

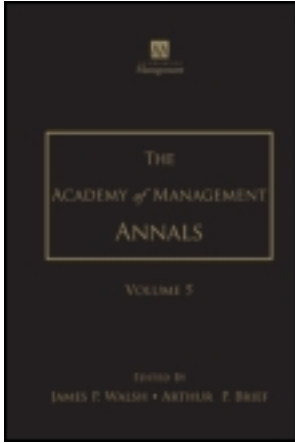
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Leadership in the Plural

Jean-Louis Denis ^a, Ann Langley ^b & Viviane Sergi ^b

^a École Nationale d'Administration Publique

^b HEC Montréal

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Leadership in the Plural

JEAN-LOUIS DENIS*

École Nationale d'Administration Publique

ANN LANGLEY

HEC Montréal

VIVIANE SERGI

HEC Montréal

Abstract

This paper reviews the literature on forms of leadership that in one way or other imply plurality: that is, the combined influence of multiple leaders in specific organizational situations. We identify four streams of scholarship on plural leadership, each focusing on somewhat different phenomena and adopting different epistemological and methodological assumptions. Specifically, these streams focus on sharing leadership in teams, on pooling leadership at the top of organizations, on spreading leadership across boundaries over time, and on producing leadership through interaction. The streams of research vary according to their representations of plural leadership as structured or emergent and as mutual or coalitional. We note tensions between perspectives that advocate pluralizing leadership in settings of concentrated authority and those concerned with channeling the forms of plurality naturally found in diffuse power settings such as professional organizations or inter-organizational partnerships. It is suggested that future research might

*Corresponding author. Email: jean-louis.denis@enap.ca

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pay more attention to social network perspectives, to the dynamics of plural leadership, to the role of power, and to critical perspectives on leadership discourse.

This paper aims to review and synthesize the growing body of organizational research and theorizing that examines leadership not as a property of individuals and their behaviors, but as a collective phenomenon that is distributed or shared among different people, potentially fluid, and constructed in interaction. A recent review of current theories and future directions in the leadership literature (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009) noted the emergence of research that attempts to reach beyond the “heroic” or “romantic” view of unitary leadership. However, the review did not examine this body of research in depth. Moreover, the review was limited to research in the field of social psychology and did not include bodies of work with a more sociological orientation that have also examined collective leadership phenomena. Other recent reviews of the notion of “distributed leadership” (e.g. Bolden, 2011; Currie & Lockett, 2011; Fitzsimons, James, & Denyer, 2011) have tended to emphasize specific organizational domains such as education and health care or have limited their attention to a subset of conceptualizations of plural leadership. In this paper, we draw together a range of research streams dealing with forms of plural leadership to provide a more comprehensive portrait of this growing field of scholarship and to identify future research opportunities within and across these streams.

Although some precursors can be identified from previous decades (Bales & Slater, 1955; Hodgson, Levinson, & Zalesnik, 1965; Hosking, 1988), most studies of plural forms of leadership have emerged over the 1990s and 2000s. Bryman (1996) and Pearce and Conger (2003) linked the emergence of research on plural forms of leadership to concepts such as superleadership (e.g. Manz & Sims, 1991), self-leadership (e.g. Kouzes & Posner, 1993), and empowerment (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Gronn (2002) dated the first mention of the term “distributed leadership” to Gibb (1954, p. 884), who noted in his treatise on leadership theories of the time that “Leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group.” Plural leadership theorizations have also been influenced by notions of leader-member exchange (Graen & Scandura, 1987), emergent leadership (Hollander, 1961), and participative leadership (Vroom & Yetton, 1973). Some conceptions of plural leadership extend beyond the idea that leadership can be shared between specific individuals to encompass possible reformulations of the notion of leadership itself as constituted by collective processes and interactions. For example, as synthesized by Fletcher (2004), leadership in the plural

[...] reenvisiones the « who » and « where » of leadership by focusing on the need to distribute the tasks and responsibilities of leadership up,

down, and across the hierarchy. It re-envisioned the « what » of leadership by articulating leadership as a social process that occurs in and through human interactions, and it articulates the « how » of leadership by focusing on the more mutual, less hierarchical leadership practices and skills needed to engage collaborative, collective learning. (p. 650)

An examination of the literature on plural notions of leadership quickly reveals a diversity of labels used to identify these forms, such as “shared”, “distributed”, “collective”, “collaborative”, “integrative”, “relational”, and “post-heroic”. A deeper investigation further reveals that although there are some central tendencies surrounding the meaning of these terms, there is also a good deal of inconsistency, with some scholars using different terms loosely and interchangeably and others adhering to narrower definitions (see Bolden, 2011, p. 5, for a historical perspective on the emergence of these terms). For this reason, we have chosen the broader label “leadership in the plural” to encompass the range of phenomena and their conceptualizations considered in these bodies of work. Moreover, in determining the most appropriate way to organize our review, we avoided classifying contributions strictly in terms of the specific labels used by authors and sought more substantive bases for categorization in terms of the phenomena considered and the dominant theoretical and methodological approaches used to consider them. These considerations led us to identify four distinct streams of scholarship that jointly cover the range of works accomplished on plural forms of leadership. Although there are overlaps at the margins, each stream emphasizes different types of situations and has attracted scholars with distinct epistemological, theoretical, and methodological orientations.

Specifically, the first stream, “Sharing leadership for team effectiveness”, focuses on a body of research largely based in the organizational behavior tradition that considers leadership as “. . . a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both” (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1). The empirical emphasis here is on mutual leadership within the context of groups. The second stream, “Pooling leadership capacities at the top to direct others”, focuses on empirical situations in which two, three, or more people jointly work together as co-leaders of others outside the group (Alvarez & Svejnova, 2005; Hodgson et al., 1965). This stream is perhaps best associated with the label “collective” leadership and has attracted scholars with a more managerial or sociological orientation. The third stream, “Spreading leadership within and across levels over time”, refers to work that has examined how leadership may be handed over between people from one hierarchical level to another over time as well as across intra-organizational and inter-organizational boundaries. This is the stream that is most associated with the term “distributed leadership” and that has been developed extensively

by researchers in education (Spillane, 2006) and those interested in inter-organizational collaboration (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Finally, the fourth stream, “Producing leadership through interaction”, moves furthest toward decentering the notion of leadership from individuals entirely, adopting “a view of leadership and organization as human social constructions that emanate from the rich connections and interdependencies of organizations and their members” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655). This perspective is most associated with the term “relational leadership”.

Table 1 illustrates the key dimensions of these four streams to be presented in depth in the following sections. For each stream, we identify its key empirical focus, the dominant theoretical and methodological orientations adopted, historical precursors, the most interesting claims emerging from contemporary contributions, and some critical reflections and suggestions for future research. After presenting these four streams separately, we compare and contrast their contributions, identify potential opportunities for cross-fertilization, and raise some broader critical issues concerning the past, present, and future of this area of scholarship.

Sharing Leadership for Team Effectiveness: Mutual Leadership in Groups

The first stream of research takes a functionalist approach to plural forms of leadership. The main objective is to better understand and find alternate sources of leadership that will impact positively on organizational performance. The studies mainly focus on the identification of antecedents and consequences of “shared leadership”, and they inform variance theories rather than process theories of leadership. Organizational behavior is the main source of disciplinary inspiration and empirical work involves hypothesis testing using quantitative methods. Scholars generally focus on shared leadership within the context of teams, defined here as “a simultaneous, ongoing, mutual influence process within a team that is characterized by ‘serial emergence’ of official as well as unofficial leaders” (Pearce, 2004, p. 48). We first discuss the historical roots of this stream of research. We then review contemporary contributions to the understanding of shared leadership and team effectiveness (summarized in Table 2), before assessing the progress so far and suggesting future developments.

Historical Roots

The origin of this stream of research can be located in the human relations school of management theory dating back to the 30 years between 1930 and 1960 (Pearce & Conger, 2003). For example, the early work of Mayo (1933) and Barnard (1938) underlined the importance of paying attention to the needs of employees. The recognition of the social and psychological

Table 1. Four Streams of Research on Leadership in the Plural

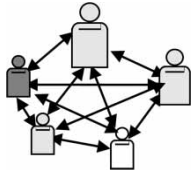
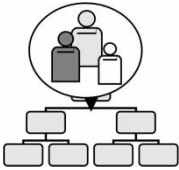
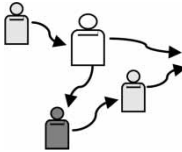

| | Sharing leadership for team effectiveness | Pooling leadership at the top to lead others | Spreading leadership across levels over time | Producing leadership through interactions |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Empirical focus | Mutual leadership in groups: members leading each other | Dyads, triads, and constellations as joint organizational leaders | Leadership relayed between people to achieve outcomes | Leadership as an emergent property of relations |
| |  |  |  |  |
| Particularly propitious contexts | Teams (product development, change teams, and crisis teams) | Knowledge-based organizations | Inter-organizational collaboration, public services, and education | Knowledge-based organizations |
| Historical precursors | Self-leadership (Manz & Sims, 1980, 1987) | Executive role constellations (Hodgson et al., 1965) | Leadership as distributed or focused (Gibb, 1954) | Practice theories of leadership (Hosking, 1988) |
| Dominant disciplinary perspectives | Organizational behavior and social psychology | Management, sociology, and psychodynamics | Sociology, educational administration, and public administration | Sociological perspectives |
| Dominant methodologies | Quantitative surveys and experiments | Qualitative case studies | Qualitative case studies and some surveys | Conceptual papers and ethnography |

Table 1. Four Streams of Research on Leadership in the Plural (Continued)

| | Sharing leadership for team effectiveness | Pooling leadership at the top to lead others | Spreading leadership across levels over time | Producing leadership through interactions |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Key contributors | Pearce and Conger (2003), Ensley, Hmieleski, and Pearce (2006), and Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone (2007) | Gronn (1999, 2002), Alvarez and Svejenova (2005), Denis, Langlely, and Cazale (1996), and Denis, Lamothe, and Langlely (2001) | Spillane, Camburn, and Pareja (2007), Huxham and Vangen (2000), and Currie, Lockett, and Suhomlinova (2009) | Uhl-Bien (2006); Crevani, Lindgren, and Packendorff (2010) and Raelin (2005) |
| Typical claims and findings within this literature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared leadership behaviors are positively related to team effectiveness • Vertical leaders and self-leadership contribute to shared leadership development • Task interdependence, complexity, and need for commitment are conditions conducive to shared leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pooled leadership bridges expertise and provides legitimacy in professionalized settings • Role specialization, differentiation, complementarity, and mutual trust sustain pooled leadership • Pooled leadership is fragile and shifts as leaders' actions are evaluated by others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful cross-boundary projects exhibit leadership relays over time • Structures, routines, and artifacts contribute to distributed leadership practices • Tensions between accountability pressures and needs for participation inhibit distributed leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership is an emergent organizing process and relationally elaborated by actors in situation • Leadership is dissociated from individuals, located in practices, and created in communication • Relational leadership is associated with democratic values |

Critiques and limitations

- Assumes shared goals
- Power issues missed
- No consideration of the influence of shared leadership on the role of formal leaders
- Lack of clarity in boundaries between leaders and others
- Limited attention to dynamics over time
- Ambiguity on what constitutes leadership
- Over-enthusiasm for distributed leadership (becomes “discourse”)
- Power issues strongly overlooked
- Power overlooked
- Risk of diluting the notion of leadership
- Relational leadership becomes an ideology

Future extensions

- Studies of sharing in multilevel teams
- Consideration of the influence of status and power on the ability to develop self-leadership and shared leadership
- Network operationalizations of shared leadership
- Quantitative studies of success and sustainability
- More attention to dynamics
- More attention to contingencies for pooled leadership
- More attention to the role of artifacts/materiality
- More investment in empirical studies
- Consideration of power relations in leadership roles
- Convergence with work on coordination across boundaries
- More comparative case studies
- Consideration of asymmetrical relationships, power positions, and dysfunctional dynamics

Table 2. Sharing Leadership for Team Effectiveness: Mutual Leadership in Groups

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Bligh, Pearce, and Kohles (2006) | <i>Predictive:</i> How does self-leadership influence the development of shared leadership in team? | Conceptual paper based on a literature review | <i>Concept of self-leadership as a determinant of shared leadership:</i> Self-leadership influences the development of shared leadership through a range of intermediary variables such as trust, potency, and commitment |
| Burke, Fiore, and Salas (2003) | <i>Predictive:</i> What is the influence of cognitive factors on the development of shared leadership? | Conceptual paper based on a literature review | <i>Identification of a variety of cognitive constructs that are involved in the constitution of shared leadership:</i> Shared cognition and situational variables have an impact on team leadership and team adaptiveness |
| Carson et al. (2007) | <i>Predictive:</i> What are the determinants of shared leadership in teams? How do they impact performance? | Survey of 59 consulting teams in an MBA program. Use of social network analysis to assess shared leadership | <i>Identification of internal and external determinants of shared leadership:</i> Internal team environment (shared purpose, social support, and voice) has a positive impact on shared leadership. External coaching may compensate for deficiencies in internal team environment. Shared leadership is positively associated with performance |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Carte, Chidambaram, and Becker (2006) | <i>Predictive:</i> Which leadership behaviors of virtual teams are associated with team performance? | Longitudinal study of virtual student teams in American universities | <i>Identification of the impact of specific leadership behaviors on virtual team performance:</i> Concentrated leadership based on producer behavior and shared leadership based on monitor behavior are associated with team performance. Leadership behaviors develop early and decay through time |
| Day, Gronn, and Salas (2004) | <i>Predictive:</i> What is the role of team processes in the development of shared leadership? | Conceptual paper based on a literature review | <i>Identification of key team processes that support the development of shared leadership:</i> The nature of teamwork, learning process within teams, and specific interventions can have a positive influence on the development of shared leadership |
| Ensley, Pearson, and Pearce (2003) | <i>Predictive:</i> What is the impact of shared leadership on the performance of new ventures? | Conceptual paper based on a literature review | <i>Identification of a set of intermediary and situational variables that impact on the relation of shared leadership with firm performance:</i> Identification of the impact of shared leadership on team characteristics such as cohesion and collective vision. Identification of the role of resources constraints, risks, and ambiguity in mediating the impact of shared leadership on performance |

