership, participation and power in the school system <i>Richard Hatcher</i>	269
20 The fourth way <i>Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley</i>	283
Index	289

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About the Editors

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Introduction

Margaret Preedy, Nigel Bennett and Christine Wise

There is widespread recognition that leadership is a key factor in successful educational organisations. At the same time, the demands on educational leaders have arguably never been greater. This volume explores current thinking and debate on the role of educational leaders and the strategic challenges they face. We do not seek to provide ready answers but rather to stimulate critical reflection and discussion.

The environment in which schools and colleges operate is characterised by increasing turbulence and uncertainty as a result of economic, social and political pressures. The globalisation of capital and labour and the impetus for nation states to compete in the international marketplace create policy pressures for educational organisations to produce a labour force with the skills needed for this marketplace, with schools and colleges held accountable for year-on-year improvements in student outcomes: 'Education is now seen as a crucial factor in ensuring economic productivity and competitiveness in the context of ... the pressures and requirements of globalisation' (Ball, 2008:1). Linked to these developments, the large-scale educational reforms that have taken place in the UK, USA and many other countries over recent decades mean that educational leaders face a complex range of competing pressures and challenges, including:

- increased autonomy for schools and colleges with respect to operational decisions accompanied by
- greater accountability for their performance and spending decisions to central/state governments
- market accountability pressures as a result of competition between educational organisations, driven by the linkage of funding to student enrolments, and parental choice, accompanied by
- policy and practical incentives to develop collaborative partnerships with other educational organisations
- severe budgetary constraints as a result of the impact of the global financial crisis on national spending on education and other areas of public sector provision
- tensions between the demands of external stakeholders and internal priorities and expectations, and between the standards agenda, focused on raising student academic achievement, and a broader and more holistic focus on the overall well-being and social development of children and young people

- increasing diversity and heterogeneity of students and parents, and their needs and expectations (Huber, 2010), giving rise to the challenge of celebrating diversity while at the same time building consensus on values and purposes across the organisation.

Recognition of growing environmental ambiguity and the intensification of the demands and expectations placed on head teachers and other educational leaders has led to the realisation that the traditional model of the solo heroic leader is no longer feasible. Post-heroic perspectives emphasise the situated and relational nature of educational leadership and a shift away from the individual leader to multiple sources of influence, as exemplified in notions of distributed, teacher and ‘hybrid’ leadership (Gronn, 2010).

There has also been increasing acknowledgment of the limits to the influence and authority of individual and collective leadership in the face of a rapidly changing and largely unpredictable environment and permeable organisational boundaries which mean that the ‘external’ context is no longer ‘out there’ as in the past, but is a central influence on organisational events. These perspectives highlight the uncertainty and impermanence of leadership, the less than rational aspects of policy making and practice, and the loosely coupled nature of structures and actions within educational organisations and across education systems more broadly. Another important trend in the literature has been the growing attention to the moral and ethical dimensions of leadership in terms of personal values and integrity and in fostering a shared commitment to the organisation’s core purposes and values.

This book explores the challenges outlined above and their implications for how educational leadership is conceived and enacted. It draws on the work of many leading writers in the field from the UK and elsewhere. While much of the literature on educational leadership continues to be largely Anglo-centric in origin and approach (Walker and Dimmock, 2002), we have included a strong international perspective in the chapters included here, representing authors from a range of countries and work which takes a trans-national perspective in exploring themes and issues that are of widespread interest and concern in a global setting. We have also selected a range of studies set in specific national contexts, particularly England, to explore ideas that we believe are of wider relevance. The selection also seeks to represent a range of sectors and settings within and beyond education. The volume is based on the premise that it is illuminating for educational leaders to transcend national and sectoral boundaries in their thinking – there is much to be learned from reflecting on one’s professional practice in the light of insights from other cultures and sectors. The chapters here also take a range of conceptual and methodological approaches: theoretical overviews, research studies, applications of conceptual frameworks to leadership practice, and case examples.

In exploring this complex landscape of educational leadership, the chapters in this book are organised around five broad themes. Part 1 examines conceptualisations of leadership, including the important role of values and moral purposes underpinning leadership integrity. Part 2 explores a key task for educational leaders: strategic leadership and managing change. Part 3 moves on to look at leadership in context and the influences of external and internal organisational factors on how leadership is enacted in practice. Part 4 then explores partnerships and collaboration, within and across educational organisations. Part 5 concludes with a look to the future, drawing on two contrasting perspectives – one proposing a relatively optimistic view of educational reform, while the other proposes a more

critical approach, questioning the dominant paradigm within educational leadership. We outline briefly below the chapters comprising each part.

Part 1: leadership theories and values

In Chapter 1, Western presents a critical introduction to the development of leadership theory, identifying three broad discourses that group together the multiplicity of theoretical stances developed during the twentieth century. He then explores the possibility of a new developing discourse, eco-leadership, which will take account constructively of the developing moral and ecological issues resulting from globalisation. He argues that the discourses he identifies are not sequential but developmental, and that they co-exist both in organisations and, importantly, within individuals' thinking about leadership practice.

