Shifting the leader(ship) off centre-stage: A critical and alternative exploration of leadership ontologies

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Greetings to you all
My mountain is Rangitoto
I was born in Rochford, England
I now live in Auckland, New Zealand
My name is Howard Youngs
Therefore, greetings to you, greetings to you, greetings to you
KEEP THIS SIDE
GOING UP STREAM
2009 in JEAH: (Un)Critical times? Situating distributed leadership in the field

2014 in Leading & Managing: Moving beyond distributed leadership to distributed forms: A contextual and socio-cultural analysis of two New Zealand secondary schools.

2017b: A critical exploration of collaborative and distributed leadership in higher education: Developing an alternative ontology through leadership-as-practice

2017a Chapter 9: (Re)positioning the distributed ‘turn’ in leadership
More work labelled as leadership

New roles and wider distribution of this work

Informed by Thomson (2005) and Gunter (2012)

Economic field
(market advantage)

Political field
(reforms/controls to Higher Education)

Economic & political fields

New Public Management
Economic
Effective
Efficient

Policy interventions and performative pressures
Higher Education

• A managerial lens can favour individualism within higher education and be in opposition to collegial academic practices (Ehrich, Kimber, & Ehrich, 2016).
• Performative and economic pressures have led to HEIs to seek out new work with the same or less resourcing of staff.
• Shifting of voices of influence and the role of the Professoriate.
• The performative arena of research and funding.

The rise and prominence of central service units and professional staff within institutional structures has contributed to a blurring between academic and professional/administrative practice. This can be evident with professional staff:
• with their engagement in academic leadership and development (Berman & Pitman, 2010; Cardno, 2013);
• interactions with students (Graham, 2012);
• some degree of agency to take control of situations (Davis, 2014);
• an increase in decision-making competencies of administrative heads (Blümel, 2016);
• having roles that sometimes complement the work of academic staff (Gray, 2015);
• collaborative work with academic staff (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012; Pitt & Mewburn, 2016; Veles & Carter, 2016) and research staff (Sebalj, Holbrook, & Bourke, 2012); and,
• the development of roles in higher education institutions that span both professional and academic domains (Whitchurch, 2009).
Leadership?
The Leadership Field

A very general overview

The last 150 or so years

Great Man

Trait

Behaviour

Contingency

Situational

New leadership theories

Transformational

Charismatic

Shared

Distributed

Collective...

Post-heroic

Critical

Growth of the Leadership industry
Where the two come together in Higher Education

The Leadership Field

A very general overview

Great Man

Trait

Behaviour

Situational

The last 150 or so years

Heroic, Leader-centric, Leader-follower

Contingency

New leadership theories

Transformational

Charismatic

Growth of the Leadership industry

Economic & political fields

Economic field

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New Public Management

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More work labelled as leadership

New roles and wider distribution of this work

Fields

Knowledge (re) creation

The market and economy

Centuries of tradition

Academia

The rise of the organisation
Where the two come together in Higher Education

How do we understand practice labelled as leadership in this space?

To what extent has ‘leadership’ undergone any managerial colonisation? (Thrupp & Wilmott, 2003)
Some leadership ontologies

Individual

Relational

Co-

Distributed / Shared / Team

Leadership-as-practice
Questioning Relational Leadership as practice
Leadership is collapsed to an individual unit of analysis. Leadership exists in a person or attributed to a person via an appointed position.

Establishment of who the leaders are in advance.

Leadership can still be collapsed to an individual unit of analysis in distributed and shared leadership studies. For example, a ‘senior leader’ distributing out leadership.

- Stable and enduring
- Individual (action)
- A set of traits
  - Natural
  - Learned
- Uni-directional
- Homogeneous
- Ontology of leader, follower(s), (goals/direction)
A process approach places the focus on practices, a focus that is lacking in the leadership studies field (Alvesson & Spicer, 2014).

Wilkinson and Kemmis (2015) shift “attention from the notion of leadership as a taken-for-granted and fixed state or role, to the activities and practices that constitute leading” (p. 346).

Leadership occurs as a practice rather than reside in the traits or behaviours of individuals (Raelin, 2016, p. 125).

