

Not Enough Science or Not Enough Learning? Exploring the Gaps between Leadership Theory and Practice

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Abstract

This paper addresses the relationships between leadership theory, practice and development, drawing on both the higher education and wider leadership literature. It explores why challenges and problems exist within the contested field of leadership theory and why gaps remain between theory and practice after more than a century of research – and indeed, with increasing levels of research, scholarship and development in the last 25 years. After highlighting the importance of context for theory, practice and development, the first section of the paper examines a range of factors that contribute to theoretical ‘contests’ including different starting assumptions made by researchers, the different focus of studies, examination of different causal links to explain leadership, differences in values and cultural lenses and different constructs, terminology and perspectives. The second section examines the challenges faced by leadership practitioners, as individuals, and through exercising leadership as a collective responsibility in the context of changing operating environments within higher education institutions and across sectors and countries. The author highlights three areas where some re-thinking of the links between theory and practice are necessary – at the input stage, linking research findings and recruitment practices; in terms of outcomes, by researching links between leaders, leadership and performance; and in process terms, to examine more deeply complex and relational dynamic of leadership in action. The third section offers a number of specific suggestions as to how closer alignment between theory, practice and development can be achieved. The paper concludes by arguing for greater maturity (in research, practice and development) that acknowledges that leadership is played out in complex, dynamic and changing social systems. A stronger emphasis on ‘leadership learning’ should deliver both better science and better outcomes for leaders and led in higher education.

Introduction

The relationship between leadership theory and leadership practice presents a conundrum. Each year, there is more research published and more books written on the subject. Storey calculated, for example, that the numbers of published articles rose from 136 in 1970–1971 to 1,105 in 1990–1991 and to 10,062 in 2001–2002 (Storey, 2004, quoted in (Bolden, 2004)). A search of the Amazon.com website for books on ‘leadership’ in 2003 gave a listing of more than 11,000 books, by 2008, that number had more than doubled to 25,784. In the popular business press, there is no shortage of calls for more leadership, new leadership or strengthened leadership. Leadership development activity has clearly expanded to meet demand, as a brief look at the world’s largest leadership development operation reveals. Founded in 1970, the Centre for Creative Leadership has grown its operating revenue from \$0.8 million in 1970–1971 to \$59.1 million in 2000–2001 and \$81.9 million in 2006–2007. The organisation has also grown from its US base to centres in Europe, Singapore and India. By 2006–2007, its annual report noted that more than 20,000 individuals had participated in its programmes from 120 countries. Yet despite all this activity and pressure to find ‘the magic bullet’, challenges remain, as Bolden (2004, p. 3) has suggested: ‘There is [still] no widely accepted definition of leadership, no common consensus on how best to develop leadership and leaders, and remarkably little evidence of the impact of leadership or leadership development on performance and productivity’. However, this is the picture in the corporate and wider public sectors. Perhaps higher education is different?

There are features of the higher education leadership landscape that appear similar. Calls for stronger leadership occur at regular intervals; in the mid-1980s in the USA, for example, several reports contained calls for ‘strong, assertive and enlightened presidents who will lead us to a new and higher level of contribution’ (Bennett, 1984; Fisher, 1984, p. 11). Ten years later, the US Association of Governing Bodies issued a report on *Renewing the Academic Presidency: Stronger Leadership for Tougher Times* (1996), and the Association of Governing Bodies’ (2006) most recent report is entitled *The Leadership Imperative*. Its central message is that ‘to renew public trust and confidence in higher education, college and university presidents, along with their boards and faculties, must shape and lead institutional resolve and marshal the support of external stakeholders’. The UK has seen parallel developments. In 1989, the then Department of Education and Science commissioned a study on the

Changing Roles of University Leaders and Managers: Implications for Preparation and Development (Middlehurst, Pope and Wray, 1992). A decade later, a report on *Developing Senior Managers* (Middlehurst and Garrett, 2000) provided evidence that contributed to the creation of a new Leadership Foundation for Higher Education in 2003. These developments are mirrored in other parts of the world. Australia established the LH Martin Institute in 2007, while Malaysia, in 2008, has created the Higher Education Leadership Academy.