In Chapter 2, Moos pursues the arguments about the moral nature of leadership further, incorporating into the discussion issues of organisational effectiveness and the ideas of shared, distributed or dispersed leadership that have developed in education since the turn of the century, and in the wider general leadership literature in the 15 years before that. Moos locates his discussion in the context of the Danish educational system, with its relatively flat hierarchies and low power-differential between students and teachers.

Chapter 3 explores moral issues in more depth. Begley argues that educational leaders must keep in mind the core purposes of education and the values that are derived from them as the basis for moral leadership. He explores the multiple sources of our personal, professional and social values, and how educational leaders respond to the ethical dilemmas they encounter. The chapter identifies four key ethical paradigms and proposes how they might be used to guide leaders' moral analysis of particular problems and dilemmas, pointing to the critical importance of context in leading with moral purpose.

Chapter 4, by Held and McKimm, concludes this part of the volume. The authors move us away from the traditional rational perception of the context of leadership to discuss how leaders must both face and address their own emotional responses to circumstances and recognise those of their colleagues. In examining these themes, they explore the strengths and weaknesses of the popular concept of emotional intelligence as a means of understanding and developing sensitive responses to emotions in leadership and organisations more generally. In this, a key consideration for leaders is the extent to which they must 'perform' emotional labour in order to acknowledge and respond to their colleagues' needs.

Part 2: strategic leadership and managing change

It is essential for educational leaders to be able to manage multiple and ongoing changes, balancing externally initiated innovations with the organisation's own values, purposes and priorities. This entails a strategic overview, developing an agreed way forward which looks to the medium and longer-term direction of the organisation.

In Chapter 5, Hickman puts forward a range of concepts for understanding the leadership of change. She takes an international perspective, drawing on ideas from various cultures, to argue that leading change is a complex and collective process, so no one explanatory model or approach is adequate. Instead, she suggests that we need a compilation of leadership concepts to guide action and to take into account the differing challenges and concerns involved in externally and internally focused aspects of change. While leader-focused theories and authority structures tend to be dominant, successful innovation entails preparing and involving people throughout the organisation to take part in leading the change process.

The next chapter, by Davies and Davies, draws on the authors' research to look in more detail at the nature of strategic leadership and the activities that strategic leaders undertake. They identify three broad approaches to strategic development: the traditional planning model, emergent strategy which recognises ongoing external and internal change and evolution, and strategic intent, where leaders and their colleagues have a picture of the desired future position but the means of achieving this are not clear. In these circumstances, it is argued, it is necessary to engage organisational members in a learning and development phase to work towards achieving the defined intents. The authors go on to explore what strategic leaders do to develop a strategic approach across the organisation.

In Chapter 7, Johnson et al. develop the theme of the limitations of traditional planning approaches to strategy in proposing different lenses or perspectives on the strategy process, arguing that we need to draw on each of these to develop a rounded picture of the realities of how strategies are developed. They suggest that we need to question the conventional wisdom of strategy development as a logical process of analysis and decision making by taking alternative views: the role of people and their experiences, of new ideas and of discourse in shaping strategy.

In the final chapter in this part, Denis et al. also challenge rational models of organisational change, drawing on case examples from an empirical study of healthcare organisations in Canada. They point to the ambiguities and plurality of interests and values in large organisations and examine leadership as a practical activity within this context. The authors argue that leadership is dynamic, collective, situated and dialectic – leaders are embedded in settings and networks that they do not fully control and are subject to unpredictable forces for change, including the consequences of their actions and decisions.

Part 3: leadership in context

This part turns to look at the interrelationships between the external environment and internal contextual factors and how these impact on educational leadership.

In Chapter 9, Spillane et al. explore the important theme of how policy is implemented in educational organisations. Like Denis et al., Spillane and his colleagues focus on practice as it unfolds in the interactions between people in particular settings. They explore various organisational resources – human and social capital, technology and organisational routines – and how these enable and constrain policy implementation. The authors argue that we need to attend not just to what resources are available but to what organisational members working collectively do with them in particular places and at particular times.

Wallace and Tomlinson, in Chapter 10, draw on a qualitative study of senior public sector leaders to examine the evolutionary relationship between leader activity and their external and internal contextual settings. They portray leaders' interactions with their environment as a dynamic process where leaders can, to varying degrees, affect and 'manipulate' contextual factors to extend their scope for future influence. From this perspective, leadership is not just context-dependent but in many ways context-creating.