Table 2. Sharing Leadership for Team Effectiveness: Mutual Leadership in Groups (Continued)

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Ensley et al. (2006) | <i>Predictive:</i> What are the roles of vertical and shared leadership in the performance of new ventures? | Survey of managers among two samples of new venture firms (500 firms for each sample) | <i>Assessment of the role of self-leadership and shared leadership in new venture performance:</i> Shared leadership has a stronger influence on firm performance than vertical leadership. Specific behaviors of leaders influence the potential of vertical and shared leadership. Vertical leadership behaviors impact leadership behaviors of team |
| Fernandez, Cho, and Perry (2010) | <i>Predictive:</i> What is the impact of integrated leadership on the performance of public programs? | Survey of 390,657 civil servants | <i>Integrated leadership roles have a positive impact on performance:</i> Individuals in managerial and non-managerial positions share a variety of leadership roles. Performance of a full range of roles (integrated leadership) has a positive impact on performance |
| Hiller, Day, and Vance (2006) | <i>Predictive:</i> What is the influence of collective team leadership on team performance? | Survey of road teams from transportation departments in the USA | <i>Identification of leadership behaviors that predict performance:</i> Teams that present higher levels of collective leadership defined as the concertive enactment of leadership behaviors demonstrated higher performance. Power distance among team members is negatively related to collective leadership |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| Houghton, Neck, and Manz (2003) | <i>Predictive:</i> What are the roles of vertical leadership and self-leadership in the development of shared leadership? | Conceptual paper based on a literature review | <i>Identification of the role of vertical leaders and self-leaders in the promotion of shared leadership:</i> Vertical leaders can develop specific actions to support the development of self-leadership. Self-leaders are instrumental in developing team processes supportive of shared leadership |
| Mehra, Smith, Dixon, and Robertson (2006) | <i>Predictive:</i> What is the impact of the social structure of teams on team performance? | Use of social network data on 28 sales teams to delineate the leadership structure of groups | <i>Identification of the effect of distributed leadership network structure on team performance:</i> Characteristics of leadership structure have an impact on team performance. Distributed leadership by itself is not necessarily correlated with higher team performance |
| Morgeson, DeRue, and Karam (2010) | <i>Predictive:</i> What is the relation between leadership sources and team leadership functions? | Conceptual paper based on a literature review | <i>Identification of a set of leadership sources and team leadership functions:</i> Development of a framework to understand how teams fulfill their leadership needs |
| Pearce (2004) | <i>Normative:</i> Why are vertical leadership and shared leadership important? | Practitioner-oriented paper based on a literature review | <i>A series of questions for the development of shared leadership in organizations:</i> Definition of the respective roles of vertical and shared leadership in leveraging knowledge work. Identification of organizational characteristics that favor shared leadership |

Table 2. Sharing Leadership for Team Effectiveness: Mutual Leadership in Groups (Continued)

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Pearce and Manz (2005) | <i>Normative:</i> Why self-leadership and shared leadership are important in contemporary organizations? | Practitioner-oriented paper based on vignette (e.g. Braille Institute of America), experience, and literature | <i>Set of contextual factors that appear to favor self-leadership and shared leadership:</i> Urgency, interdependence, and complexity are among situational variables that require more plural form of leadership. Organizations can develop deliberate interventions to support shared leadership |
| Pearce and Sims (2002) | <i>Predictive:</i> What are the roles of vertical and shared leadership in team performance? | Survey of 236 teams at time 1 for leadership measures and at time 2 for team effectiveness measures | <i>Assessment of the role of self-leadership and shared leadership in team effectiveness:</i> Shared leadership appears to be a stronger determinant of team effectiveness than vertical leadership. Specific behaviors of leaders influence the potential of vertical and shared leadership |
| Pearce, Conger, and Locke (2007) | <i>Normative:</i> What are the respective roles of individual and shared leadership in organizations? | Debates among scholars in the field of leadership study | <i>Identification of different meanings and implications of shared leadership in organizations:</i> Different views on shared leadership are debated. Divergence resides mostly in the role that scholars recognize for individual-hierarchical leadership in the context of shared leadership |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Pearce, Manz, and Sims (2009) | <i>Normative:</i> Why is shared leadership important in modern organizations? | Practitioner-oriented paper | <i>Identification of a series of issues around the development of shared leadership in contemporary organizations:</i> What is meant by shared leadership, why we need shared leadership, and are organizations good to promote shared leadership? |
| Solansky (2008) | <i>Predictive:</i> What are the advantages of teams with share leadership over teams with single leaders? | Laboratory study of 20 work teams. Survey of team members using questionnaires | <i>Identification of advantages of shared leadership for teams:</i> Teams with shared leadership have a higher sense of collective efficacy and a more developed transactive memory system. They also demonstrate lower scores on relational conflict. Overall, shared leadership favors team characteristics that promote team effectiveness |
| Vandewaere, Voudeckers, Lambrechts, and Bammens (2011) | <i>Predictive:</i> What are the predictors and the consequences of shared leadership within governing boards? | Conceptual paper based on a literature review | <i>Identification of the antecedents and consequences of shared leadership within the context of boards:</i> Individual board members' characteristics influence the development of shared leadership. The impact of shared leadership on board performance is mediated by task complexity and interdependence |

dimensions of work, including the potential for intrinsic motivation, provides a rationale to engage employees in a broader range of roles including leadership. The work on participatory management and decision-making (Drucker, 1954; Vroom & Yetton, 1973) further suggested that leaders in formal appointed positions have a role in developing a context that supports employee participation.

A more contemporary expression of this approach to leadership is found in the work of Burns (1978) and Bennis and Nanus (1985) on transformational leadership. According to this literature, leaders and followers are engaged in a reciprocal relationship and their interactions are considered critical to achieving better performance and higher morale and motivation (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). The transformational approach to leadership broke with more traditional perspectives where the role of followers was limited to execution. Through their attitudes and behaviors, transformational leaders develop the leadership potential of followers and consequently favor the emergence of more plural forms of leadership and superior organizational performance.

Another source of inspiration can be found in streams of work on emergent leadership in groups dating back to the 1950s (Bales & Slater, 1955; Gibb, 1950; Hollander, 1961), where scholars examined how and why leadership roles come to be defined in the absence of external leader designations (see also Bartol & Martin, 1986; Hollander, 1974) and where the possibility that different individuals might come to play different leadership roles within the group was proposed based on the idea that “task functions” and “expressive functions” within groups might require people with different and complementary talents (Bales & Slater, 1955). The emphasis on leadership in relation to group dynamics was further developed in a more recent work on self-leadership, team autonomy, empowerment, and self-management in teams (Hackman, 1987; Manz & Sims, 1980, 1987). Self-managed teams have greater responsibility in establishing their own goals, in monitoring their own progress, and in decision-making. This means that individual group members will necessarily have to assume leadership roles and functions. Again, the assumption behind work on self-management is that shared leadership will take place only if group members are empowered to engage in leadership roles or processes.

In summary, a diverse set of influences have shaped the approach to plural leadership adopted within this stream. The motivation of individual organizational members is recognized as a basic ingredient from which shared or plural leadership can develop. It is because these works set aside any assumption of a natural inclination for opportunistic behaviors by organizational members that involvement in leadership roles becomes legitimate and accessible to a wider group of individuals. In addition, in the spirit of the writings on transformational leadership, shared leadership is seen to be nourished by deliberate management intervention. Leaders in formal authority positions can adopt different roles to support the expression of leadership behaviors

among organizational members or followers. Plural leadership is seen here as an instrument for the achievement of organizational objectives.

Contemporary Contributions

Self-leadership as a Mechanism of Shared Leadership. Within this research stream, the main focus is on the antecedents and consequences of shared leadership in the context of teams. Self-leadership is considered by several researchers to be a prerequisite for team leadership (Houghton et al., 2003). Self-leadership is defined as “a process through which people influence themselves to achieve the self-direction and self-motivation needed to perform” (Houghton et al., 2003, p. 126). This definition of self-leadership strongly reflects the anchor of this body of work in organizational behavior where the fundamental unit of analysis is the individual within groups or organizational contexts. To take into account the role of self-leadership in the development of shared leadership, Bligh et al. (2006) proposed a meso-level model of shared leadership in team-based knowledge work. According to this model, self-leadership is based on a series of processes through which individuals influence themselves: individual trust, self-efficacy, and individual commitment. It is expected that the expression of self-leadership will have an influence on the development of team characteristics in term of trust, potency, and commitment. It is further argued that teams with higher levels of trust, potency, and commitment will be in a better position to engage in and sustain processes of mutual influence among members and consequently the sharing of leadership roles and responsibilities. One of the basic assumptions behind this model is that certain conditions have to be in place to ensure a smooth transference of leadership functions among team members (Burke et al., 2003).

For example, while the development of self-leadership can be promoted by deliberate managerial interventions and supportive organizational contexts, it is expected that the presence of more qualified employees typical of contemporary knowledge-based organizations will provide fertile ground for higher levels of self-leadership and consequently for the development of shared leadership (Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Manz, 2005). There is thus explicit recognition that shared leadership is more likely to develop in contexts where individuals have distinctive expertise that requires them to exert some autonomy as well as to achieve task integration with others.

Co-Existence of Vertical and Shared Leadership for Team Effectiveness. This stream of literature nevertheless emphasizes quite strongly the idea that the development of self-leadership and shared leadership can (and indeed should) be “managed”. Specifically, it is argued that formal appointed leaders can create the conditions to transform followers into leaders (Bennis &

Nanus, 1985; Diaz-Saenz, 2011). The role of formal leaders in promoting shared leadership within teams has been studied empirically by Pearce and various colleagues (Ensley et al. 2006; Pearce & Sims, 2002).

For example, using a longitudinal survey design, Pearce and Sims (2002) examined the impact of vertical and shared leadership within 71 change management teams created as part of a continuous quality improvement initiative of a large automotive manufacturing firm in the USA. Vertical leadership is defined as the appointment of a formal leader to a team. Shared leadership is defined as a form of distributed leadership that emerges from within team dynamics. The empirical findings show that shared leadership has a strong impact on perceived team effectiveness. Moreover, vertical leadership also plays an important role, suggesting that these two alternate sources of leadership should not be considered as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary. The researchers also tested the impact of five classic leadership behaviors on team effectiveness: aversive, directive, transactional, transformational, and empowering leadership. They observed that both vertical and shared aversive and vertical and shared directive leadership behaviors have a negative impact on team effectiveness. In contrast, vertical and shared transformational and shared empowering leadership behaviors are associated with positive self-ratings of team effectiveness. They also observed that behaviors of vertical leaders influence the behaviors of team members in a context of shared leadership. One of the main conclusions of this paper is that in order to reduce the prevalence of directive and aversive leadership behaviors within a team, leaders in formal leadership positions (vertical leadership) need to rely less on these leadership behaviors. In addition, these findings suggest that shared leadership may rely on a diverse set of leadership roles that may be more or less predictive of team effectiveness.

In another study using a survey methodology, Ensley et al. (2006) analyzed the role of vertical and shared leadership among two different samples of startup firms. The results show that shared leadership among top management team members explains more variance in firm performance than vertical leadership. However, vertical leadership still plays an important role. In addition, the authors found that when team members demonstrate higher levels of directive, transactional, transformational, and empowering leadership behaviors, the performance of the new venture is higher.

Another set of studies aims to understand the role played by different contextual and mediator variables in the influence of shared leadership on team and organizational effectiveness. For example, Ensley et al. (2003) developed a conceptual model that combines insights from studies on entrepreneurship, group process, leadership, and top management teams. In their input-process-output model, shared leadership is conceived of as an antecedent variable which promotes cohesion and collective vision among top management team members. High team cohesion and the sharing of collective vision will

then impact positively on firm performance. Their model also posits that a set of situational variables, namely time, resource constraints, and risk ambiguity, will mediate the influence of shared leadership on team cohesion and the emergence of a collective vision. The development of more sophisticated multivariate models that document the causal chain from the antecedents of shared leadership to its consequences on team leadership and effectiveness represents an emerging preoccupation within this stream of research with contexts varying from boards of directors (Vandewaerde, Voordeckers, Lambrechts, & Bammens, 2011) to selling teams (Perry, Pearce, & Sims, 1999). However, much of this work still remains at a purely conceptual level.

One exception is an empirical study by Carson et al. (2007) on shared leadership and performance in a sample of 59 teams in an MBA program. The antecedents of shared leadership are defined in terms of the internal team environment composed of shared purpose, social support, and voice. It is also hypothesized that shared leadership will be influenced by external coaching, a variable somewhat similar to the constructive role that the transformational vertical leader can play in team development. One of the originalities of this empirical study is the assessment of the level of development of shared leadership using social network analysis. The empirical findings suggest a positive relation between a strong internal team environment and the development of shared leadership. In addition, external coaching may compensate for a lack of strong internal team environment in supporting the development of shared leadership. Finally, as observed in other empirical studies (Table 1), shared leadership is positively related to team performance.

From another perspective, the work by Burke et al. (2003) and Solansky (2008) pays attention to the socio-cognitive processes involved in the development and consequences of shared leadership. In their review of work on shared cognition and shared leadership, Burke et al. (2003) examined the cognitive implications of transferring leadership functions among team members. They developed a model of the knowledge structure of the team as a predictor of shared leadership and team adaptability. Their model suggests that shared mental models among team members favor the coordination of their action. A series of attitudinal variables related to collective self-efficacy, collective orientation, and open climate act in synergy with the cognitive variables to support shared leadership in the team. The research by Solansky (2008) consists of a laboratory study of 20 work teams during a 16-week period where teams compete with each other in various activities. Team participants were surveyed to assess the difference in collective efficacy, relational conflict, and transactive memory system between teams with shared leadership and teams with single (i.e. non-shared) leadership. Empirical results indicated that teams with shared leadership had higher motivational and cognitive advantages than teams with non-shared leadership. These studies reveal the importance of cognitive processes in supporting and sustaining shared leadership.