Research on leadership in higher education also shares some characteristics with parallel research in other sectors. Bryman's recent review of the literature on leadership effectiveness in higher education notes that 'not enough is known about exactly what makes an individual effective as a leader in the higher education context, and what in turn can make them ineffective' (Bryman, 2007, p. 14). This question has been addressed in a longitudinal study in the USA, culminating in a book on success and failure in the College Presidency (Birnbaum, 1992), but new longitudinal studies are now needed. Birnbaum and colleagues' initial summary of leadership research as applied to higher education (Bensimon, Neumann and Birnbaum, 1989) has been updated to good effect, but the authors still highlight the challenges and missed opportunities in the field (Kezar, Carducci and Contreras-McGavin, 2006). They point out that 'there continues to be no agreed-upon definition of leadership [and] the application of new theories and concepts from the general leadership literature to the higher education literature also remains incomplete' (Kezar, Carducci and Contreras-McGavin, 2006, p. 12).

This paper seeks to explore this conundrum by asking why these problems and challenges exist within both leadership theory and practice and in the relationship between the two. What more should be done or done differently to change this situation?

Contexts for theory building

The first, and arguably the most important point about leadership research is that it is clearly associated with its context. Scientific research on leadership emerged strongly in the early 20th century (although the study of leadership has a much longer history), and the settings for studies that laid the foundations of the field were business, military and governmental organisations. Research was located in a relatively narrow range of disciplines, the majority being in political science and business administration (politics, psychology and organisational behaviour). The focus of studies tended to be on those in positions of leadership; not only

was this something of a tautology, but it also resulted in a particular bias towards studies of white, Anglo-Saxon males who typically occupied those positions in the organisations studied at the time. The cultural context of early studies was the USA, and the USA remains the largest producer of research and literature on leadership. Finally, most research until the latter part of the 20th century was undertaken using a positivist research paradigm in the search for universal leadership characteristics (Kezar, Carducci and Contreras-McGavin, 2006).

Context is no less significant for leadership practice. Several authors have noted the strong influence of prevailing ideas about leadership (folk tales or leadership ‘myths’) on leadership practice (Birnbbaum, 1989; Middlehurst, 1993; Andrews and Field, 1998). Bolden (2004) argues that traditional and contemporary theories of leadership strongly influence current practice, education and policy, and Bryman notes the influence of everyday language and ideas about leadership on policy and practice, commenting (after Boje and Rhodes, 2005, p. 11) that the ‘mass mediatisation of leaders and leadership provides a strong story that leaders can draw upon to portray their own leadership’. Leadership development is also influenced by the prevailing socio-economic environment, as the changing focus of leadership agendas addressed by the Centre for Creative Leadership suggests.

There are several points that can be drawn from these findings and observations. The first is that both leadership theory and leadership practice are ‘contingent’ at several levels. Theory and practice at any one time (typically over one or more decades) is associated with a historical and cultural context, and studies are located within particular (typically organisational) settings and are framed by the methodological approaches and perspectives of particular disciplines. At an individual level, contingency theories also encourage leaders to match and adapt their styles and behaviours to particular tasks, circumstances and the people with whom they must interact. Yet much of the literature, particularly in higher education, does not specifically address or problematise these different aspects of ‘context’.

There are many obvious examples from practice of how significant context can be in relation to leadership. An Anglo-Saxon dean of a UK higher education institution would recognise instantly, no doubt, the need for different approaches to leadership from those of a dean of a Chinese university; a corporate-sector leader moving to take up the role of university vice-chancellor would notice the impact of context on what can or cannot be done; or how quickly it can be done, and individuals who have undertaken 360-degree reviews of their leadership perfor-

mance in more than one setting will often have direct feedback that successful behaviours and actions in one setting do not necessarily achieve the same results in a different place. Even where some aspects of context remain the same, differences may be the key to leadership effectiveness, for example, when individuals rise up the organisational hierarchy successfully and then apparently 'reach the limits of their competence'. Differences of situation and expectations may also be the root cause of leadership deficits when someone finds, on shifting from disciplinary and academic leadership to managerial and institutional leadership, that well-honed skills and expertise are inadequate or inappropriate in the new context.