MacBeath also explores the nature of the relationship between leaders and their contexts, focusing on head teachers' interpretation of and response to the policy environment. His study contrasts with that of Wallace and Tomlinson in suggesting that educational leaders see little room to manoeuvre in influencing the external environment. Perspectives of the 12 head teachers in the study showed a wide range, from, at one extreme, seeing policy requirements as a positive force for improving learning and teaching, and, at the other extreme, perceiving government policy as imposing dysfunctional strategies which deskilled and disempowered heads and teachers. MacBeath argues that government policies have made a deep imprint on the practice and discourse of schools. While some heads expressed dissatisfaction with various aspects of external evaluation and assessment requirements, the perceived scope for challenging and resisting external authorities and policies was very limited – heads and their staff tended to 'play safe', complying, with varying degrees of willingness, to external mandates. As the author notes, the apparent lack of room for dissent is antithetical to notions of the learning organisation which engages in an ongoing process of challenging and reviewing its activities and thinking.

Ryan and Feller, in Chapter 12, take a transnational approach in exploring two key policy themes which impact on leaders in all educational organisations – national systems for evaluation and accountability. They argue that accountability and performance measurement have become intertwined; performance measurement is the increasingly preferred or mandated means through which schools, colleges and higher education institutions are held accountable. Their analysis highlights the importance of specific contexts in how national policies play out. Accountability and evaluation can have very different meanings and outcomes in different national contexts and different education sectors. The authors caution against the dangers of 'one size fits all' and technical–managerial approaches to educational accountability.

The next two chapters turn to focus more specifically on internal contextual influences on leadership, looking at the UK further education (FE) sector. Collinson and Collinson argue that studies of leadership effectiveness tend to take dichotomous approaches, focusing either on the individual qualities of 'hero' leaders or on the collective nature of 'post heroic' leadership. Their study of FE staff views found that these respondents value practices that combine elements of both models, a combination of delegation and direction, and internal and external engagement, which the authors term 'blended leadership'. They highlight the value of dialectical studies of leadership which explore the dynamic tensions between seemingly opposite approaches and practices, transcending the simplistic either/or assumptions found in much leadership literature.

Finally in this part, Lumby, in Chapter 14, examines leadership for diversity and inclusion, drawing together some key concepts and research and their implications for leadership action. She notes the multiple and contested definitions of both 'diversity' and 'inclusion', based on different literatures and research traditions, and looks at some of the major issues

in identifying organisational goals and leadership preparation to develop inclusive educational organisations. While official policy documents espouse a commitment to increasing equality of opportunity and social justice, there continues to be a wide gulf between intention and actual practice – there is a long way to go in transcending issues of inequality and achieving truly inclusive educational organisations.

Part 4: partnerships and collaboration

Here we begin to look in a much more focused way outside the remit of the single leader or single institution. There is growing interest in the ways in which cooperation and collaboration can improve not only the educational experience of children and young people through raising standards, but also the life experience of children and young people through better integration of services and responses.

In the first chapter, Riley maps the key features of the community contexts in which a range of urban schools facing challenging circumstances are located, highlighting the community-related issues for school leaders. She suggests that it is necessary to reconfigure leadership to strengthen connections with the communities and to build trust for the benefit of children and young people.

In Chapter 16, entitled ‘Networks as power bases for school improvement’, Moore and Kelly critique assumptions about collaborative working arrangements as tools for school improvement. They look at two English primary school initiatives designed as a response to the national standards agenda and question the impact of power, authority and influence on the networks and their long-term working. They conclude by suggesting an ‘ideal’ model for networks that might improve their sustainability.

Chapter 17 looks at some of the issues facing workers at the boundaries of the – supposedly – more integrated schools in England. Edwards et al. draw on their own research into the new roles that have been created by the changes in teachers’ contracts and the need to interface with the wider group of professionals in Children’s Services. ‘Inter-professional work and expertise: new roles at the boundaries of schools’ examines these new roles and questions whether those occupying the new posts that have arisen have the expertise to do the work required without considerable development.

In Chapter 18, Pont and Hopkins look more widely across five OECD countries to consider the commonalities and differences in national approaches to introducing system leadership. The chapter, entitled ‘Approaches to system leadership: lessons learned and policy pointers’, considers the benefits and challenges of these collaborations. It proposes that there are benefits to this level of sharing of skills, expertise, experience and resources, but that there are system-level challenges that need to be addressed if the potential is to be fully realised.

Part 5: looking to the future

The volume concludes with two contrasting perspectives. Hatcher (Chapter 19) takes a critical stance in examining two key themes in leadership research and practice – distributed

and systems leadership. He argues that the dominant academic and policy paradigm of educational leadership neglects questions of power within and over the education system – managerial power and state power – and how these limit authentic democracy and public participation in education. He suggests that within schools and school networks, there are contradictions between the benefits of participation claimed for distributed leadership and networks and the structural constraints of hierarchical management structures driven by state power. He argues that we need to continue to critique the dominant view and to develop credible alternatives based on authentic collective participation in decision making.