Overall, these studies suggest that shared leadership has the potential to generate higher team and firm performance and that specific leadership behaviors adopted by team members and formal appointed leaders influence the contributions of vertical and shared leadership to performance (Day et al. 2004). A set of situational variables associated with the broader organizational context or the internal environment of teams also influence the development of shared leadership and its consequences for team effectiveness. Throughout these studies, the interdependence between vertical leadership and shared leadership is revealed. In their own leadership roles, vertical leaders may compensate for deficiencies in team functioning or limit the ability of team members to develop productive shared leadership roles. In addition, cognitive structures that develop within the context of groups may influence the development and sustainability of more plural forms of leadership.

Roles and Functions Shared by Leaders. Another series of papers has emphasized the detailed analysis of leadership roles and functions performed by groups. These works are interesting as they attempt to open up the black box of more collective forms of leadership. For example, Fernandez et al. (2010) developed the concept of “integrated leadership” and empirically analyzed its potential to predict public sector performance. Integrated leadership is conceived “as the combination of five leadership roles that are performed collectively by employees and managers at different levels of the hierarchy” (Fernandez et al., 2010, p. 308). These five leadership roles, seen as essential to succeed as a leader in the public sector, are task-oriented leadership, relation-oriented leadership, change-oriented leadership, diversity-oriented leadership, and integrity-oriented leadership. Because these roles are very demanding, it is argued that a more plural form of leadership becomes almost a necessity to properly fulfill them. This idea seems to be related to Bales and Slater’s (1955) earlier notion that task-oriented and expressive leadership might demand different individuals. Based on an empirical survey of a population of U.S. public servants, Fernandez et al. (2010) concluded that integrated leadership has a positive impact on the performance of public programs. This study, like the one by Pearce and colleagues on vertical and shared leadership, provides additional empirical support for the importance of specific leadership roles or behaviors in determining the potential for more plural forms of leadership. Using a different typology of leadership functions, Carte et al. (2006) in a study of students’ virtual teams have also identified a set of leadership roles that appear to positively influence team effectiveness.

While it is not easy to assess the potential of the different typologies used to empirically study the leadership roles of collective entities, it appears from these studies that shared leadership can be more or less functional according to the capacity of groups to implement key leadership roles or functions. These roles and functions may also vary over time, which suggests that there may be benefits

to incorporating more processual approaches into the study of shared leadership within this tradition (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2006; Morgeson et al., 2010).

Assessment and Future Directions

Overall, this research stream has recognized shared leadership as a legitimate organizational phenomenon, reflecting a movement from “outward” to “inward” influence in leadership studies. Outward influence refers to a model of leadership that is essentially based on vertical leadership, while inward influence is based on self-leadership and shared leadership resulting from team processes. A key implication of this body of work is that shared leadership can be highly desirable for the functioning and performance of teams and organizations and that it can be considered as a valuable “instrument” for goal attainment.

The particular attention paid to teams is somewhat related to the growing role of team-based arrangements in contemporary organizations. According to Pearce (2004) and Pearce and Manz (2005), with the greater prevalence of knowledge-based organizations characterized by task complexity and highly qualified employees, shared leadership becomes a common source of leadership rather than the exception. While shared leadership is often encouraged by the leadership behaviors of formal appointed leaders, highly skilled knowledge workers are more inclined to take charge of leadership roles and responsibilities. Shared leadership is thus both a deliberate and an emergent phenomenon as managers face more and more pressures to share leadership with other organizational members. In addition, Pearce (2004) and Pearce and Manz (2005) identified a series of conditions such as issue urgency, the need for employee commitment and creativity, the level of interdependence, and the degree of task complexity that justify the development of shared leadership. Yet calls for more plural forms of leadership do not necessarily imply significant *power-sharing* between an organizational elite and ordinary organizational members. Sharing in this research stream still appears to be seen as the gift of vertical leaders. Moreover, the research clearly emphasizes an ongoing role for vertical leaders in support of and in parallel with sharing.

The distinctive contribution of this research stream thus lies in its preoccupation with widening the notion of leadership to consider the participation of other team members while maintaining a clear focus on its conditions for effectiveness. The stream’s strengths are those of its disciplinary origins: an emphasis on developing cumulative knowledge through the elaboration and empirical testing of multivariate models based on social–psychological theories with a functionalist orientation (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2009). The team-level unit of analysis favored in these studies builds on a foundation of previous group and team research (Morgeson et al., 2010) and facilitates the bounding of the phenomenon in empirical studies.

Remaining within this research paradigm, there is a clear opportunity for more theoretical and empirical works. For example, the cognitive dimensions of shared leadership might be the focus of further exploration to understand how deep cognitive structures influence the development of shared leadership. In contexts characterized by complex and interdependent tasks and a high degree of ambiguity, cognitive processes may make the difference in determining the potential of shared leadership to improve performance. Promising developments might also be found in greater application of social network analysis to understanding group dynamics and the emergence of leaders in teams (Carson et al., 2007; Gockel & Werth, 2010; Mehra et al., 2006). For example, in a recent paper on the social network approach to leadership, Balkundi and Kilduff (2005) proposed a model of how cognitive and opportunity structures influence leadership effectiveness. They argued that the ability to become a leader (formal or informal) is influenced by the accuracy by which people decode their social environment. The perceptions of individuals about current patterns of relationships, embeddedness of relations, social capital, and social structure within their environment may influence their ability to achieve leadership positions. Social network analysis has the potential to describe in a fine-grained detail the structure of shared leadership roles (often measured by aggregate indicators in many existing studies) both within teams and across whole organizations.

This research stream also has some blind spots. For example, the strong emphasis on links to performance and the implicit assumption that sharing is a choice under the control of vertical leaders underplays the possibility of conflict or opportunism and fails to recognize the political dynamics inherent to many organizational settings where influence-sharing may not be a managerial choice but a *de facto* condition of organizational life. The work on shared leadership within the social–psychological tradition has also paid little attention to the dialectic between vertical/unitary leadership and more plural forms. While the potential impact of vertical leaders on shared leadership has been extensively considered, no attention has been paid to the influence of shared leadership on the role and practices of formally appointed leaders. In addition, shared leadership is studied among relatively homogeneous groups of organizational members or followers. For example, we found no studies in this research tradition that examined shared leadership in groups mixing senior executives and middle managers. A debate published in 2007 in *Leadership Quarterly* between Pearce and Conger, on the one side, and Locke, on the other side, confirms that this stream of work still struggles between an expanded and a confined representation of shared leadership. Shared leadership can be more or less redistributed within the organizational hierarchy. It can also mean more or less sharing among organizational members of key decisions and orientations that affect the organization and their work context.

In addition, the conceptual and methodological traditions of this research stream, embedded as they are within a broader tradition of leadership research that emphasizes almost exclusively variance models and quantitative methods (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2009), may have limitations when it comes to examining in finer detail the nature of shared leadership in organizations and the processes associated with its emergence and development.

Pooling Leadership at the Top to Direct Others: Dyads, Triads, and Constellations

While for many authors, plurality in leadership seems to be associated with conceptions of democracy, empowerment, and participation among members of a team who mutually lead each other (as suggested in the work described in the previous section), in some situations, plurality in leadership is clearly more structurally embedded. Moreover, a structurally plural group can become a collective source of leadership for people outside it.

Indeed, by institutionalized mandate or sometimes by common consent, in some organizations, top leadership roles may be formally structured so that no single individual is invested with the power to lead unilaterally. Despite some authors' resistance to the idea that such a division of roles could be sustainable in the real world (Locke, 2003; Schumpeter, 2010), it remains that in many contexts, including professional organizations, the arts, education, and health care and even in entrepreneurial ventures and large enterprises, not only leadership, but authority may also sometimes be formally divided. For example, arts organizations very often have co-leaders who represent, respectively, the artistic and administrative sides of the organization (Reid & Karambayya, 2009). Healthcare organizations have been historically labeled as "three-legged stools" because of divisions of powers between community, management, and medicine (Denis et al., 2001; Johnson, 1979). In Norway, newspapers have a dual leadership structure with the top job being shared between the chief editor and the business manager. In the same context, higher education institutions have recently moved from unitary to dual leadership where academic and administrative leaders share the top job, while healthcare organizations have moved in the opposite direction (Fjellvaer, 2010). UK law firms have dual business and practice leaders (Empson, 2010), the partnership or entrepreneurial team is a very common leadership form in small businesses (Gartner, Shaver, Gatewood, & Katz, 1994; Harper, 2008), and some very famous large businesses have been run successfully for many years by co-CEOs (e.g. Goldman-Sachs and Google; Alvarez & Svejnova, 2005).

Gronn (2002) reviewed the literature on situations such as these, focusing explicitly on studies of situations involving the existence of a numerically limited number of people (generally two to four) who conjointly were believed to exert leadership. He did not exclude the possibility that there might be some

hierarchical ordering between members of a leadership group, but insisted on the idea that it is only through their collective contribution that leadership may be recognized, suggesting a shift in the unit of analysis from the individual to the small leadership group.

Note that in this conceptualization of leadership in the plural, there is no implication that leadership is distributed more widely beyond a particular focal group that occupies a top position within the organization. In the next subsection, we shall consider the literature where such an extension of the notion of plurality is made explicitly. The current focus does, however, raise a host of questions. For example, how do individuals sharing formal positions jointly exert their leadership roles or, as Gronn and Hamilton (2004) put it, how do they constitute their “shared role space”? What enables these groups to hang together or alternatively to fall apart? How does such a group maintain itself as it interacts with the rest of the organization? Finally, can a plurality really be the source of the kind of incisive vision that is often associated with successful leadership? Table 3 summarizes a set of studies that have begun to address these questions.

Historical Roots

The notion that two or more people might occupy a single leadership space within an organization has always exerted a certain fascination. While the early managerial literature saw such an arrangement as unstable or doomed, with Fayol (1917) including “unity of command” as one of the basic principles of management, a number of other contributions have questioned this. Some of these contributions, including those of Etzioni (1965), Senger (1971), and Hodgson et al. (1965), drew on the theories of Bales and Slater (1955) concerning the importance of both expressive and instrumental leadership functions in small groups and the rarity of their co-existence within a single individual.

A particularly influential and interesting precursor is Hodgson et al.’s (1965) book on *The executive role constellation*. Hodgson et al. (1965) studied in detail the top leadership team of a psychiatric hospital, composed of a triumvirate of leaders who jointly covered the multiple roles needed to orient this organization and mobilize its members. While one member focused on overall vision and positioning with respect to external actors, a second operated in closer relationship with lower level employees (emphasizing the “expressive function”), and the third contributed by effective organization of formal management systems (emphasizing the “task function”). Hodgson et al. (1965) concluded that their successful collaboration made them into a “constellation”: a collective leadership form in which members play roles that are specialized (i.e. each operates in particular areas of expertise), differentiated (i.e. avoiding excessive overlap in roles that would create confusion), and complementarity (i.e. they jointly cover all the required areas of leadership intervention). They argued

Table 3. Pooling leadership at the top to direct others: Dyads, triads, and constellations

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| Alvarez and Svejnova (2005) | <i>Contingent:</i> What are the origins, dynamics, facilitating conditions, and problems with “small numbers at the top” leadership? | Study based on initial fieldwork in creative industries, supplemented by archival data. No clear methodology presented | <i>Conditions for integration of interdependent roles at the top:</i> Shared cognition, trust, and affection <i>Contingency framework for aligning small number structures with corporate power contingencies:</i> Duos and trios are better at internal management and understanding environmental uncertainties, but confused accountability and career rivalries may cause difficulties |
| Court (2004) | <i>Dynamic:</i> How do school co-principalships emerge and evolve? Why are these forms continued or discontinued? | <i>Case study:</i> Interviews with co-principals and others at 3-month intervals over 5 years | <i>Example of a failed co-principalship:</i> Study shows complexities of co-principalship in a context where this is not the default mode and when the designated co-leader is not ready to assume a leadership role and continually plays the role of a follower |
| Dass (1995) | <i>Illustrative:</i> What are the behaviors of leaders in a co-principalship relationship? | Four-month ethnographic study shadowing co-principals, observations, and 44 interviews with staff, parents, and officials | <i>Metaphor of co-principalship as family relationship:</i> Portrait of effective trusting partnership in which individuals interchanged responsibilities fluidly according to availability, expertise, and preference generating a collective capacity to achieve change |

Table 3. Pooling leadership at the top to direct others: Dyads, triads, and constellations (Continued)