Recent research published by the Leadership Foundation does highlight the importance of context for leadership. One of the clearest examples arises from the study by Smith, Adams and Mount (2007) into the changing role of pro-vice-chancellors (PVC). Despite similar job titles in this second-tier institutional leadership role, the authors identified five models of leadership in operation. The most contrasting roles were between PVC roles that included budget and line management responsibilities linked to executive authority, and those that had no budget or line management responsibilities, where authority was linked to other sources of social power (French and Raven, 1959), such as academic and personal credibility. The contextual factors affecting these roles include institutional history and legal frameworks, as well as the power, personality and influence of first-tier institutional leaders. Gibbs' (2008) study on departmental leadership in research intensive universities highlights 'situation' as a variable in the style of leadership adopted and found to be effective. In some cases, an internal or external 'crisis' had led to the exercise of more directive leadership; in other departments, a collegial and inclusive style was key to maintaining high academic performance. Bolden and colleagues' study of collective leadership in higher education offers a third perspective. Supporting the findings of Smith and colleagues, the authors noted the evolving nature of university leadership roles with 'a tendency to alternate between "horizontal" and "vertical" leadership roles that require fundamentally different approaches' (Bolden, Petrov and Gosling, 2008, p. 72). They also found that leadership in higher education is strongly influenced by the broader social and political context, whereby universities are becoming more commercially orientated and market sensitive, including shifting from bureaucratic and collegial forms of organisation to more entrepreneurial and corporate models.

Findings from these studies demonstrate the need to take the issue of context seriously in the domains of leadership theory and practice, as

well as development. They also suggest a need to consider the match between individuals and 'context' much more carefully in recruitment, selection, promotion and career development.

A contested concept

While context and situation clearly affect the understanding and practice of leadership, there are also some fundamental conceptual issues to consider. Despite the steady accumulation of knowledge over the last century and beyond, Bennis and Nanus' (1985) claim that leadership is both the most studied and the least understood topic in the social sciences still resonates among scholars. Leadership remains 'a contested concept' for several reasons. An exploration of these reasons is offered below, drawing on the work of Bensimon, Neumann and Birnbaum (1989) and Kezar, Carducci and Contreras-McGavin (2006).

Different assumptions

The basis for research design varies considerably if the initial assumption is that 'leaders are born', as trait theories suggest, or, contrastingly, that leadership capabilities emerge or develop as a consequence of education, experience and the events that shape individuals in particular circumstances. Trait theories, prominent in the early 20th century but continuing today, seek to identify a definitive list of characteristics associated with successful leaders. Behavioural theories, focusing on what leaders do to be effective, grew out of trait theories; these were then influenced in the latter half of the 20th century by 'contingency' theories, which shaped the search for leadership behaviours and styles that were most appropriate for particular situations, tasks and followers. The shift from traits to behaviours also opened up the potential for leadership to be viewed as a process or function (that serves certain organisational purposes or meets particular human needs) rather than being the property of an individual.

Different focus

The search for leadership has been dominated by a focus on those with positional power in roles of 'assigned or formal leadership'. There has been less attention addressed to 'informal and emergent leadership' – that is, leadership exercised by individuals and groups outside designated positions. A major shift in leadership research occurred when the focus

moved from 'leader-centred' studies to an investigation of 'followership' and the dynamics of the relationship between leaders and followers. Power and influence theories depicted leadership not as a trait, but as a 'social exchange process' characterised by the acquisition and demonstration of power. Alternative (and combined) approaches to this exchange of power are captured in two well-known theories of transactional and transformational leadership based on the work of Bass (1985, 1999).