Leadership is a consequence of collective activity

From the area of practice theory (Youngs, 2017b): “activity is elevated beyond that of an individual, so the focus is on the practice rather than the action of an individual (Nicolini, 2012) … bundled human activities are interwoven with non-human materials (Schatzki, 2001) … organisations are no longer viewed as a fixed state, rather … how they are continually constructed and reconstructed (Geiger, 2009)".
An event
fleeting moments
moment
moment
moment
moment
moment

Actors ——— Context
‘the ones doing’

past practice

(Carroll et al., 2008; Wood, 2005)
An event
fleeting moments
moment
moment
moment
moment

past practice
accessing of capital

Actors
‘the ones doing’
Context

(Carroll et al., 2008; Wood, 2005)

accumulation and reforming of social and cultural capital
A flow of practices
“situated in historical and material conditions” (Nicolini, 2012, p.6)

See Youngs (2014; 2017a,b)

Practice labelled as leadership (Carroll, Levy & Richmond, 2008; Wood, 2005) and collaborations (Kramer & Crespy, 2011) occur in a moment / as very short exchanges.

Figure adapted from Youngs (2017b)
For example in HE research of distributed leadership and collaboration:

• Leadership is viewed as a practice distributed throughout a higher education institution across five dimensions; personal, social, structural, contextual and developmental (Bolden & Petrov, 2014; Bolden et al., 2008);

• Communities of practice can help provide conditions conducive to collaborative work amongst academic staff across institutions (Davison et al., 2013);

• The six tenets of Jones, Harvey and Lefoe (2014) 6E conceptual model of distributed leadership highlight a focus on practices with the emphasis on activity, process and enablement;

• The acknowledgement of hidden practice due to threats in Hancock and Hellawell (2003) study of academic middle managers;

• Academics from differing knowledge domains have distinct collaborative practices (Lewis, Ross, & Holden, 2012);

• Distributed leadership arises from interactions amongst diverse individuals (Van Ameijde et al., 2009); and,

• Whitchurch (2009) argues for new forms of activity to be developed encompassing both “professional and academic domains” (p.410).
Invitation to all staff to participate in a working group

Survey to all staff

Various leadership models from across the University presented

Professional staff
Academic staff (x2)
Programme Leaders
Professoriate
SLT

Staff focus groups

Emergent themes

Possible leadership structure
Significant areas of practice
Leadership ‘spaces’

- Research
- Operations
- Strategy & Innovation
- Academic Programmes
- Learning & Teaching
- Community Engagement
Suggested key leadership roles

- **Deputy Head of School (DHoS)**
- **Head of Undergraduate Programmes (HoUG)**
- **Head of Postgraduate Programmes (HoPG)**
- **Head of Research (HoRG)**
- **Head of School (HoS)**
- **Head of Research Group (HoRG)**
- **Head of Community Engagement (HoCE)**
- **Head of Learning & Teaching Cluster (HoLaT)**

**Organizational Structure**

- **Operations (SMT)**
  - **Executive Team**
  - **Head of School (HoS)**
  - **Deputy Head of School (DHoS)**

- **Strategy & Innovation Group**
  - **Head of Research (HoRG)**

- **Academic Programmes Cluster**
  - **Head of Undergraduate Programmes (HoUG)**
  - **Head of Postgraduate Programmes (HoPG)**

- **Learning & Teaching Cluster**
  - **Head of Learning & Teaching (HoLaT)**

- **Community Engagement Cluster**
  - **Head of Community Engagement (HoCE)**
I do not think that power can be delegated because I believe that genuine power is capacity. To confer power on HE staff may be an empty gesture. The main problem for HE staff is by no means how much control they can wrest from capital or management, often we hear that stated; that would be a merely nominal authority and would slip quickly from their grasp. Their problem is how much power they can themselves grow. The matter of HE staff control which is so often thought of as a matter of how much the senior managers will be willing to give up, is really as much a matter for the HE staff, how much will they be able to assume; where the senior managers come in is that they should give the HE staff (academic and professional) a chance to grow capacity or power for themselves and together.

Adapted from the words of the late Mary Parker Follett, in a paper addressed to the Bureau of Personnel Administration in January, 1925. She is regarded as a Management prophet ahead of her times.

Photo © H.Youngs
Ehara tenei toa i te toa takitahi
Engari ko tenei to ate toa takitini

Power does not belong to individuals alone.
Rather, it resides within the whole community.
References