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|---------------------|--|---|---|
| Denis et al. (2001) | <i>Dynamic:</i> How can leaders achieve strategic change where leadership roles are shared, objectives are divergent, and power is diffuse? | Five case studies in health care organizations, 100+ interviews, and 54 meeting observations and documentary evidence | <i>Dynamic model of collective leadership and strategic change:</i> Strategic change in pluralistic contexts is a cyclical process in which collective leadership groups (constellations) promote change through their actions, but where these actions simultaneously alter the form and viability of the leadership group as their legitimacy is re-evaluated by others |
| Fjellvaer (2010) | <i>Contingent:</i> How are tensions between divergent logics within pluralistic organizations managed under dual and unitary leadership regimes? | Interviews with 63 leaders in 27 different organizations within the four domains of the arts (orchestras, museums, and theaters), newspapers, health care, and higher education | <i>Model of relationship between leadership structures and management of competing logics:</i> Leaders adopt a range of practices that can be classified as relational, structural, or cognitive to manage conflicting logics in pluralistic settings. Relational approaches involve developing relationships between key actors. In structural approaches, leaders join or separate leadership domains. Cognitive approaches rely on developing an understanding of alternative logics |
| Gronn (1999) | <i>Illustrative:</i> How can leadership couples substitute for individual leaders? | Single case, archival data including extensive correspondence between leaders | <i>Concept of the leadership couple as a “substitute” for individual leaders:</i> Identification of pre-role rehearsal (experience working together), reciprocity, discretionary space, and compatible temperaments as facilitators of joint leadership |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Gronn and Hamilton (2004) | <i>Illustrative:</i> How does co-principalship enable distributed leadership? | <i>Single case study:</i> Observation of co-principals over 7 working days and 29 interviews of staff and students | <i>Illustration of distributed leadership practice as that occurring in a fluid “shared role space inhabited by a distributed mind”:</i> Notes importance of interdependence, trust, and complementarity and identifies five practices: paralleling, anticipating, positioning, pooling, and retrieving that enhance organizational capability and identity |
| Heenan and Bennis (1999) | <i>Illustrative/normative:</i> How do CEO–COO pairs work together? | Archival research on 13 CEO–COO pairs | <i>Checklists of pieces of advice for COOs and co-leader pairs concerning self-knowledge, trust, identity, strategy, career development, etc.</i> |
| Hodgson et al. (1965) | <i>Illustrative:</i> How do multiple individuals effectively share leadership roles in a complex organization? | Single case study of a psychiatric hospital, focusing on the roles of three leaders that shared the top position | <i>Concept of the executive role constellation:</i> A constellation is a group of top leaders who share instrumental and affective roles between them in such a way that each individual plays specialized, differentiated, and complementary roles. This formation is believed to offer effective leadership |
| O’Toole, Galbraith, and Lawler (2002) | <i>Illustrative:</i> When are two (or more) leadership heads better than one? | Practitioner-oriented paper based on vignettes and experience (e.g. Intel and GE) | <i>Set of factors that appear to facilitate effective plural leadership at the top:</i> Playing different but complementary roles, selecting for compatibility, and mechanisms of coordination |

Table 3. Pooling leadership at the top to direct others: Dyads, triads, and constellations (Continued)

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Reid and Karambayya (2009) | <i>Dynamic:</i> How do dual executive leaders work with conflict in their relations? What impact does conflict have on others? | Eight case studies of arts organizations. Interviews with 79 people including duos and collaborators | <i>Model of how conflict within a duo leads to dissemination to other levels and influences organizational processes:</i> Different types of conflicts (task oriented, process oriented, and emotionally oriented) lead to different forms of dissemination. The most damaging form of conflict is emotional in part because it leads to abdication and this is very demoralizing. |
| Sally (2002) | <i>Illustrative:</i> What can business learn from leadership practices of republican Rome? | Relating business anecdotes to historical descriptions of how consular system worked in Republican Rome (e.g. based on Livy) | <i>Recommendations for effective co-leadership:</i> Co-leaders arrive and depart together and have no chance of a solo role, roles are equivalent, only one office, co-leadership is diffused to other levels, each co-leader has veto power, no sacrosanct areas, no speaking ill of the other, and mobilizes duality and humility. |
| Stewart (1991) | <i>Illustrative:</i> What is the relationship between chairs and chief executives after the introduction of general management in the NHS? | Longitudinal study over 2 years with 20 executives, 25+ interviews per executive, interviews with chairs, and meeting observations | <i>View of the chair–chief executive relationship as a complementary partnership:</i> Shape of partnership is dependent on role expectations of both but especially the chair. There is important mutual dependence in roles. Synergy was created when there was role complementarity. |

that these features are necessary for an “aggregate” of top leaders to become an effective “executive role constellation”.

Another historical inspiration for work on leadership groups was role theory (Graen, 1976; Katz & Kahn, 1978), which examines how individuals send and receive signals from potential co-leaders and others concerning the roles that they should, respectively, be playing and how through this process roles are mutually negotiated leading to some kind of stabilization in relationships. DeRue and Ashford (2010) explored a similar idea, but focusing on identities rather than on roles, suggesting that identities as leaders and followers are co-created in interaction as people make leadership claims that are or are not recognized by others. Building on a role theory framework, Stewart (1991) examined chair–chief executive relationships in the UK National Health Service, showing how these relationships very often evolved toward complementary leadership partnerships similar to the constellations described by Hodgson et al. (1965), as expectations were mutually communicated and negotiated over time. Stewart’s (1991) study marks the beginning of a renewal of interest in numerically bounded groups as leaders beginning in the mid-1990s and extending into the 2000s.

Contemporary Contributions

Illustrating Patterns of Pooled Collective Leadership. Studies of numerically bounded leadership groups have taken several forms. One set of studies is largely *illustrative*. These studies are concerned with showing how and why such plural leadership forms can be effective. Some of these contributions are more practitioner oriented, drawing lessons from experience presented in the form of vignettes (Heenan & Bennis, 1999; O’Toole et al., 2002) or comparing contemporary examples with the principles of the Roman consular system (Sally, 2002; Table 3). However, others follow the example of Hodgson et al. (1965), in developing detailed systematic analyses of successful leadership groups based on close observation and sometimes archival sources. For example, in the field of education, Dass (1995) conducted an ethnographic study of a school co-principalship in which the two protagonists developed a form of “integrative practice”. Also in the education sector, Gronn (1999) and Gronn and Hamilton (2004) described successful collaborations, one based on hierarchical relations between a principal and a headmaster operating a school (Gronn, 1999) and the other in which two individuals shared the principalship equally. Dass (1995) and Gronn and Stewart (1991) emphasized how intuitive mutual adjustment of roles within the “shared role space” characterizes these relationships, as does recognition of interdependence, trust, and commitment to a common vision. Similar themes return again in Alvarez and Svejenova’s (2005) study of dyads and trios in the executive suite and in Heenan and Bennis’ (1999) analysis of effective CEO–COO pairs.

Overall, these contributions nuance Hodgson et al.'s (1965) early idea that roles need to be specialized and strongly differentiated in leadership groups (although all authors re-emphasize the importance of complementarity). Especially, for the co-principalships described by Dass (1995) and Gronn and Hamilton (2004), the dual leaders experienced considerable role overlap, but were able to manage this without difficulty through continual daily interaction. The degree to which leadership groups bring similar sources of expertise and legitimacy to the table or draw on different bases (e.g. doctors and administrators in hospitals and editors and managers in newspapers) (Fjellvaer, 2010) seems likely to influence emerging roles. Overall, the illustrative success story style of analysis shows the feasibility of leadership plurality at the top and describes (sometimes in rich detail) how this may work in practice (e.g. Dass, 1995; Gronn & Hamilton, 2004; Hodgson et al., 1965). However, a focus only on successes can be somewhat limitative.

Contingency Frameworks for Understanding Pooled Leadership. Reaching beyond illustration, some authors have attempted to develop richer *contingency* frameworks for analyzing numerically bounded leadership groups. Alvarez and Svejenova's (2005) study of small numbers at the top in business identifies six contingencies that are relevant to the design of corporate political structures—two each for the external environment and the internal organizational context and for relations within the leadership group itself. The authors suggested that the complexity of the internal organizational context in terms of the need to bring to bear multiple perspectives on decisions and the need to manage internal political relationships argues in favor of integrated “small numbers at the top” rather than in that of solo leadership. On the other hand, contingencies in the external environment and within the executive group itself may be more contradictory. For example, the authors argued that high strategic uncertainty in the external environment makes collective leadership groups more relevant, but that normative pressures for clear accountability are likely to render them more problematic, a tension also mentioned by Stewart (1991). Similarly, in terms of relations within the executive group, the need for psychological security and support may favor plural leadership, while the presence of concerns for career development is likely to favor solo leadership. The contingency argument clarifies the fundamental tensions underlying plural leadership at the top. However, the model is largely conceptual and has not been subject to systematic research.

Fjellvaer's (2010) study represents a second attempt at contingency reasoning, this time developed empirically on the basis of interviews with leaders in arts, health care, education, and newspaper organizations with various kinds of leadership structures. The author showed that a common feature of these organizations is the presence of competing logics (e.g. esthetics versus entertainment in the arts). She then focused on how different organizations

manage these tensions. Structure (e.g. the creation of dual leadership arrangements reflecting different poles of the tension) is seen as one common solution to these tensions, confirming Alvarez and Svejenova's idea that internal complexity favors small number leadership. However, other findings suggest that the practices involved in managing competing logics differ depending on the chosen leadership structure. For example, dual leaders engage in extensive "bridging" (collaborative working between the two individuals), "participation" (involving members from around the organization in decisions), and occasionally as a "last resort" or "safety valve" "abdication" (moving decisions on which they cannot agree to another level). In contrast, unitary leaders sometimes suppressed competing logics entirely, or if they attempted to balance them, they found that they needed to engage in a broader range of practices including teamworking, confronting ideas, probing, and competence-building.

These contingency studies suggest that there is more to be learned about when and where dual or multiple leadership groups are likely to be most in demand and more or less effective. Most clearly, the studies indicate that plurality is a natural solution where organizations must handle complex decisions and diverse internal groups that traverse different logics, in other words in situations of institutional pluralism or complexity (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011). Yet these situations do not make problematic issues of accountability and internecine rivalry disappear.

The Dynamics of Pooled Leadership Structures. This brings us to a third set of studies that address *dynamic* questions. Given the contingencies noted above, how do these structures change and evolve over time as leaders play their roles? The literature here is limited, but three studies warrant attention here. The first study by Reid and Karambayya (2009) examines conflict and its consequences within executive leadership duos in the arts based on eight in-depth case studies. They found that while cognitive conflict is usually contained within the duo, personal or emotional conflict is more easily disseminated to others and that emotional conflict can become particularly destructive when it spreads upwards to the board in a form of abdication practice as described also by Fjellvaer (2010). This kind of risk leads several writers to insist on the importance of maintaining a public "front" of harmony.

A second dynamic pattern is illustrated by Court's (2004) study of the development and evolution of three co-leadership pairs in the education sector, one of which is the specific focus of her paper. The story is complex, but it shows a co-principal relationship in which despite a formal agreement to share role space (Gronn & Hamilton, 2004), the duo remained unbalanced. One of the partners always took the initiative and the other remained passive despite invitations to contribute. The interactive and dynamic nature of role-taking and role-making (Graen, 1976) and mutual construction of leadership identities (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) is evident in this case, except that it seems that

claims of “leadership” were never clearly made by one of the pair. Eventually, the duo was dissolved, leaving the more assertive partner with sole leadership.

Note, however, that interpersonal interaction is only one dimension of the context of a small leadership group. As Alvarez and Svejenova (2005) indicated, members must respond simultaneously to the external environment and to the internal organizational context as well as to their own interpersonal relations. In a rare study of the evolution of leadership constellations over time, Denis et al. (2001) focused on all the three dimensions (see also Denis et al., 1996; Denis, Langley, & Pineault, 2000). They built on Hodgson et al.’s (1965) notion of the executive role constellation to show how constellations form and reform as leaders attempt to reconcile conflicting forces within the external environment and in the organization to implement change. Constellations are challenged by interpersonal tensions, but also by the need for co-leaders to maintain legitimacy with their natural constituencies (e.g. doctors with respect to their peers; general managers with respect to governmental demands). Denis et al. (2001) showed that co-leaders may promote change through their collective actions, but that these actions may have political consequences that alter the form and viability of the constellation as the legitimacy of its members is re-evaluated by others. Denis et al.’s (2001) findings seem to be most relevant to pluralistic settings traversed by multiple logics and values, where power relationships are diffuse. Such extreme fragility in constellations would seem to be less likely in the business firms described by Alvarez and Svejenova (2005) and O’Toole et al. (2002).

Assessment and Future Directions

We know from the literature presented here that numerically bounded groups (dyads, triads, and constellations) can exist and act jointly as leaders occupying a “shared role space”. Despite skepticism from believers in unity of command, numerous examples have been identified, and some have been investigated in considerable depth. We also know that such arrangements tend to require individuals to develop a form of complementarity, a *modus vivendi* that works for them, and that this may involve role specialization and differentiation as well as mutual trust and some flexibility. We also have some ideas about when and where such arrangements might best fit the setting, with professionalized and pluralistic organizations being a case in point. At the same time, issues of accountability, legitimacy with stakeholders, and internal competition among co-leaders are potential weak points of this form that render them potentially fragile.

Moving forward, there seems to be little need to show once again that such arrangements are possible. Taking inspiration from the first stream of research, there would, however, be room for more quantitative studies that consider their conditions for success or sustainability based on larger samples than

usually seen in the current work. There is also a need for greater attention to the *dynamics* of leadership groups, in particular, attention to how they form, evolve, and disband as they interact together and with other organizations' members around specific issues and as new individuals enter or leave them. Part of the difficulty in studying such groups is in part one of access. Yet as some researchers have shown, this is not always an impossible barrier (Denis et al., 2001; Gronn & Hamilton, 2004), although it may mean that certain types of leaders (e.g. those ill at ease with the collective form) may be difficult to investigate.

The question of whether unitary leaders or constellations are preferable in professional settings is an interesting issue and one where there has been some controversy (Fjellvaer, 2010). This is a place where large-scale quantitative studies again might be useful. However, as Fjellvaer (2010) discovered, such forms may in fact be difficult to capture accurately through coarse-grained surveys or archival data as there are often discrepancies between formal organizational charts and everyday *modus operandi*. The study of co-leaders is particularly fascinating because of the variety of ways in which pairs of individuals may divide up their world and organize their relations with followers.

This raises the broader issue of boundaries. We have been implicitly assuming since the beginning of this section that it is easy to identify who is a member of the small number leadership group and who is not. In practice, however, this may not be a simple matter. For example, Gronn and Hamilton (2004) described the "shared role space" of their co-principals as expanding and contracting as they involved others in their decisions or not: who then is or is not a contributor to that collective leadership and how do we know? Some scholars might argue that leadership constellations could shift depending on the particular issues considered (Roberto, 2003). The ground around this concept of plural leadership can thus become somewhat shaky.

Spreading Leadership Across Levels Over Time: Leadership Relays

In this section, we focus on another manifestation of the idea of plural leadership, one that is broader than that discussed either in the first section that focuses more specifically on leadership shared between interacting group members or that discussed above where the emphasis is placed on small groups of leaders at the top. Here, we refer to the dispersion of leadership roles across organizations, and even beyond their boundaries, as a variety of people relay leadership responsibilities over time to achieve important outcomes.