Different causal links

Cognitive theories that examined the influence of cognitive processes on leadership cast new light (as well as doubt) on the idea that 'leaders cause events' because of intervening factors, such as the perceptual bias of leaders themselves, of followers and others, and from other psychological processes, such as attribution and errors of judgement. Historians would be familiar with the debate as to whether or not circumstances create leaders, or the reverse. Cognitive theories shifted leadership from being construed as an objective phenomenon to a concept that was seen as socially constructed. An interesting set of studies within cognitive theory focused on 'substitutes for leadership' (Kerr and Jermier, 1978), examining structures, groups and situations that might act as substitutes for social sources of leadership. More recently, these theories have formed part of the groundwork for investigations of 'shared leadership' (Pearce and Conger, 2003).

Different lenses

Gaining prominence at the end of the 20th and into the 21st centuries, cultural and symbolic theories are premised on the fact that leadership occurs in complex social systems. Leadership is viewed as a social construct that differs across cultural contexts. Theories highlighted the importance of shared meaning through values, cultural norms, common histories, identities and beliefs, and examined the role of leaders and their use of symbolic processes such as rituals and stories to 'create shared meaning', particularly in the context of leading change. Gender studies have contributed another valuable lens through which to examine leadership theory. These studies have thrown light on the 'cognitive dissonance' experienced by many female leaders (Rosener, 1990), have highlighted some of the paradoxes that exist in leadership in practice (Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003), and to an extent, have challenged the whole

basis on which the edifice of leadership research has been built (Rhode, 2003). Time and distance have offered other lenses through which to view leadership. Gardner (1997) offers one example in his study of political and thought leaders who have exerted influence over time and distance through a variety of media. Alimo-Metcalfe (1999) has also offered a useful distinction between 'close-up' leadership in teams and groups and 'distant leadership' in the context of large organisations. Other scholars have explored the impact of distance and separation between leaders and followers in relation to the leadership of virtual teams (Zigurs, 2003).

Different values

Questions about the value basis of leadership cut across many theories and much practice. Both historians and leadership scholars have discussed the legacy of leaders such as Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung or Pol Pot. Where the concepts of leadership include hierarchy, heroic acts, dominance in power relations and separation of 'leader' from 'led', these leaders earn their place. However, studies with a different value base, such as Greenleaf's study of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) define and assess leadership differently. As studies of power and leaders' intentions and actions have come under scrutiny both in practice and theory (through postmodernism and critical theory), new avenues of research have sought to discriminate between the intentions and outcomes of leaders' actions and behaviours, whether positive or negative. Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser (2007), for example, have examined destructive or coercive leadership based on 'the toxic triangle of destructive leaders, susceptible followers and conducive environments'. Critical theorists have exposed the apparently value-free assumptions of early leadership theories, promoting studies that see the social and cultural process of leadership as value-laden. In addition, cultural theorists focus on how leaders bring values into the leadership process and on the nature of leadership interactions with groups with different sets of values.

Different terminology, different constructs

Both definitions and terminology have proved problematic in leadership research. Some scholars have argued, for example, that 'leader' and 'manager' are fundamentally different types of roles, either designed for different people or occupied by those with different traits and expertise (Zaleznik, 1977; Bennis, 1989). Other scholars have noted differences,

but also connections, between leadership and management (Kotter, 1990), and others have seen the two concepts as part of a whole, with rigid distinctions being unhelpful in practice (Mintzberg, 1975, 2004). Bryman (2007) noted that the higher education literature often did not distinguish the terms leadership, management and administration in a precise or consistent way. In studies in continental Europe, the term 'governance' is also used as an umbrella term to cover leadership, management and administration, and in the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2006) study, the final chapter discusses leadership as a shared responsibility between president and governing board. Terminological difficulties are unlikely to recede if leadership is increasingly seen 'in context' and in 'relational terms'.

Further attempts to clarify terminology have been made by seeking to separate conceptually the term 'leader' (an individual role) and *leadership* (a shared function and collective responsibility). Such a distinction has once again shifted the focus of research, this time from examining traditional leader-follower models of leadership to investigating 'concertive action' that is more than the sum of its parts (Gronn, 2002), and distributed leadership, which is shaped in the interactions between people and their situation (Spillane, 2006). Bolden, Petrov and Gosling (2008) have examined the application of distributed leadership ideas in the context of UK higher education.