In Chapter 20, Hargreaves and Shirley propose an agenda for future educational reform which brings together government policy, professional development and public engagement into an interactive partnership around values of creativity and inclusiveness to promote learning, achievement and well-being. They argue that earlier approaches to educational reform have failed internationally and that a new approach is needed which promotes educational change through deepened and demanding learning, professional quality and engagement and invigorated community development. The authors put forward an appealing and optimistic vision of the way forward for education.

Finally, it should be noted that this selection of reading is partial and selective – it makes no claim to provide a comprehensive picture of the educational leadership field. Instead, it presents a range of perspectives on some key areas of the strategic and outward-facing aspects of educational leadership. In particular, it does not seek to cover key areas of leading learning and organisational improvement which are addressed elsewhere in Open University publications and in a planned companion volume to this one. We hope that this collection will contribute to critical thinking and debate among researchers, practitioners and students of educational leadership.

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Part 1

Leadership Theories and Values

1

An Overview of the Leadership Discourses

Simon Western

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the leadership discourses, and show how they relate to each other and to leadership practice. It is important to highlight that while these discourses emerged at different social and economic periods, each are now familiar and have become normative. Each discourse dominated a historical period, in contemporary organizations, each one has its strengths and weaknesses. Each discourse may stand alone and dominate different sectors and organizations, but they also co-exist, within organizations and within individual leaders and leadership teams. However, one discourse is usually dominant in any given situation at any given time. In leadership practice, co-existence usually means one of two things:

1. a strategic leadership synthesis of skills and culture to maximize organizational efficiency and enhancement of member engagement;
2. competing cultures and visions of how to lead the organization.

I will now summarize each discourse.

Discourse 1: leader as controller

The first leadership discourse that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century epitomized by Taylor's scientific management is the Leader as *Controller*. This character is very similar to MacIntyre's social 'manager' character, which he claims signifies the tension between manipulation and non-manipulation, and I would add between control and autonomy. The Controller leadership discourse is born from scientific rationalism and the industrial revolution, which, in the name of the Enlightenment and progress, relegated the worker to being a cog in a machine, mirroring standardization and mechanization within

Source – An edited version of Western, S. (2008) 'An overview of the leadership discourses'.

the mass production of the factory. The leader as Controller operates as a technocrat leader focusing on efficiency. In Etzioni's (1961) taxonomy of control, this leadership character is based on an overt system of coercive and utilitarian control, using reward and deprivation (transactional leadership). In the leadership discourse, covert control is applied from beyond the workplace. The political/economic and social leadership supports the drive for worker efficiency, leveraging worker productivity through class power relations and the threat of unemployment, poverty, healthcare and pension benefits. Political leadership always retains the leader as Controller discourse in the background alongside other leadership discourses, using the threat of job loss and welfare to work benefit links etc., as a social control mechanism (healthcare linked to paid employment is very important in the USA).

Discourse 2: leader as therapist

The second discourse is the leader as *Therapist*. [It] signifies the dominant therapeutic culture in contemporary Western society and highlights the tension between individualism and alienation, personal growth and workplace efficiency, well-being and mental/emotional health. [It] represents the subtlety of therapeutic governance as opposed to coercive control. This leadership reflects the wider social trends of atomization, self-concern, and the post-war individualistic expectations of being fulfilled, successful and happy (Rieff, 1966; Lasch, 1979; Furedi, 2003).

The Therapist leader emerged from within the Human Relations movement and encompasses the work of theorists such as Mayo, Lewin, Maslow, Frankl and Rogers. Their focus on individual personal growth and self-actualization was readily translated to the workplace, through techniques to motivate individuals and teams, through job re-design and job enhancement to make work more satisfying and to produce work-group cohesion. Employers and theorists believed that happier workers would be more productive than unhappy, coerced workers. This approach in essence was seen as more progressive and productive. It aimed to overcome the alienation created by the machine-like efficiency under the leader as Controller discourse. Work became a site for personal growth and achievement, a place to create meaning and identity. Under the leader as Therapist, people 'went to work to work on themselves' (Rose, 1990), embracing therapeutic culture in society at large.

Personnel departments were established, management consultants and new texts, theories and a huge training and development industry flourished. The leader as Therapist still flourishes, often alongside the later Messiah character; a common scenario is the HR Director acts as the Therapist character and the CEO as leader as the Messiah character. Recent examples of the therapist discourse are the interest in emotional intelligence and the huge growth of executive coaching. However, this discourse lost its potency in corporate life, as it could no longer deliver the economic benefits across global business.

Discourse 3: leader as messiah

The third discourse is the leader as Messiah. The term leader has been elevated in recent years, challenging the dominance of the term 'manager' and signifying more social change. Coming to the fore since the early 1980s and most clearly articulated within the

Transformation leadership literature, the *Messiah discourse* provides charismatic leadership and vision in the face of a turbulent and uncertain environment. The Messiah character signifies the tension between salvation and destruction, between the technocrat and the moral visionary, and between hope and despair. The Messiah discourse appeals to individuals and society, promising salvation from the chaotic world in which a lack of control is experienced and where traditional community is diminished. As the workplace rises in importance as a site of community, replacing institutions such as the church and family, so the manager/leader replaces the priesthood as a social character of influence.