Although the labels associated with plural forms of leadership can be confusing because definitions are not cleanly separated across the literature, the term "distributed leadership" is most associated with the approach described here (Bolden, 2011; Thorpe, Gold, & Lawler, 2011). The notion of "distributed

leadership” has generated much interest among researchers in the field of education (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). However, similar forms have also attracted attention from researchers interested in explaining major changes in a variety of contexts including inter-organizational collaboration (Buchanan, Addicott, Fitzgerald, Ferlie, & Baeza, 2007; Chreim, Williams, Janz, & Dastmalchian, 2010; Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Zhang & Faerman, 2007). Table 4 provides a summary of the key contributions considered in this section.

Historical Roots

Gronn (2002) traced the distinction between “focused” and “distributed” leadership to Gibb (1954), who argued that it is not the specific traits of individuals that define leadership, but rather the degree to which people assume “leadership functions”. Leadership can, therefore, be seen as a “group phenomenon” distributed among individuals. Nevertheless, the term “distributed leadership” was little used until it was revived at around the same time by Gronn (2000) and Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001). While Gronn’s empirical work focused mainly on small groups at the top (see the previous section), Spillane et al. were principally interested in the way in which leadership extended across other levels of organization.

Gronn (2000) and Spillane et al. (2001) claimed grounding for the notion of distributed leadership in the concept of “distributed cognition” (Hutchins, 1995) and in Engeström’s (1999) “activity theory”, both building on the foundational work of Vygotsky (1978) and Leont’ev (1981). The distributed cognition perspective suggests that cognitive capacities are located not simply in individual brains but also in interactions among people, routines, and artifacts, as revealed in Hutchins’ (1995) studies of coordination in work situations such as airline cockpits.

Contemporary Contributions

Distributed Leadership as an Enabler of Complex Cross-Boundary Change. We again identified three strands of research in this area that we labeled as *illustrative*, *analytical*, and *critical*. Contributions that we have labeled “illustrative” are based on case studies that show the value and feasibility of forms of widely distributed leadership in enabling complex change. For example, Buchanan et al. (2007) compared attempts to implement cancer care networks in three UK health regions and noted that one of the regions was most successful because four key individuals (not in hierarchical relationships with each other) and a range of supporting actors spontaneously mobilized around the goal of improvement and were able to coordinate in a fluid and *ad hoc* manner their different initiatives, handing over leadership over time in a process that Buchanan et al. (2007) labeled “nobody in

Table 4. Spreading Leadership Across Levels Over Time: Leadership Relays

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|---|---|---|--|
| Buchanan et al. (2007) | <i>Illustrative:</i> How can change be implemented in healthcare organizations by a distributed set of actors? | Case study based on 21 interviews with participants in cancer care change program and comparison with two other sites with less successful change | <i>Example of how distributed leadership can produce change:</i> Four sets of actors intervened over time to successfully implement change without formal coordination (“nobody in charge”). Success attributed to “conjunctural causation”: for example, role interdependence, clear targets, autonomy, good relationships, champions in key positions, and resources |
| Chreim, Williams, Janz, and Dastmalchian (2010) | <i>Illustrative:</i> How does inter-organizational change occur through the agency of different individuals and groups? | Single case study of primary care innovation with integrated care, 74 interviews, 3 points in time (over 4 years), and 17 meetings | <i>Example of how distributed leadership can produce change:</i> Multiple actors involved in bringing change to fruition over time based on legitimacy, resources, expertise, and ability to inspire trust. People played complementary roles at different times and were not members of formal leadership group. Project coordinator played an important role |

Table 4. Spreading Leadership Across Levels Over Time: Leadership Relays (Continued)

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Crosby and Bryson (2010) | <i>Illustrative:</i> How can integrative leadership lead to the creation and maintenance of cross-sector collaborations? | Case study of development of a geographic information system. Action research and participant observation | Model of integrative leadership with five components: initial conditions, processes and practices, structure and governance, contingencies and constraints, and outcomes and accountabilities. Twenty-four propositions with several on leadership: need for powerful sponsors and champions and need for leaders to move in and out and bring in others. Indicates value of actor–network theory |
| Currie, Grubnic, and Hodges (2011) | <i>Critical:</i> How is distributed leadership implemented in a partnership reform that claims to promote it? | Two case studies in health care; 46 interviews | <i>Emergent forms result from conflicting institutional pressures for distributed leadership versus accountability:</i> The development of distributed leadership is hampered by countervailing accountability regimes. Participants demanded coordinative leadership, but gave little power to coordinators |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Currie et al. (2009) | <i>Critical:</i> How do institutional forces and local contexts affect the enactment of distributed leadership? | <i>Case:</i> school system in the UK (macro-level) and interviews in 30 schools—51 interviews | <i>Discourse of distributed leadership is undermined by culture of individual leadership around professional autonomy and accountability:</i> Catch 22. Respondents use individual leadership language. No distribution from principals to deputies. External distribution to parents works least well in deprived areas where most needed |
| Davis and Eisenhardt (2011) | <i>Predictive:</i> How do leaders mobilize participants across organizational boundaries for effective innovation? | Comparative case studies of 8 collaborations between 10 firms, 72 interviews, and archival data | <i>Model of how “rotating leadership” contributes to innovation performance in collaborative technology development:</i> Rotating leadership consists of “alternating decision control between firms”, “zigzagging objectives”, and “fluctuating network cascades” of different people over time |
| Gosling, Bolden, and Petrov (2009) | <i>Critical:</i> How do rhetoric and reality about distributed leadership in higher education diverge? | 12 case studies of universities; 10–17 interviews at each site; 152 interviews | Mismatch between discourse of distributed leadership and academic managers’ experience. Leadership felt to be dislocated (devolved so no overall vision), disconnected (silos), disengaged (not valued), dissipated (diffused to committees), distant (imposed), and dysfunctional (failing) |

Table 4. Spreading Leadership Across Levels Over Time: Leadership Relays (Continued)

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|--------------------------|---|--|--|
| Hulpia and Devos (2010) | <i>Analytical:</i> How is distributed leadership related to organizational commitment | Interviews and surveys in eight schools | Some distributed leadership dimensions are related to teachers' organizational commitment. Encouragement to participate (a dimension of the distributed leadership scale) was related to commitment |
| Huxham and Vangen (2000) | <i>Analytical:</i> How does leadership work in inter-organizational collaborations? | Data from seven interventions on partnerships. Variant of "action research" and grounded theory | <i>Leadership mechanisms in collaborations have two elements:</i> (a) Media: structures, processes, and people and (b) activities: managing power and controlling the agenda, representing and mobilizing member organizations, and enthusing and empowering people to deliver collaboration |
| Leithwood et al. (2007) | <i>Analytical:</i> Who performs which leadership functions? What favors or inhibits distributed leadership? | Study of eight schools. Teachers asked to nominate 19 non-administrative leaders; 31 nominators and 19 nominees interviewed on nominated leaders | There are four configurations of distributed leadership: planful alignment (organized distributed leadership), spontaneous alignment (appears naturally but may dissipate), spontaneous misalignment, and anarchic misalignment: resistance to distributed leadership. Claim effective distributed leadership requires focused leadership: planful form is best in longer term |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Martin, Currie, and Finn (2008) | <i>Illustrative/critical:</i> How do networks and distributed leadership contribute to public-service reform | Two cases of cancer screening networks—one successful in implementing distributed leadership and the other less so; 88 interviews | Networks require distributed leadership, but it is difficult to achieve as it confronts professional and administrative hierarchies. Public-service networks with diffuse objectives and loci of power may require a combination of leadership styles and an ability to make the project relevant to the concerns of others, increasing the likelihood of acceptance |
| Mascall, Leithwood, Straus, and Sacks (2008) | <i>Analytical:</i> How are patterns of distributed leadership related to teachers' academic optimism | Survey of 1640 teachers and correlational analysis | <i>Planned forms of distributed leadership are more strongly related to academic optimism:</i> Unplanned and unaligned forms were not well regarded |
| Spillane (2006) | <i>Analytical:</i> What does it mean to take a distributed perspective on school leadership? | Longitudinal study of leadership practices in eight schools undergoing reform. Observations and interviews | <i>Distributed perspective on school leadership:</i> Two dimensions of distribution: (a) "leader plus dimension": more than one leader and (b) practice dimension: leadership is created in interaction between leaders, followers, and situations emphasis on the role of routines and tools |

Table 4. Spreading Leadership Across Levels Over Time: Leadership Relays (Continued)

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|--------------------------|---|---|--|
| Spillane et al. (2007) | <i>Analytical:</i> How is leadership distributed among people in the context of the principal's workday | 42 school principals logging activity at random times to note who was leading. Beeped 15 times/day for multiple days | Principals share leadership with others; 33% of time principals said that they were leading alone, 33% they were co-leading, and 33% others were leading. Curriculum issues more often shared with teachers and administrative issues shared with assistant principals |
| Zhang and Faerman (2007) | <i>Illustrative:</i> How are leadership roles distributed in the process of developing and implementing a knowledge-sharing system? | Case study of IT system involving collaboration of public agencies and divisions. Nineteen interviews and document observations | Example of how distributed leadership among many individuals may be crucial for project success. Leadership of three types of actors (project manager, upper management, and local champions). Distributed leadership characterized by interdependence and emergence. Joint capacity to get around normal formal channels blocking the development of the knowledge-sharing system |

charge". Chreim et al. (2010) offered another example in the development of primary health care where different leaders (clinical leaders, regional managers, and a project coordinator) relayed leadership roles, taking turns in moving a change project forward. Similarly, Zhang and Faerman (2007) described how distributed initiative by a project manager, upper management, and local champions succeeded in bypassing traditional channels of authority to allow the successful development and implementation of a knowledge-sharing system in New York's Office of the State Comptroller. Finally, although their work is not restricted to examining leadership roles *per se*, Crosby and Bryson (2010) and Bryson, Crosby, and Bryson (2009) have also drawn on case studies of large collaborative ventures to argue for the importance of distributed leadership in moving projects forward.

All these case studies show multiple actors taking on different roles over time. Buchanan et al. (2007) used the notion of "conjunctural causation" to suggest that it is the fortuitous combination of a variety of situational elements that enabled this kind of emergent distributed action. These elements include in their case consistent signaling by top management, role interdependence, autonomy, good relationships, champions in key positions, and available resources. Chreim et al. (2010) and Zhang and Faerman (2007) identified some similar factors. However, while Buchanan et al. (2007) suggested that formal project coordination was not necessary and might even have been harmful, Chreim et al. (2010) and Zhang and Faerman (2007), on the contrary, situated these actors as key players in drawing other leaders together, even though the individuals concerned had no formal authority to force others to contribute (see also Vangen & Huxham, 2003).

These studies provide valuable illustrations of successful distributed leadership in action. And yet, they do not provide evidence that such forms *necessarily* lead to positive outcomes or that success might not be obtained in other ways. One recent study of interfirm collaborative technology projects does, however, have a comparative design where successes and failures are contrasted. Davis and Eisenhardt (2011) showed how what they call "rotating leadership" contributes to innovation performance. Their concept of rotating leadership implies alternating decision control between firms, zigzagging objectives, and drawing on fluctuating cascades of people to work on projects. The study suggests that rotating leadership is superior to either dominant leadership within one firm or consensual leadership across firms because rotations access complementary capabilities across firms, ensure deep and broad search for ideas, and mobilize diverse skills.

Analyzing Patterns and Roles of Distributed Leadership in and across Organizations. The next set of studies that we consider begin from a different angle. Rather than using the distributed nature of leadership as a device for explaining change, this body of work assumes a perspective on leadership as

distributed across people and levels and attempts to understand its nature and role in organizations. We label this body of work *analytical*. It is here that research in education has been particularly influential, represented most notably by a set of distributed leadership studies led by James Spillane and colleagues at Northwestern University. One important branch of this work involved a 4-year longitudinal investigation of 15 schools in the Chicago area as they addressed curriculum reform initiatives (Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The studies led to a distinctive perspective on distributed leadership described as composed of a “leader plus aspect” and a “practices aspect” (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). The “leader plus” aspect focuses explicitly on the roles and contributions of multiple individuals. This aspect was also further developed in a study in which 42 school principals were asked to log leadership activities when beeped at random times during the day (Spillane et al., 2007). The study found that, on average, principals were found to be leading alone one-third of the time and to be sharing leadership activities with others one-third of the time and that others were leading for the other third. Leithwood et al. (2007) also focused on the “leader plus” aspect by asking who was undertaking which leadership functions in an interview survey. They found, not surprisingly, that formal administrative leaders were more involved in direction-setting and less in operational areas such as curriculum reform than informal, non-administrative leaders but noted a wide distribution of roles and functions.

For Spillane and colleagues, however, the “leader plus aspect” of distributed leadership is seen as limited without also focusing on the “practices aspect”. This refers to an approach in which leadership is seen to emerge in interactions:

We contend that, to understand leadership practice, it is essential to go beyond a consideration of the roles, strategies, and traits of the individuals who occupy formal leadership positions to investigate how the practice of leadership is stretched over leaders, followers, and the material and symbolic artifacts in the situation. (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 27)

With this perspective, the authors move some way toward the more relational perspectives that we shall describe in the next section. However, inspired by activity theory, they also placed an interesting emphasis on routines, tools, and material artifacts as contributors to distributed leadership, something that is clearly missing in most of the illustrative studies described above. Another particularity of Spillane and colleagues’ view (Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007) is that leadership does not have to act concertedly or in harmony to be recognized as distributed. Indeed, one of the original case organizations studied was the site of highly contested leadership practices with informal leaders undermining formal leaders in sequences of opposing moves (Hallett, 2007).