Different perspectives

Challenges to the basic tenets of leadership theory have come not only from critical theorists and feminist scholars, but also from advances in the physical sciences. Wheatley's (1999) work on 'leadership and the new sciences' signalled a shift from classical scientific notions of linear causality, predictability, order and control, where a leader's job was to have an impact on events through setting goals, controlling execution and monitoring outcomes. This perspective on leadership may be suited to stable environments with low levels of complexity and where processes can be mechanised. In conditions of ambiguity, rapid change, high complexity, incomplete information, and where core processes cannot easily be automated, the leadership task is significantly different (Kezar, Carducci and Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Heifetz (1994) has argued that routine problems do not require leadership; the real focus of leadership is on problems that are difficult to define. Adaptive challenges require experiments, discoveries and adjustments from many parts of an organisation; the leadership task is to mobilise expertise and generate novel solutions.

Complexity and chaos theories have made several contributions to leadership by examining the changing nature of leadership contexts and introducing new concepts, such as social networking and systems thinking.

Challenges to research from practice

There are a variety of challenges that face leaders as individuals and leadership in a collective sense at different times and in different circumstances in the 21st century (Table 1).

The challenges (Table 1) are multidimensional and interconnected. They come from changes in the operating environment, as well as changes that spring from the internal dynamics of higher education. They affect the way that institutions are structured and organised (or may need to be) and the professional identities, career paths and working lives of those who work in higher education. The suite of 12 research studies commissioned by the Leadership Foundation in 2005 (with publication between 2006 and 2008) illuminate the nature of changes, some of the impacts on leadership, leaders and leadership development (as well as selection and recruitment). The challenges are also about how higher education institutions and the sector as a whole interacts, exchanges and intersects with other sectors and organisations, other cultures and countries. There are implications here for 'vision' and 'direction', for 'goal-setting', 'performance' and 'outcomes'. These challenges require different conceptions and different models of leadership to be tested and applied in research, practice and development.

There are three areas where rethinking is particularly important. The first is at the input end, in the selection of leaders. Recent research by Breakwell and Tytherleigh (2008) on institutional leadership demonstrates that both the leadership characteristics and the selection criteria identified in the research represent 'traditional, heroic' leadership models. These do not appear to take full account either of the challenges from practice presented in Table 1 or the shifts in leadership research that have been outlined, both in higher education and beyond. There is a strong need for closer alignment between research findings about leadership and the recruitment and selection processes for those who will occupy leadership positions in higher education. There is also a need for more and better research on the characteristics of leadership effectiveness and the contribution of leadership to academic and organisational outcomes.

The second area concerns outputs and performance. Traditional notions of leadership suggest that the impact of leaders on performance

TABLE 1
Examples of current leadership challenges

Source	Issue	Impact or consequence
Political, economic and social environment	Expanding stakeholder and consumer expectations of leaders	Leadership more difficult and burdensome
Political, social and economic environment	Excessive data, multiple reporting, leadership under media gaze	Leadership more demanding, resilience at a premium
Economic, social and technological change	Reconfiguring the university's role, delivery and response to societal problems and needs	Leadership capabilities and expertise stretched, collective working between leaders needed
Cultural change	Multicultural, inter-cultural leadership	New forms of leadership and new leaders as role models
Social and organisational change	Professionalisation and specialisation	Challenges to authority and hierarchy, need for multi-professional teams
Social, educational and organisational change	Blurring of organisational boundaries and professional identities; multi-professionalism	Collaborative and cross-organisational leadership, role and identity conflicts, structural conflicts, political and negotiating skills important
Changing higher education context: different forms and types of leadership	Vertical and horizontal leadership roles, research, educational, enterprise, institutional leadership, cosmopolitan, local leadership, collaborative leadership, leadership across networks and virtual teams	Leadership capabilities and contexts expanding, different sources of power, influence and approach required: positional power less relevant
Stages of development and change (organisations, teams and individuals)	Organisational stages of development, individual stages, becoming a leader, being a leader and exiting leadership roles	Leadership 'fit' important; leadership and leader 'renewal' requires attention
Diversity (organisations, groups, cultures, individuals)	Differentiation, distinctiveness, customisation, personalisation	Leadership 'fit', inter-cultural sensitivity, cognitive complexity important