The Messiah character leads through their signifying capacity, symbolism, ritual, myth and language. Their focus is to act on culture change and the Messiah leadership discourse relies on ‘normative control’, which is self- and peer-control through surveillance and internalization, emotionalism and cultural norms. Followers of the Messiah character work hard because of an internalized belief system aligned to the leader’s vision and values.

The earnings of leaders graphically represent the new values and expectations on leaders since the Messiah discourse arrived. In the 1980s, in the USA, CEOs earned 40 times the average wage (as the Therapist character), in 2000 (as the Messiah character) they earn over 475 times (*Business Week*, ‘Executive compensation scoreboard’, 17 April 2000).

Table 1.1, at the end of the chapter, shows an overview of the signifying qualities of each discourse, clearly demonstrating the differences between them and how they impact on leadership practice. It also includes an overview of a fourth discourse – eco leadership – that is discussed later in the chapter. It is an interesting exercise to be playful with the discourses we have discussed, to observe leadership and the language leaders use, seeing if they fit into one or more of these discourses. Also look at vision statements, company websites, newspaper articles, and try to identify these discourses. When you have identified a leadership discourse, look for any patterns and the context in which they occur. Practising this alerts you to the underlying discourses in any leadership situation, which then enables you to take a critical stance, and ask why a certain discourse is favoured, and what implications this has for the employees and the organization.

The leadership discourses in practice

The embodiment of the leadership discourse by a leader character brings the concept of a discourse into the lived workplace. It provides a tangible and observable leadership practice to engage and negotiate with. It reveals to those who take a critical perspective how a discourse impacts and influences organizations, managers and employees. It reveals the constantly changing tensions and desires within the social realm and how this impacts on leadership at work. There is a dynamic interaction between the character (the discourse-filled role) and the actor inhabiting the character. The interaction extends also to those interacting with the leader or leadership team.

Discourses preference

Individual leaders, leadership teams and organizations rarely consciously choose their preferred leadership discourse as these are hidden within normative behaviours and expectations. However, they are drawn to discourses for various reasons.

Sometimes leaders and organizations are ‘trapped’ within a discourse; others change between leadership discourses under certain conditions. Individuals and groups can be attracted to different discourses depending on their personal social location and how they perceive the world from this location.

Often individuals have an internalized ‘idealized’ leadership stance, which relates to their social location, and their personal experience of leadership, beginning from their parenting. If a person has a very strict mother or father, or they are brought up in a strict religious culture or a harsh boarding school, this may influence the leader they identify with later in life. They may assume that all leaders should be in the Controller discourse, as this is the norm to them. Alternatively they may internalize a view that this early experience was damaging to them and they may seek a reparative leadership model that would situate them in the ‘therapy discourse’. Individuals who doted on their parents or another early leadership role model may identify with the Messiah discourse, relating to the special leader who presents as a saviour.

Changes in leadership discourses often arise due to external pressures. An individual leader can be pulled by competing discourses. As British Prime Minister, Tony Blair embodied the Messiah discourse, talking passionately, with vision, with persuasion, attempting to modernize and change the culture of his political party, the country and beyond, but every so often he reverted to the Controller leadership discourse. His desire seems to be visionary, but his instincts seem to be the controller, the interventionist leader, setting a target and audit culture of micromanagement in the public sector.

Anxiety over performance often distorts a leadership team who favour the Messiah discourse, and all the company rhetoric supports transformational leadership, but then return instinctively to the controller discourse, when they receive poor output figures or share prices drop.

Understanding the leadership discourses makes it easier for leaders in practice to recognize these processes. When they are recognized, leaders can act to ensure that reactivity to short-term pressure doesn’t alter their strategic course.

Different geographical, historical and socio-cultural contexts will also favour different leadership discourses. It appears that in the USA leadership seems more generically accepted than in Europe where it seems more distrusted. The Messiah discourse is therefore more likely in the USA, and the Therapist discourse more likely in Europe as it has less of an overt leadership feel to it.