Another influential analytical contribution is Huxham and Vangen's (2000) grounded theory study of multi-actor public and community collaborations. These authors defined leadership as a set of "mechanisms that make things happen in collaboration". Using data derived from intervention workshops, they identified two sets of dimensions for collaborative leadership, which they labeled "leadership media" and "leadership activities". Leadership media comprise "structures", "processes", and "participants". While the role of "participants" seems uncontroversial and corresponds to a traditional understanding of the locus of leadership, the authors' argument is that formal structures also exert leadership roles (i.e. help make things happen or not) by determining the access of different individuals to the collaboration. Similarly, processes (how committees are run, how communication is assured, etc.) channel members' activities. In addition, leadership media may themselves emerge over time, be out of the direct control of participants, and be subject to the same leadership influences in a dynamic structuration process. In parallel, "leadership activities" are carried out by participants in the context of these media and are identified as comprising "managing power and controlling the agenda", "representing and mobilizing member organizations", and "enthusing and empowering those who can deliver the collaboration". This study is complementary to Crosby and Bryson's (2005) work on multi-sector collaborations. Bryson et al. (2009) have also drawn on actor-network theory (Latour, 1987, 2005) to suggest the key role of routines and artifacts (such as formal strategic plans) in helping to pull leaders and collaborators together.

Overall then, these "analytical" contributions provide descriptors of how leadership may become spread out across people within and across organizations and over time in the accomplishment of important goals and outcomes. The ideas are enriched by understandings of not only how different people may come to play different roles but also how their actions may be channeled by structures and processes and how routines and physical objects may contribute in important ways to leadership activity.

Distributed Leadership as Rhetoric or Discourse. Note, however, that while distributed leadership has been of academic interest to researchers, its promise as indicated in several of the studies illustrated above has led to it being taken up as something of a normative ideal for practice, particularly in the areas of education and health care (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003; Mayrowetz, 2008), where it seems to be equated either with a democratic ideal (Mayrowetz, 2008) or, more instrumentally as Bennett et al. (2003, p. 8) put it, "as a strategy for improving school quality and assisting schools to operate as learning organizations". Within education, a limited number of surveys have attempted to relate distribution of leadership to measures of performance. For example, Mascall et al. (2008) found that teacher optimism was higher where respondents agreed with the statement "We collectively plan who will provide

leadership for each of our initiatives and how they will provide it”, but negatively related to statements reflecting more “spontaneous” or the so-called misaligned forms of distributed leadership. In another study, Hulpia and Devos (2010) found that distributed leadership properties were more frequent in schools evaluated as high potential. However, this rather thin evidence does not appear to support the wave of enthusiasm. Spillane (2006), Gronn (2009), and others have resisted the normative pull, with Gronn (2009) even calling for a return to an approach that recognizes the importance of hierarchical leadership along with more distributed forms. However, “distributed leadership” has become something of an institutionalized “discourse”. The final set of studies that we consider here are labeled *critical* because they take a more detached look at what becomes of this discourse when attempts are made to apply it.

The most interesting set of studies in this vein are by Graeme Currie and colleagues using examples from education, local government, and health care. Underlying their studies are conceptions of these fields as traversed by competing institutional discourses between accountability and/or professional autonomy, on the one hand, and a push for spreading leadership more widely, on the other hand (Currie et al., 2009, 2011; Martin et al., 2008). For example, Currie et al. (2009) compared two pilot projects to implement genetics screening pathways within cancer care networks. The study shows how one pilot succeeded better than the other because the structures, processes, and participants within the network (see Huxham & Vangen, 2000) facilitated the mobilization of a distributed set of leaders. However, in both cases, patterns of distributed leadership were constrained by mandated structures outside the networks that favored other forms of leadership. The conflict between institutionalized norms of accountability and policies promoting distributed leadership was even more evident in the other two studies. Currie et al. (2009) found that this conflict led to the implementation of diluted forms of leadership distribution in education. In the local government case, despite attempts to move toward greater leadership dispersion, participants themselves pushed for centralized coordination to enable response to accountability regimes (Currie et al., 2011).

A more devastating assessment still comes from Maxcy and Nguyen’s (2006) study of schools and Bolden, Petrov and Gosling’s (2009) study of distributed leadership in higher education (see also Gosling et al. 2009). For these authors, far from enabling more democratic forms of participation, the discourse of distributed leadership may be associated with greater managerialism. Moreover, while respondents in Bolden et al.’s (2009) study were able to articulate the potential advantages of distributing leadership more widely, the authors found discrepancies between their rhetoric and experience, where leadership was described as dislocated, disconnected, disengaged, dissipated, distant, and dysfunctional, with many of these adjectives being clearly related to the fragmentation of leadership roles.

Assessment and Future Directions

The body of literature described here extends the notion of leadership in the plural beyond teams and beyond small groups at the top to a broad array of people who jointly exert influence. Often, this literature focuses on particular projects or incidents of major change where different individuals may bring to bear their contributions. This literature focuses, in particular, on how people collectively achieve influence by taking turns, although several authors here are beginning to move toward a more relational view where leadership is embedded not so much in people but in relations and situations (Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Spillane, 2006). Moreover, the role of structures, processes, and artifacts in plural leadership phenomena are emphasized by some of the contributions we have described, though by no means all. The strengths of this literature lie in the revelation of more complex forms of leadership distribution. Moreover, in contrast to other streams, we also find here some more critically oriented contributions. On the other hand, it is not easy to see from many of these studies when and why distributed forms of leadership might be more or less successful. There would be benefit in developing more explicitly comparative work that would address this issue.

One direction in which this type of scholarship might proceed is related to the enhancement of the consideration of the non-human elements in patterns of distributed leadership. In fact, it is striking to consider to what degree actor–network theory accounts of innovation might in many cases resemble the accounts of how “distributed leaders” contribute to major change, though with more attention being paid to the role of artifacts in mediating linkages between people and in enabling new arrangements to be brought into being (Latour, 1987, 2005). It would also be constructive to compare accounts of distributed leadership with analyses of working across boundaries more generally. Scholars of plural leadership might learn from Carlile’s (2002, 2004) cross-boundary work on innovation or from Kellogg, Orlikowski, and Yates’ (2006) analyses of how different groups of professionals coordinate activity. While leadership scholars are preoccupied with the agency of people, work scholars place more emphasis on practices and the role of objects. Yet they are often seeking to explain quite similar outcomes.

Another direction that needs greater attention concerns the role of power in understanding how leadership works and what this means when it is spread over organizations and across their boundaries (see also Bolden, 2011). Power is in fact rarely mentioned in any of these works. And yet it is clearly inherent to the phenomenon being considered. Power might be seen, for example, as a resource that enables or prevents would-be leaders from sharing influence, as a barrier that the distribution of leadership roles might help to bridge through coalitional activity, or as a property that becomes manifest through leadership practice.

Finally, the issue of boundaries is again problematic. Where does leadership activity begin and end and how is it recognized? Huxham and Vangen (2000) noted how difficult it was in their study for collaboration members to identify themselves or others as leaders. In truly collaborative settings, such identifications may be taboo or they may also be quite simply too ambiguous to be encircled and pinpointed. Leadership perhaps does truly lie not in the people, but in their relations or interstices. This is the message of the next section.

Producing Leadership Through Interaction: Decentering Individuals

Most leadership studies, including the streams presented up to now, tend to equate leadership with what specific individuals identified as leaders do, starting with the existence of these distinct individuals and considering various elements such as their qualities, their behaviors, or their effectiveness. The studies discussed in this section differ by questioning this *a priori*: that leadership is a property of individuals (either in the singular or in the plural). This questioning leads directly to the perennial interrogation about the nature of leadership, which is in fact what we see at the heart of many of the contributions described here. This interrogation opens the door to a wide variety of possibilities: philosophical inquiries, empirical studies of what, on a daily basis, leadership is about, reconceptualizations of leadership, ethical concerns, questioning of leadership discourse, etc. Yet, all the inquiries within this line of thinking share one common root: that leadership is fundamentally more about participation and collectively creating a sense of direction than it is about control and exercising authority. This assumption problematizes the *individuality* of leadership, which in turn requires a reconceptualization of what leadership is and, for some, what indeed it should be.

These studies extend reflections on the sharing of leadership and power beyond the perspectives described previously: resolutely anchored in a socio-constructionist epistemology, these studies conceptualize leadership as a social phenomenon, as a collective process in which formally designated individuals may play a role, but from which it is impossible to ignore other actors. The place of individuals is thus reduced: actors are present *in* leadership—enacting it, influencing it, and creating it—but they are not “containers” of leadership. As many of these studies underline, leadership concepts that attribute leadership to individuals create heroic definitions of leadership; these studies aim to move away from such a heroic view (hence the oft-used label “post-heroic leadership”). Because leadership is always collectively enacted in situation, it becomes a consequence of actors’ relations, an effect processually generated by a group of people, a product of their local interactions.

Thus, the contributions in this stream can be summarized as proposing a relational or an interactional conceptualization of leadership. Their social

constructionist assumptions favor commitments to qualitative analysis. These studies view leadership as a situated activity that takes shape through and emanates from actions and interactions and accordingly focuses on the *in situ* “performance” of leadership. It is because leadership is conceived as elaborated through social processes and emerging via interactions that it is *fundamentally* plural. These studies rarely explore the antecedents and/or the predictors of performance. Following a sociological tradition, the empirical studies that are part of this group clearly emphasize *processual* “how” questions, aimed at understanding how leadership is produced and performed (see Table 5).

Historical Roots

Most of the contemporary contributions located in this stream are quite recent, dating from the mid-2000s; in fact, many of these contributions build on the influential work of Pearce and Conger (2003) on shared leadership and/or on that of Gronn (1999, 2002) on distributed leadership. However, these studies can also be linked philosophically to Follett’s view on collaborative leadership, as put forward in her 1924 book, *Creative experience*. From what would be perceived today as a fully processual perspective, Follett considered relationships and interactions in organizations as dynamic and evolving and thus as the basis of leadership. Such a processual view can be seen in how she defined power:

It seems to me that whereas power usually means power-over, the power of some person or group over some other person or group, it is possible to develop the conception of power-with, a jointly developed power, a co-active, not a coercive power. (Follett, 1924; cited in Mendenhall & Marsh, 2010)

Her view of leadership is also based on the concept of circularity, where “power and authority continually shift and morph to match the situation as it evolves” (Bathurst & Monin, 2010, p.120). As summarized by Bathurst and Monin (2010), Follett’s thought can be seen as the dominant root of the perspective discussed here:

***Leading and following are not found in top-down or bottom-up linearity. Instead Follett favours the notion of leadership; a phenomenon that occurs when all actors, regardless of their status within the organization, understand the common purpose. Paradoxically, leadership occurs when leaders abandon the need to control and dominate, and emerges within the dynamic interactions of daily organizational existence. But there are times when orders must be given and commands must be followed. In order to contextualize these Follett argues that it is the situation itself that provokes this need. Therefore, it is not the command itself that is important but the social relationships that

Table 5. Producing Leadership Through Interactions: Decentering Individuals

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|---|--|---|--|
| Crevani, Lindgren, and Packendorff (2007) | <i>Illustrative:</i> How is leadership collectively practiced and constructed? | Empirical illustrations taken from four case studies: two schools, a festival, and a theater | <i>Leadership is a collective construction process:</i> It describes the activities that compose leadership and takes into consideration actors who do not have a formal leadership role. This contribution shows that unitary command is both reconstructed (supposed) and deconstructed (transformed) by actors in a context |
| Crevani et al. (2010) | <i>Exploratory:</i> What is included in a process and practice-based conception of leadership and what does this perspective allow to study? | Conceptual development of a renewed definition of leadership and empirical application to interactive vignettes | <i>Producing leadership involves elaborating direction, orientation, and action space:</i> Leadership is a processual phenomenon, and it is shaped by multiple actors interacting in a context. The leadership that is developed in this fashion is also influenced by societal discourses on leadership |
| Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) | <i>Empirical:</i> How do people become leaders and lead in new and uncertain contexts? | Three-year study of Federal Security Directors and 1 year of ethnographic work and interviews | <i>Relational leadership is a way of being-in-the-world in relation to other human beings:</i> It is a way both to conceptualize leadership and to enact it. Ethical and moral concerns are linked to dialog and intersubjectivity |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Drath et al. (2008) | <i>Exploratory</i> : What is the ontology of leadership? | Conceptual development of a new ontological framework to define leadership, the DAC framework | <i>Leadership is an outcome, and it takes the form of DAC</i> : These outcomes are produced by the practices of actors in contexts and shaped by their beliefs. They propose a “new vocabulary” to talk of leadership production |
| Hosking (2007) | <i>Exploratory</i> : How can we conceptualize leadership using postmodern discourse? | Conceptual reflection on the definition of leadership | <i>Leadership can be approached differently in terms of relationality</i> : It offers new “thinking space” to leadership by questioning traditional assumptions and imagining other possibilities for the definition of leadership and also in terms of training and development |
| Lichtenstein and Plowman (2009) | <i>Empirical</i> : How can leadership in organizations influence the dynamics of emergence? | Three case studies in various contexts: urban church, theater district, and technology venture | <i>Leadership of emergence is based on four conditions</i> : disequilibrium state, amplifying actions, recombination/self-organization, and stabilizing feedbacks |
| Lichtenstein et al. (2006) | <i>Exploratory</i> : How does adaptive leadership develop in organizations? What are the consequences of adaptive leadership? | Conceptual exploration of the production of adaptive leadership in organizations | <i>Drivers of adaptive leadership events occurring in interaction include identity formation and tensions</i> : Proposal for methodological options to study adaptive leadership including bracketing events and analyzing their dynamic interdependence |
| Lindgren and Packendorff (2011) | <i>Illustrative</i> : What are the leadership processes in R&D projects? | Case study of an R&D project in a biotechnology venture | <i>Doing leadership involves processing issues, constructing rules and responsibilities, and working out identity concerns</i> : This doing contributes to moving action forward |