is direct, visible and tangible, assuming a linear causal link. Researchers have spent many years trying to identify links between individual leaders and performance at different levels of the organisation and in different types of organisation, and results have been mixed. A major difficulty has been isolating leadership from other variables, including size of organisation, individual leaders versus 'collective leadership', and leadership independent of other systems (such as human relations practices). A more useful approach to understanding a leader's influence is to distinguish between direct and indirect impact on organisational performance. Direct impact would involve specific influence on followers, decisions or policies such that behaviours or actions are changed with positive results. Indirect impact concerns the ways in which leaders create strategies and an environment that is conducive to high performance through an appropriate culture and systems that are aligned and fit for purpose (Lord and Maher, 1991). This culture would need to include sufficient agreement about shared standards of behaviour among leaders and managers. Lord and Maher note that the range of mechanisms linked to successful outcomes tend to be diffuse, spread over time and more difficult to associate solely with the work of top leaders. This is an important lesson, particularly for the complex and loosely coupled organisation that defines many universities. The work of Bolden, Petrov and Gosling (2008), Barrett and Barrett (2007), and Guest and Clinton (2007) address the issues of leadership and performance in different ways, but there is more work to be done in this area.

The third area where re-thinking is needed lies between inputs and outputs, and concerns 'the process of leadership' or leadership in action. It is in this space that practitioners face the most difficulties and where the competing theories described above do not offer simple solutions to the paradoxes and dilemmas that leaders encounter. General theories do not provide a specific tool kit that can be applied successfully in every circumstance, and apparently well-tailored leadership competence models do not identify consistently successful behaviours or successful individuals. An important reason is that leadership is 'relational' between leaders, followers, situation and context, and, indeed, between governance, leadership, management and administration. Leadership is not static and unidirectional; it is also a process that involves active and cumulative learning through experience, problem solving and the exercise of judgement. Leadership theories offer different lenses through which to understand and assess the complex dynamics of leadership in practice; they also highlight dangers and pitfalls that will derail individuals and teams (Leslie and van Velsor, 1996). However, there remains a

need for those in leadership positions to discuss, negotiate and learn about the leadership that needs to be exercised in specific settings and circumstances.

Forging new pathways between leadership theory and practice

This section seeks to draw out some pointers for future research and for aspects of practice from the exploration above.

Future research

New research on leadership needs to be framed with certain criteria in mind. The analysis suggests 10 pointers towards different and better science.

1. The context and purposes of leadership need to be identified and critically examined so that they form an integral part of research studies.
2. The leadership perspectives and assumptions that underpin the research design need to be spelt out, critiqued and tested in real settings.
3. The nature and relationship between different forms and levels of leadership needs to be explored, including the influence and impact of disciplinary and professional backgrounds and expertise, as well as other aspects of difference between people.
4. Research methods need not only to be sharper and more focused, but also more varied, with triangulation of sources of data and evidence. Multiple theoretical 'lenses' are likely to be illuminating for practitioners. More complex research designs could usefully mirror more complex settings, contexts and paradoxes of leadership, as they are encountered in practice. Such designs would also help to address the problems of 'rhetoric and reality' highlighted in Bolden, Petrov and Gosling (2008) and by Bargh, Boccock, Scott and Smith (2000) in an earlier study of university leadership.
5. There is a need to examine critically the cultural assumptions and premises, myths and mental models, stereotypes, value bases, rhetoric and language of 'leadership' so that the behaviours, actions, networks, relationships, systems and interactions that achieve successful outcomes are not 'disappeared' from the record (Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003) because they are not categorised or recognised as 'real leadership'. This is particularly important in relation to differ-

ent cultures and the individual diversity of those who might become or wish to become 'designated leaders'.