The British National Health Service (NHS) is an interesting example of a large public sector institution which has experienced all three discourses. It was dominated by hierarchy and control in the early years and until the 1970s was led by the leader as Controller discourse with severe matrons, rigid role definitions, a bureaucratic structure and medical personnel acting with omnipotent power. This shifted towards the leadership as Therapist discourse as new management/leadership techniques filtered in from the private sector, and it was realized that leadership and motivation were key issues as employee morale waned in an under-resourced and underpaid service. In the late 1980s, greater reforms began to take place and again, following the corporate lead, the leader as Messiah discourse became prominent, with the aims of modernizing the NHS and changing the culture to enable flexible and adaptive working. Huge sums were spent on leadership development using competency frameworks designed to support the change using the Messiah discourse. Symbolic culture changes took place, which were/are hotly contested, for example, to make patients into customers with choices and create an internal market. Interestingly, while the

espoused leadership was the Messiah discourse and CEOs have been given more positional power to change culture, the reality on the ground has been one of competing discourses. The health workers' favoured discourse is the Therapist discourse, which relates closely to their clinical roles and vocations, and that is what clinical leaders attempt to provide. The senior management attempts to create culture change through the Messiah discourse, but complain that the government is so anxious about its modernizing reforms that it reverts to the leader as Controller discourse, micro-managing CEOs' performance. This is due to the government anxiety that if the reforms fail they would themselves lose office. This anxiety is passed down throughout the institution and the experienced leadership is the Controller discourse. An ex-colleague of mine spoke of her experience as a clinical leader:

My job used to be caring for people, now I feel like I am running a production line, all we are concerned about is getting the waiting times down, if we don't, our funding is reduced. The leadership here talks about creating a culture of trust, empowering us to do our jobs, but in reality they are the most controlling leaders we have had in my 24 years of service. (Ward Charge Nurse, NHS hospital, September 2005: Anonymous)

The result of an espoused Messiah leadership discourse colliding with the experience of a Controller discourse creates cynicism and distrust, resulting in low morale.

Positions within hierarchies, and location in functions and departments, also impact on the leadership discourse. The Messiah leadership discourse is more favoured, the higher in the organization one climbs. The Therapist leader has become favoured in the realms of aspiring middle managers, HR departments and the public sector. Human Resource departments often fluctuate between the Controller discourse, when operating on transactional and contractual concerns, and the Therapist discourse, when dealing with leadership development. This split is unhelpful. They can be perceived as Controlling characters from below, and as Therapist characters from above. Structurally within companies the HR leadership becomes split between discourses, which is unhelpful as they are in a vital influencing position and should be working towards the company's strategic leadership vision.

Leadership development, often instigated through the HR function, is a very risk-averse process, because the deliverers worry about having safe and measurable outcomes to justify their work. Also when working with senior personnel, the risk is increased because of the power held by these executives. This often influences choices and the deliverers revert to individualist, reductionist and formulaic solutions: competency frameworks setting universal leadership goals, followed by individual 'tests' to 'scientifically' measure skills and identify gaps. The weakest part of this process is usually the follow-up. Sometimes it is missing altogether or the individual is given token leadership development. This approach is situated in the Therapist discourse, attempting to change individual behaviour through modification using a technician-rational approach. What is missing is a coherent systemic approach with an organizational development and strategic vision.

Leadership discourses can be used heuristically to help understand an organizations' individual leadership assumptions. If an HR leader can understand the tensions in their roles, they can resist the pull to the Therapist discourse and take a more strategic view alongside the individualist rational approach.

To make progress in the emancipatory role of leadership in organizational life, the discourses help identify normative assumptions, social relations and beneath-the-surface

structural dynamics. They also help to reveal how power, authority, control and influence are exerted. The leader is as ensnared in the dominant discourse as are the followers; nobody is acting as a free agent unless they are aware of the dominant discourses which create the boundaries and norms in which we all act.

Working with leadership discourses

Each discourse has its merits and its weaknesses. Once aware of the discourse, we can make some judgement and assessment as to how each discourse affects leadership and organizational culture. While we are all in a sense captured by a particular discourse, we are also able to negotiate, individually and collectively, to change the discourse and our relationship to it. Collectively, the discourse can be transformed, and with it the power and social relations that emanate from it. It is through this social construction (of which we are all active agents) that negotiation takes place and social change occurs.

Boxes 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 offer examples of how each leadership discourse might impact within different work situations (which often reflects how they emerged). These boxes are there to open dialogue as to which leadership discourses, and the accompanying assumptions, fit to different situations and contexts. As stated previously, discourses can and often do co-exist within organizations and sectors, but one is usually dominant.

Box 1.1 Controller leader discourse

Strengths	Weaknesses
Focus on output and task Results driven Improves efficiency Empirical and measurable targets Decisive leadership in a crisis Creates clear boundaries between work and home identity	Creates employee alienation, resentment and resistance Poor use of human resource: does not utilize employees' knowledge, skills and creativity Creates inflexible and rigid 'them and us' workforce relations Often leads to disputes
Useful settings	Less useful settings
Production line, old manufacturing Workplaces where efficiency and control are vital Nuclear industry, projects which require high security, and high levels of checking Accounting departments Construction industry Task-focused project management First line leadership	Post-industrial workplaces Knowledge-led industries Education sector Entrepreneurial business Innovation and creative sector Senior strategic leadership