Table 5. Producing Leadership Through Interactions: Decentering Individuals (Continued)

| Authors | Research question | Methodology | Findings and contribution |
|-----------------|---|---|---|
| Raelin (2005) | <i>Exploratory:</i> What should be the components of a new paradigm for leadership for today's organizations? | Conceptual paper | <i>Leaderful practice is defined as concurrent, collective, collaborative, and compassionate:</i> Leaderful practice is based on a full sharing of leadership. It involves all organizational members. Structural changes such as post-bureaucracy, fluid boundaries, and growth in knowledge workers explain why such an approach is necessary |
| Raelin (2011) | <i>Exploratory:</i> What is the basis of leadership as practice and how is this related to leaderful practices? | Conceptual paper | <i>A leadership-as-practice approach shares affinities with leaderful practices:</i> Developing this model of leadership requires changes to leadership training |
| Uhl-Bien (2006) | <i>Exploratory:</i> How do relational dynamics produce leadership? | Conceptual development, proposing a new theory of leadership: RLT | <i>Leadership is relationally produced, emerging through interactions and communication between actors in a context:</i> Leadership is both an outcome of social processes and a contextual element that influence the following interactions. Leadership is linked to an organizing process producing coordination and change |

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| Uhl-Bien and Marion (2009) | <i>Exploratory:</i> From a complexity perspective, what leadership functions exist in organizations? | Conceptual exploration of complexity theory's relevance to leadership theory | <i>Development of a meso-model of complexity leadership theory:</i> Identification of three functions of leadership in organizations: administrative, enabling, and adaptive. Definition of outcomes derived from the interaction of these three types of leadership |
| Vine, Holmes, Marra, Pfeifer, and Jackson (2008) | <i>Illustrative:</i> How is co-leadership talk enacted? How are leadership functions performed? | Case study of three SMEs in New Zealand. Vignettes of recorded interactions analyzed and presented | <i>Communication occupies a central place in leadership production:</i> Daily and shared talk plays a key role in producing leadership. It illustrates how leadership is done in |
| Wood (2005) | <i>Exploratory:</i> What is the essence of leadership under a strong process ontology? | Conceptual paper based on a philosophical inquiry | <i>Leadership as becoming. Leadership does not reside in individuals, but in relations, directions, and orientations:</i> Leadership as a perpetual process of becoming. It suggests investigating leadership as an event: through relations, connections, dependencies, and reciprocities over time |

facilitate the group's identity in the first place. Hence commands are first *de-personalized* because of an awareness of the total situation. However, once the order has been given and carried out, all the actors reacquaint themselves with their group identity and relationships are *re-personalized* in order to achieve solidarity. (p. 124; emphasis in the original)

Another influence is Hollander's work, which put forward the idea that leadership may be the property of a group (Hollander & Julian, 1969). By paying close attention to followers, Hollander and Julian's leadership conception can be seen as an antecedent to numerous leadership studies; however, it is by talking of leadership as an interactive and transactional process evolving over time that we can discern an influence on the studies in this category. Hollander (1992) promoted the view that "leadership is a process, not a person" (p. 71). Hosking (1988) also put forward a processual view, developing a vision of leadership as an organizing activity that arises in the course of action and that contributes to the negotiation of a social order (see also, Brown & Hosking, 1986).

In addition, a few other early contributions proposed an interactive view of leadership. For example, Vanderslice (1988) questioned the leader–follower dichotomy through a case study on an organization, a restaurant collective that did not have formal leader–follower hierarchical roles. She argued that the apparent leaderlessness of this organization should in fact be seen as leaderfulness, because leadership functions and responsibilities were distributed between all members using a participative decision-making approach. Finally, Feyerherm (1994) can also be seen as a precursor of the relational and interactional studies. In the same line of thinking as Hollander and Vanderslice, she suggested that leadership may be seen as a group characteristic and a web of influence covering the groups under study.

The last important—and more contemporary—influence on the contributions in this relational category is the practice turn in leadership studies (e.g. Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a, 2003b; Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008; Holmberg & Tyrstrup 2010), which underlines the importance of studying leadership as it is practiced in a context and investigates it from the viewpoint of its mundane and daily performance. These studies are not directly concerned with questions pertaining to sharing leadership. However, practice perspectives as well as discursive studies of leadership (e.g. Fairhurst, 2007; Larsson & Lundholm, 2010) have also influenced contributions discussed here. For example, Fairhurst (2007) has proposed a psychosocial approach to leadership, where leaders and followers are both discursively constructed; in other words, their relative positions in leadership situations and contexts are constructed through talk. Taken together, the practice turn, the discursive turn, and some of the relational and interactional conceptions of leadership all share a socio-constructionist epistemology, but diverge in what they prioritize:

practice studies focus primarily on everyday interactions; discursive studies on talk and conversation; and relational studies on relations and interactions.

Finally, for some contributions in this perspective, leadership—and plural leadership—belongs to the world of discourse. This leads to a recognition that “leadership” itself *is* a social and cultural discourse and that it shapes how leadership is practiced. This discursive approach differs from Fairhurst’s because it focuses more on broad societal discourses (big “D” discourse) than on everyday interactions (little “d”) (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) and because it exposes the rhetorical dimension of plural forms of leadership.

Contemporary Contributions

(Re)defining Leadership as Transcending Individual Actors. Many contributions in this stream aim to develop new leadership conceptualizations and can, therefore, be described as *exploratory*. The studies are all characterized by a strong definitional concern and have a descriptive orientation. Generally speaking, in the interactional perspective, leadership becomes viewed as a form of organizing, characterized by what is traditionally viewed as being produced by leadership: direction, orientation, decisions, etc. Because these contributions place relationships between actors at the forefront of their investigation of leadership, communication is also central in their work, since it is through communication that these relationships arise, are shaped, and evolve.

For example, Uhl-Bien (2006) developed a relational theory of leadership, in which the meaning of leadership is the fruit of a situated social construction. Building on and influenced by a wide range of contributions (e.g. leader-member exchange, social network, collective self, and relational constructionism), this framework—which she called relational leadership theory (RLT)—puts relational dynamics at the core of the understanding of leadership. Uhl-Bien (2006) defined relational leadership as “a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e. evolving social order) and change (i.e. new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, ideologies, etc.) are constructed and produced” (p. 668). Leadership is not necessarily linked to holding a specific managerial position because it is defined as a collective product of actors’ interactions. Uhl-Bien suggested that leadership cannot be captured by limiting the investigation to individual attributes. Also, because leadership is viewed from a socio-constructionist epistemology, it is at the same time an outcome of actors’ interactions and a contextual element that shapes the interactions that follow. Uhl-Bien (2006, p. 672) underlined that this relational conception of leadership has methodological consequences: it cannot be studied with the methods generally used by traditional approaches to leadership (i.e. variables and measures), but requires “richer methodologies”, in other words, qualitative methods that allow the observation of interactions and can capture relational dynamics as they are happening *in situ*.

In another conceptual article, Drath et al. (2008) have also proposed a new ontological framework to define leadership, organized around the concepts of direction, alignment, and commitment (otherwise known as the DAC framework). Viewing leadership as a product, DAC are the outcomes of actors' practices and beliefs. They proposed this "tripod" to replace the traditional ontology of leadership, that is, leaders, followers, and common goals (inspired by Bennis', 2007, tripod). The DAC framework considers leadership to be produced by actors, but as a phenomenon, it transcends individuals. Drath et al. argued that their framework is multilevel because outcomes can be produced at all levels, from dyads to inter-organizational relations, and that it is culturally neutral, because beliefs and practices that shape the production of leadership need to be specified in each context. Since their framework focuses on outcomes, this allows Drath et al. (2008) to argue that the production of DAC provides the indication that leadership has been produced. Context and interactions are thus preeminent in this framework. Interestingly enough, contrary to many contributions located in this perspective, Drath et al. are not shy about the question of leadership effectiveness: they contend that it can easily be assessed by considering the DAC levels created.

Following the reflection she began at the end of the 1980s, Hosking (2007) can also be seen as proposing another view of leadership, constructed on the basis of socio-constructionism. Addressing alternatives to modernism and positivism to understand leadership, she suggested moving the inquiry in this field from leaders to leadership processes, in what she called a post-modernist discourse of leadership. More precisely, she argued that the key process in organizational life is *relating*, which refers to a process of reality construction. In this sense, leadership is constituted through organizing activities, which are emergent; and by clearly identifying leadership as a political process, Hosking underlined that these activities involve the negotiation of a social order. Finally, she argued that such an approach to leadership has consequences for training and development, as promoting this relational view of leadership implies paying more attention to followers and, accordingly, requires different skills.

The consideration of the question of the nature of leadership can easily open the door to philosophical reflection. In what is probably one of the most radical reconceptualizations of leadership, Wood (2005) reconsidered the essence of leadership from the perspective of a process ontology. In philosophy, a process ontology views phenomena as in flux and as marked by continual emergence; in other words, change is seen as underlying everything that exists, and things are defined not as the causes of processes, but as apparently stable properties continually reconstituted by ongoing processes (Rescher, 2000). Under a process ontology, leadership becomes completely emergent, always created and recreated, a process in which individuals participate. Leadership never belongs to a person or a group of persons: as he explained,

[l]eadership is not located in A where it is apparent (i.e. the designated leader), nor is it simply at B from where it is being recognized (i.e. in the 'mind' of followers). Neither is it a series of discrete relationships between A and B ($A \rightarrow B$ and $B \rightarrow A$). It is, rather, the undefined middle, the in of the between ($A \leftrightarrow B$), where both A and B are 'inseparable moments' (Deleuze, 1983), each necessarily referring back to the other. (2005, pp. 1111–1112)

We see Wood's contribution as fundamentally rethinking what leadership is because it removes it entirely from belonging to individuals. This processual definition of leadership has methodological implications. For example, Wood (2005) noted that leadership may be considered as an *event* and as *movement* in time and over time and that, accordingly, a strong situational focus is required to study it.

Finally, another set of papers has drawn on complexity theory to develop an interactional view. These conceptual papers (Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009; Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009) also consider leadership as an emerging phenomenon resulting from dynamic interactions among organizational members across organizations and inter-organizational spaces. According to this approach, specific leadership behaviors can be performed to foster conditions for emergence. Any individuals can develop these behaviors and no assumption is made about the role of formal appointed leaders in generating the conditions for emergent leadership. For Lichtenstein and Plowman (2009), these behaviors can be clustered into four categories: disrupting existing patterns, encouraging novelty and sense-making and sense-giving activities, and stabilizing feedbacks. While the complexity approach to leadership pays attention to the emerging property of organizations, this approach does not negate the role of formal administrative or bureaucratic structure in the development of leadership and organizations. One of the key roles that leaders can play is to create connections or to harmonize administrative structures and adaptive structures in organizations. Overall, this set of papers on complexity theory and leadership provides an innovative conception of leadership that transcends the role of individuals as leaders in order to conceive leadership as a collective and emergent property of organizations.

Leadership as Practice and in Communication. While also interested in questions pertaining to the nature of leadership, some contributions in the interactional stream have also added empirical work to their reflections. In particular, the contributions of Crevani et al. (2007, 2010) and Lindgren and Packendorff (2011) strongly reflect a practice perspective while pursuing the exploration of leadership as a collective and emergent phenomenon. Along the lines of other researchers such as Hosking (2007), the authors argued

that it is leadership in action that should be the focus of research, rather than individual leaders. Anchored in a processual ontology, leadership is viewed as continually negotiated and created by actors in mundane interactions while also becoming an object of reflection (Crevani et al., 2007). Although sharing a number of similarities with other relational conceptualizations, these authors also added a discursive dimension. They recognized that leadership is not only something that is produced but also something that is a social, cultural, and institutionalized discourse and that this discourse has an influence on actors' conceptions and actions—therefore highlighting the performativity of leadership discourse. Moreover—and contrary to other reformulations of leadership—they did not stop at proposing that leadership is an outcome: they went one step further and specified some of the forms these outcomes can take. They suggested that what emerge, when actors are involved in producing leadership, are direction, co-orientation, and action space, and it is these elements that should be the focus of leadership studies. Lindgren and Packendorff (2011) applied these ideas to the context of a biotechnology firm, illustrating how the collective production of leadership is achieved through interactions around issue-processing, construction of rules and responsibilities, and the co-construction of professional identities.

In another vein, Vine et al. (2008) have highlighted the communicational dimensions of leadership, exploring how leadership is co-produced through talk and conversations. They mobilized sociolinguistics (analysis of talk guided by an understanding of the social context and norms in which the interactions are happening) and explored concretely how pairs of individuals perform leadership together, through talk. They showed that leadership is a dynamic phenomenon that has to be continuously elaborated and enacted in relation to the changing context and that communication plays a significant role in this process. They also underlined the importance of training related to communication, suggesting that current communication training in leadership development tends to overlook its more mundane side.

Ethical and Moral Concerns of Leadership Interactions. Some contributions within this research stream have adopted a more prescriptive angle. While retaining the tenets of the relational and emergent view of leadership, these studies are concerned with ethical and moral issues and the principles, values, and conduct of leaders: they are interested in what is “good”, in terms of leadership practice. They directly address value questions and even put forward ideals that should guide individuals in existential reflections:

In other words, in order for one to become a collaborative leader it requires that he or she actually deeply believes certain things, is actually striving to become a certain kind of human being, and is willing to bind her or himself to the current and future well-being of the group. Thus,

the process of becoming a collaborative leader is one of personal transformation (. . .). (Mendenhall & Marsh 2010, p. 301)

For example, Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) argued that relational leadership is more than a new reconceptualization of leadership and that it is a “way of being-in-the-world” that refers to practical wisdom, intersubjectivity, and dialog. Because relational leadership focuses on interactions, it opens the door to a reflection on the ethics of leadership practice. Other contributions present an explicit engagement toward democratic ideals and participation in organizational contexts. Raelin (2003, 2005, 2011) has been using the term *leaderful* to refer to the idea that leadership can be shared and assumed by every member of the organization; a leaderful organization “is full of leadership [. . .] (e)veryone is participating in the leadership of the entity both collectively and concurrently; in other words, not just sequentially, but all together and at the same time (Raelin, 2003)” (Raelin, 2011, p. 203). Raelin contended that leaderful practice is required because traditional models of leadership are becoming less appropriate in organizations where knowledge workers are more and more present, where structures are more horizontal, and where boundaries are more open. Leaderful practice is described as in opposition to traditional approaches on four dimensions: it is concurrent (where traditional approaches are serial), collective (instead of being individual), collaborative (and not controlling), and compassionate (whereas traditional approaches are dispassionate) (Raelin, 2005). Learning also occupies an important place in this view of leadership.