6. Particular theories (such as 'substitutes for leadership', the impact of cognition and of time, distance and stages of development) should be explored more deeply in a higher education context.
7. Important aspects of leadership such as 'direction setting', 'decision taking', 'power, politics and influence' need to be studied to illuminate positive and negative effects and outcomes, including the nature and impact of 'toxic leadership'.
8. There is a need to examine leadership 'beyond authority' and outside formally designated leadership roles.
9. There is a need to examine leadership life cycles associated with stages of development, both at an individual and an organisational level.
10. Notions of close-up and team leadership need exploration, as well as the mechanics of 'distant' leadership and cross-boundary leadership.

Finally, it is important to draw on the wider leadership literature to build on the extensive models, theories and rich ideas that exist in relation to other sectors.

Challenging practice

Bolden, Petrov and Gosling (2008) highlight an interesting phenomenon in their study of leadership in UK higher education institutions: a strong rhetoric about distributed leadership and a reality that both seeks and supports traditional, heroic models, including 'transformational leadership'. This difference between rhetoric and reality illustrates further paradoxes or 'conundra' in relation to leadership in practice. Four examples illustrate the point: We expect leaders to lead, that is, to provide direction, to set an example, make decisions and deliver successful outcomes, particularly when circumstances are challenging. If leaders fall short of expectations, then they have either not shown leadership or they are poor leaders and do not deserve the role. On the other hand, there are many leaders and leadership roles in universities. Each of these is surrounded by similar sets of expectations. How can these expectations be reconciled successfully? Furthermore, professional practitioners (and there are many types in universities) expect large areas of autonomy in what they do and how they contribute to the university and its mission based on professional norms, training, expertise and the design of professional work in knowledge systems. For such professionals, as Maister

(2006) has argued, the key question is, 'Why should I follow you?' His answer is that professionals will only follow leaders if they trust their motives, their track record, their values and their style. Birnbaum (1992) raises a parallel point when arguing that 'good followers make good leaders'. The reality is that leadership success is rarely, if ever, the result of a single individual, despite the rhetoric and the heroic leadership myths. Transformational leadership theories suggest that leaders can inspire followers to higher levels of achievement through the values they espouse, the aspirations they awaken and the levels of energy and commitment that are released to achieve particular goals. On the other hand, managerialism in the form of New Public Management, suggests a need for tighter control mechanisms to deliver efficient and consistent performance. There is, perhaps, an inevitable tension here between leadership aligned with creativity, and management aligned with constrained resources and accountability requirements.

There is no clear-cut solution to these dilemmas. Instead, there is a need to recognise that the real-life context for leadership is one of constant negotiation between competing choices, priorities and interests. In addition, the evidence from both Birnbaum (1992) and Maister (2006) points to the need for leaders in higher education to earn the right to lead. Leadership legitimacy is achieved not just in the first 100 days but on a continuing basis through a developing track-record of success. This track record serves to build 'trust credits' that leaders can draw upon to resolve conflicts or minimise failures, and this track record also persuades 'free' followers to cede their own legitimate power in favour of desirable goals and collective benefits. However, there is also a parallel need for followers to recognise that it is in their interests to contribute to leadership success: the rewards are mutual. John Adair's comment (personal communication) that each individual in an organisation needs to learn to act as leader, follower and team member resonates here.

Conclusions

In all areas of work on leadership in higher education, it is time for greater maturity. Practitioners who seek quick fixes and simple solutions to complex and dynamic situations will not find single answers in the literature. Instead, they will gain valuable insights and illumination on complex issues. Researchers who seek linear relationships and independent variables will have difficulty isolating them in the multiple sets of relationships that exist in practice. However, more sophisticated and

diverse research designs and wider reference points across sectors will enrich higher education research. Those who recruit leaders, including those in executive search firms, need to examine the findings of recent research on leadership in higher education more carefully, as well as the changing contexts for practice, so that yesterday's leadership models are not perpetuated on tomorrow's universities. Finally, leadership development needs to be built not on generic leadership competence frameworks, but on tailored processes that recognise the contingent, relational and negotiated reality of higher education leadership. At the heart of leadership, there is, or should be, a learning process that will deliver both better science and better outcomes for leaders and led in higher education.

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