Box 1.2 Therapist leader discourse

Strengths	Weaknesses
Individual and team focus Emotional awareness Builds trust Empowers through engaging individual and team through building rapport, listening and finding ways to offer personal growth and development opportunities	Lacks big picture, strategic focus Lacks dynamism and energy Doesn't build strong cultures Individual focus rather than systems focus Organization can become introverted and narcissistic, focusing on employee needs rather than an external focus
Useful settings	Less useful settings
Steady state organizations Education, health, public and not-for-profit sectors Value focuses in organizations with an ethos of human development Middle management-leadership roles, supporting individuals and teams Human Resource function	Fast changing organizations Multinationals with complex structures, requiring more of a systemic and culture-led approach Manufacturing sector, building industry which require robust, task focus Senior leadership requiring strategic focus Asian cultures which are less culturally embedded in therapy culture than Western cultures

Box 1.3 Messiah leader discourse

Strengths	Weaknesses
Builds strong aligned companies Dynamic energized cultures Innovative, dispersed leadership Builds in dispersed leadership and autonomous teams Strategic and visionary	Unsustainable over long periods totalizing-fundamentalist cultures Leaders can become omnipotent, dependency then becomes an issue Conformist homogeneous cultures can stifle innovation and creativity
Useful settings	Less useful settings
Post-industrial companies Knowledge-based companies Global multinationals, large corporations Senior strategic leadership	Steady state organizations Industrial, manufacturing sector Organizations reliant on continuity rather than transformation, e.g. health-care, banking Middle management/leadership Organizations with resistance to 'leadership cultures' (public sector organizations)

When thinking about leadership in one's own workplace, or when visiting another organization, these boxes can highlight a few of the relevant issues to consider. If a discourse exists in the wrong context, there will be increased tension, and the leader character will experience the full effects of this tension. If as a leader, you experience such tensions, then look at conflicts in discourses as a potential way of understanding and getting to the source of the problem.

[...]

An emergent discourse: the eco-leader

Post-heroic leaders

The Messiah discourse is not the final word, but it remains the contemporary dominant discourse in the mainstream literature and practising leaders' mindset. However, there has been a small but growing backlash against the Transformational and hero leader.

[...]

Badarraco (2001: 121) makes the case for quiet moral leadership: 'modesty and restraint are in large measure responsible for their extraordinary achievement'. [...] [This] is the post-heroic leader, but under examination we find regurgitated leadership approaches, taken directly from the Therapist leader discourse.

[...]

The leader is toned down, forceful but with humility and quiet but focused influence [...]

[S/he] needs to be authentic, emotionally intelligent, sensitive and less rational, privileging the emotional and internal self. Binney et al. (2004) describe the post-heroic leader as relational, as about people, the classic 'leader as Therapist' discourse. The post-heroic leadership literature also includes the recent idea of leader-coaches, the archetype leader-therapist. Much of this literature represents ideas from democratic and the Human Relations movement; it is particularly close to Greenleaf's 'servant leader' (1977) which pioneered post-heroic leadership under a different name, over 30 years before. [...]

The post-heroic leader literature also calls for dispersed leadership, networking and matrix organizations and advocates greater collaboration, in line with much of what the Transformational leader set out to achieve.

Attempts have been made to harness the Therapeutic character to serve the interests of the Messiah discourse. For example, Jim Collins' (2001) 'Level 5 leader' retains the heroism but inverts it. [...]

Leadership spirit/spiritual leadership

Leadership spirit implies that leaders act with spirit, or there is a spirit of leadership. [...]

It matters little what informs or underpins the leadership spirit, however, the spirit must support the joy, creativity, the positive life-force and the underlying ethics and holistic

approach of the Eco-leader discourse. Practising how to leverage this leadership spirit is more important than finding its source.

[...]

The spiritual leadership literature (e.g. Mitroff and Denton [1999]) blends the Christian-Judaeo tradition finding that spirituality is individual and transcendent, with the Eastern and perhaps indigenous Native American tradition, focusing on the ecological ideas that ‘We are all interconnected. Everything affects everything else’. [...]

The language used to describe the post-heroic leaders creates an image of a Therapist leader with spiritual and moral intent. These post-heroic leaders, however, are often more idealized, more of a fantasy, than charismatic leaders of the past.

Spirituality is now entering the leadership literature and practice: ‘For at least a decade the press has reported company leaders speaking about spirituality and business, while multiple publications have advocated links between corporate success and issues of the soul’ (Calas and Smircich, 2003: 329).

According to May (2000), spirituality is the most important influence in leadership. But as Tourish and Pinnington point out, ‘Ironically, this effort is often driven by a very non-spiritual concern – the desire to increase profits’ (2002: 165).

[...]

The Eco-leader discourse

[...]

The Eco-leadership discourse is about a new paradigm of leadership which takes an ecological perspective. This is a perspective which understands: that solutions in one area of business may create problems in another; that growth in one industry causes decline in another, with social consequences; that short-term gains may have immediate benefits, but may have longer-term consequences which may damage the business and the environment. Eco-leadership recognizes that within an organization there are interdependent parts which make up a whole; this goes for all stakeholder relationships, and in ever-widening circles that eventually reach the air that we breathe. It is about connectivity, interdependence and sustainability underpinned by an ethical, socially responsible stance. The Eco-leadership discourse takes ethics beyond business ethics into social concerns; it takes ethics beyond human concerns and recognizes a responsibility and relationship to the natural world. It also focuses the connectedness within each of us, and between each of us. The Eco-leadership discourse is fuelled by the human spirit. For some, this is underpinned by spirituality, for others not. Either way, the Eco-leadership discourse is a spirit-filled leadership, and a connected leadership. [...] As globalization and new technologies make the world ‘smaller’, our connections seem more important, and our vulnerability and reliance on each other and on safeguarding the natural world are rising concerns.

[...]

There is an ever-growing complexity of connected networks of organizations, suppliers, producers and consumers, forming webs of interaction with no single leadership, no

planned strategy, set in a constantly emerging and changing political and social environment. From this arises new organizational forms and leadership approaches. [...]

Leaders of multinational corporations are also finding that they have to find ways to increase the emergent capabilities within their companies to have any chance of keeping pace with change and the de-centralized forces impacting on them.

[...]

If one looks at the Messiah discourse through an open-systems perspective (von Bertalanffy, 1968), one can account for the un-sustainability of this leadership as the organizational boundaries are ever-closing and become increasingly rigid. When an organism's (or organization's) boundaries get too closed and don't allow inputs and outputs to flow (in human systems this includes communications), the organism starts to atrophy and will die. [...]

Open-systems thinking teaches us that we have to interact with the environment, and to achieve this successfully requires adaptive- and self-regulation. In terms of leadership, self-regulation and adaptive practice can only occur when there is dispersed leadership able to act and react to local change.

[...]

Eco-leadership is a discourse which creates self-organizing and emergent properties arising from dispersed leadership, which build into organizations the ability to be adaptive to fluctuations and constant change.

One of the focuses of Eco-leadership is to find ways to harness the human spirit, and our intuition, connectedness to each other, to nature, and our non-rational ways [of] knowing.

Holism is vital to this discourse – leadership is always conceptualized as fluid and dispersed throughout an organization. Leadership may emerge from surprising places given the right conditions. It is about acknowledging diversity and connectiveness rather than attempting to homogenize company cultures. It is about a leadership which looks for patterns, emerging in and outside of the company, and creates an adaptive culture and a localized and dispersed leadership which can both react more quickly and notice the changes occurring at grassroots level.

Ethics and Eco-leadership

If the purpose of ethics is to inform moral conduct, then two clear questions arise when thinking about contemporary leadership. The first is well rehearsed: how can ethics inform the moral conduct of leaders, as individuals and as collective groups such as corporate boards? [This focuses on] our actions which affect others near to us, those we are in contact with or those we are responsible for.

The second question is less well rehearsed. This ethical responsibility goes beyond being responsible only for what is directly in your control, and takes ethics to mean that we all share a responsibility for the planet, and for the indirect consequences of our individual and collective actions.

[...]

The Eco-leader discourse is beginning to recognize that leadership now means re-negotiating what success means for an organization or company. There is a need to look awry at this question, and not take the macro-economic and neo-liberal agenda for granted. Delivering growth and short-term shareholder value is no longer acceptable as the sole measurement of success if we are to act ethically and responsibly. [...]

Leadership success will be to harness technological advancement, knowledge, and our global trading platforms, to ‘provide’ for a better quality of life, and a sustainable future.

Ethical leadership is to take a critical stance, to look awry, to think holistically, to be accountable for your own actions and for the systems and networks you inhabit, both locally and globally. It places social justice and the environment first.

[...]

Conclusion

This new Eco-leadership discourse is an emergent discourse that has both continuity and discontinuity with the previous discourses, and is aligned to other leadership approaches.

[It] has three key qualities:

1. *Connectivity (holism)*: It is founded on connectivity; how we relate and interrelate with the ecologies in which we work and live.
2. *Eco-ethics*: It is concerned with acting ethically in the human realm *and* with respect and responsibility for the natural environment.
3. *Leadership spirit*: It acknowledges the human spirit, the non-rational, creativity, imagination and human relationships.

The Eco-leadership discourse moves away from control and towards understanding emergence, connectivity and organic sustainable growth. The leader character exemplifies tension between central regulation and self-regulation, between emergence and direction, organic growth and strategic planning. For the highly rational management world, many of these ideas are challenging and truly create a new paradigm. How do you invest in a business whose leadership talks about not-knowing and *emergence as strategy*?

Leaders are realizing that inter-connectivity is a reality and feedback systems affect them and their business as well as the rest of the planet. Training leaders to think in this way, to understand ideas of self-regulating and self-managing systems, and emergence rather than planning, then linking these to the human skills from the therapeutic discourse might support a powerful new discourse.