In his 2011 contribution, Raelin suggested that a practice-based perspective on leadership is useful to practitioners to think about their action, but would have more impact if it integrated an ideological stance, considering that leadership is fundamentally about participation, that is, if it was combined with the leaderful perspective. As he put it bluntly, “leadership-as-practice benefits from but may also suffer from a flat ideological position” (2011, p. 203). The addition of the developments and ideas from the leaderful perspective has consequences in terms of leadership development and training. Raelin’s studies clearly promote democratic ideals as a way to develop a better practice of leadership in which all organizational actors may participate. As such, they present a morally grounded and a positive view of leadership action, a message that is slightly different from the one at the core of the more descriptive contributions.

Assessment and Future Directions

The studies presented here aim at documenting how leadership is elaborated, enacted, and performed in daily activities inside groups or organizations in order to understand the subtle and complex dynamics that are involved in the production of direction. The authors have pursued this objective through

conceptual reflections, empirical investigations, and prescriptive contributions. These studies illuminate understudied aspects of leadership and have offered some rich illustrations of leadership under production. This stream of work can make a distinctive contribution by capturing and preserving the fluidity of leadership as it is produced in interactions. The studies also acknowledge the communicational dimension of leadership and provide researchers with intricate accounts of how leadership is shaped by actors in co-presence, something that is largely hidden in the other streams of research discussed here.

Yet, two important issues deserve greater attention: the place of power and the methodological consequences of the definition of leadership that this perspective puts forward. First, although some contributions do acknowledge the place of power issues in the collective, local, and contextual production of leadership, most tend to overlook power relations and questions related to formal positions. This is especially the case for normative contributions, which, given their objectives, may be interpreted at times as promoting not a renewed definition of leadership, but a leadership ideology. While the interactional perspective suggests that all actors may be involved in producing leadership, not all organizational actors are equal when entering interactions. As Sveiby (2011)—who applied Drath et al.’s framework to understand leadership practices and beliefs that create egalitarian and power-symmetric leadership situations—reminds us, collective leadership does not appear in a vacuum: it requires what he calls “benevolent hierarchical” leadership to allow collective leadership to appear and to flourish and it needs to be carefully balanced to avoid returning to vertical hierarchy. He added “collective leadership is not for the indolent and the faint-hearted. It requires value consensus, effort, courage and active participation by all members in the group [...]” (2011, p. 404). Not only did Sveiby underline that power issues have to be better acknowledged, but he also recognized something that is rarely evoked in the contributions included here: the *work* that may be required from actors to create truly collective leadership, work that, in many cases, will start from the vertical hierarchy already in place, recalling to a degree the papers presented in our first research stream. Fletcher (2004) observed that some of the “post-heroic” approaches to leadership are power and gender neutral, which is paradoxical since most of these conceptions aim at changing the way leadership is conceived and practiced. She noted that despite discourses of collaboration and sharing (the rhetorical dimension of the post-heroic approach), the individualistic model of leadership persists, at least at a subconscious and cultural level. This is why she argued that preserving the political project of change inscribed in these conceptions requires that power and gender concerns be made explicit. Because post-heroic leadership “requires [...] a different mental model of how to exercise power and how to achieve workplace success and effectiveness” (Fletcher, 2004, p. 656), issues that refer to asymmetrical relationships have to be addressed directly.

In a similar vein, Lindgren, Packendorff, and Tham (2010) argued that negative aspects or consequences of plural forms of leadership are under-theorized. Applying the framework developed previously, they explored the dysfunctional dynamics that unfold through interactions in a change project. While documenting how leadership was produced in this context, their case is one where hypocrisy and value conflicts eroded mutual understanding and constrained leadership potential. The strength of the interactional perspective on leadership is precisely to allow a close-up study of what happens in a context; as Lindgren et al. (2010) concluded, this may not always be positive and rosy. Leadership interactions can create problems and can be detrimental and even unethical, and these dysfunctional processes deserve to be better understood. Few descriptive studies examine these aspects and the normative contributions neglect them entirely.

In summary, the interactional perspective could be more sensitive to inequalities, asymmetrical relationships, power positions of actors, and dysfunctional dynamics. It would be relevant to recognize more clearly the place of power—which could be viewed in a dynamic, evolving, and possibly negotiated way in keeping with a socio-constructionist epistemology. We still know little about how power affects leadership practices, interactions, and outcomes. If empirical studies conducted from this perspective integrated these concerns, this would refine our understanding of how plural leadership emerges, what influences its unfolding, and how it is being produced.

On a more general level, by advocating an interactional, communicational, relational, emergent, and processual view of leadership, this perspective runs the risk of diluting the distinctiveness of leadership. If leadership is an organizing process, what differentiates it from other organizing processes? When studied as a mundane activity to which every actor can contribute, “leadership” may easily disappear or become difficult to distinguish from other phenomena, such as decision-making, problem-solving or simply teamworking. This is a conceptual issue, but also a methodological problem: how can leadership be studied and what counts as leadership in this case? In other words, the specificity of leadership can be diluted in this research stream. We suggest that it needs to be preserved for definitional and methodological reasons.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, we have described a panorama of perspectives on leadership as a plural phenomenon, all attempting to reach beyond the heroic or romantic perspective of the individual leader, but in rather different ways. The roots, contributions, and findings of each perspective are summarized in Table 1, and in the final segment of each section, we explored ways in which each research stream might be separately developed. In this section, we first consider

briefly what the different perspectives might learn from each other. We then examine three fundamental tensions underlying all the streams and use these to identify some more radical suggestions about directions for research within this area more generally. We conclude by examining some broader critical concerns about the overall concept of leadership in the plural.

Cross-fertilization among the Four Research Streams

The comparison of the different research streams is complicated by the fact that they may focus on rather distinct empirical phenomena and/or favor different epistemological assumptions. Nevertheless, after reviewing this work, we see that each perspective might offer lessons that could be generative for future research within other streams. For example, the “sharing leadership” perspective has emphasized hypothesis testing and the development of cumulative findings, something that seems to have been less of a priority in other streams. While work on “producing leadership” seems epistemologically incompatible with such approaches, this is not necessarily the case for the “pooling” and “spreading” streams, offering several opportunities for more such research that might add solidity to key insights. In addition, recent studies drawing on social network analysis in teams might be extended to the analysis of plural leadership in broader settings within and across organizations with relevance to other streams of work.

The work on “pooling leadership” has emphasized more strongly than other perspectives contextual factors that influence the shape and dynamics of distributed leadership roles. There could be much greater consideration of such factors within other streams. For example, by focusing intensively on micro-interactions in the here and now, the “producing leadership” stream may neglect the baggage of history, background, and power relationships that particular individuals bring to those interactions and that influence what is and can be produced. In contrast, studies in the “spreading leadership” stream have explored the role of routines and artifacts in channeling patterns of leadership distribution. These ideas could be of value to other streams also. Moreover, this stream has tended to develop a more critical angle on the distribution of leadership than on other perspectives, something that might also be transferred.

Finally, the “producing leadership” stream emphasizes the importance of micro-level interactions. This work may complement the other perspectives by capturing not only whether leadership is more or less shared and distributed, but also how this happens in everyday practice, filling out the rather coarse-grained descriptions provided by the quantitative indicators of the “sharing leadership” stream or the retrospective interview reports commonly used in the “pooling” and “spreading” streams of research. The empirical description of leadership-sharing could be enhanced by such works.

Beyond the particular strengths and weaknesses of the different perspectives, we suggest that a series of three bipolar tensions or oppositions can be identified as underlying them and indeed as underlying the whole idea of plurality in leadership. These broader tensions are now discussed, leading us to develop some more general and perhaps more radical ideas about how research on this phenomenon might be developed.

Plural Leadership as Mutual versus Coalitional

The four perspectives that we have described in this paper differ in their treatment of the questions “who is leader?” and “who is follower?” Both the “sharing leadership” and “producing leadership” streams seem to focus on mutuality—that is, the idea that group members explicitly or implicitly lead *each other* within a closed interacting group. Followers and leaders are essentially the same people. Conversely, the other two perspectives (“pooling leadership” and “spreading leadership”) tend to retain the notion that some are leaders and some are followers. In “pooling” where small numbers at the top share roles, leadership remains the privilege of an elite group. Leadership here is coalitional, involving alliances between different individuals to jointly exert influence *over others* through the consolidation of power relations. Although a degree of mutual influence is present, this is not mainly where leadership is directed. Similarly, the “spreading leadership” perspective implies that different leaders contribute to moving projects forward at different times, constituting an emergent coalition. “Followers” in these studies are often not specifically identified, but there is an implication that some but not all participants exert significant agency in contributing to outcomes.

The focus on the mutual or coalitional nature of plural leadership leads us to a provocative issue. There is an implicit assumption in almost all of the literature on plural leadership that plurality (whether mutual *or* coalitional) necessarily implies convergence around common goals and directions. But why could plural leadership not also be conflictual? Other than the study of Spillane (2006), who explicitly noted the possibility of conflict among distributed leaders and a limited number of references to dysfunctional co-leaders at the top (e.g. Heenan & Bennis, 1999; Reid & Karambayya, 2009), there has been surprisingly little explicit study of the rivalries that may emerge when different individuals claim leadership within the same domain and succeed in mobilizing groups of followers behind them. Yet, at the same time, part of the resistance to the very notion of “shared” or “distributed” leadership comes from a conception that it might be a recipe for chaos or paralysis (Fayol, 1917; Locke, 2003). Researchers might learn from studies of plural leadership in more contentious organizational situations. A focus on leadership in the plural that renders such situations invisible, as much of this work currently seems to do, is clearly missing some of the essence of what makes this phenomenon worthy of study.

Plural Leadership as Structured versus Emergent

In his discussion of “distributed leadership”, Gronn (2002) identified three levels of structuration in plural leadership, varying from “institutionalized forms”, to “intuitive working relations”, to “spontaneous collaboration”. While most would agree that plural leadership is almost always to some degree emergent, it is clear that some perspectives and writers are inclined to view the phenomenon as more structurally defined than others. For example, scholars of our first perspective (sharing leadership) have emphasized the critical nature of formalized vertical leadership in enabling effective shared leadership to occur. Those interested in dyads, triads, and constellations at the top (pooling leadership) distinguish structurally between those within the leadership group and those who are not, even though roles within the top group may be established in a more organic way. These two perspectives thus recognize the importance of structure. Scholars examining plural leadership as spread over levels and time often see leadership roles as defined spontaneously, while the interactional perspective (producing leadership) is by definition oriented around the idea of emergence.

Beyond the specific research streams, focusing on this dimension raises interesting questions as to how important formalization might be to the whole concept of plural leadership. In some of the literature, the notion of formal organization in which different individuals hold different degrees of authority or resource-based influence almost disappears, as if the individuals involved were free atoms in an egalitarian world (Raelin, 2011). Among certain other authors, the emphasis on the need for plural leadership to be “planned” or assigned by vertical leaders to different individuals and groups in order to be effective (Leithwood et al., 2007) almost negates the notion of leadership. If the distribution of leadership roles has to be “planned”, then to what extent are non-hierarchical leaders really “leading” or simply following the dictates of the plan (in other words, they are not leaders, but followers)?

More generally, we believe that scholars need to pay greater attention to the underlying pattern of power relationships (authority, resources, etc.) that might influence the emergence of plural leadership. Some have recently suggested that the enthusiasm for “shared” and “distributed” leadership may have gone too far in diluting the role of hierarchy to an unrealistic degree (Currie & Lockett, 2011). In line with these critiques, Gronn (2008, 2009), who initially contributed to shaping the notion of distributed leadership, has used the adjective *hybrid* to characterize plural forms of leadership. By asserting the hybrid character of leadership, Gronn emphasized that many forms of leadership can co-exist in the same context, with their degree of sharedness varying depending on the situation. Equally, with their concept of *blended* leadership, Collinson and Collinson (2009) can also be seen as sharing Gronn’s arguments in favor of a composite view of leadership implying a mix of structured and emergent leadership roles.

Scholars might also consider more systematically how the formal structuring of leadership roles and their spontaneous emergence interact dynamically over time. In hierarchical organizations characterized by a concentration of power, leadership is at first sight confounded with formal authority. In such contexts, plurality in leadership, at least in a superficial way, will be the result of acts of delegation by formal leaders in control of organizational processes. However, in a less visible way, plurality in the context of hierarchy may develop around situations of resistance by followers. Here, plural leadership may actually emerge as a response to structural constraints, as those with limited structural power develop leadership capacities within the process of getting organized to oppose authority or domination. As we hinted above, leadership studies have paid insufficient attention to phenomena associated with conflict and the mobilization of resistance.

Conversely, scholars might also examine how the spontaneous emergence of plural leadership influences formalization and the ongoing structuration of power relations. For example, when leadership emerges in unexpected places, the people involved seem unlikely to be ignored as later candidates for formal position. In addition, when individuals in authority voluntarily (or even accidentally) share leadership with others, one might ask how such behaviors affect their subsequent ability to exert influence and authority. We not only argue that studies of collective forms of leadership need to focus more intensively on power and conflict, but also argue that there are many untapped opportunities to examine in more depth the dynamic interactive relationships over time between formal structures and emergent leadership roles in and across organizations.

Pluralizing Leadership Versus Channeling Pluralism

This brings us to a perhaps more fundamental tension within the literature on various forms of plural leadership that is related to the neglect of issues of power, conflict, and dynamics touched on in the previous points. It seems in fact as if different groups of scholars are approaching the notion of pluralism in leadership from entirely different starting points.

On the one hand, many researchers, notably those in the “sharing leadership” tradition, as well as some users of the term “distributed leadership” come to the topic with the *a priori* conception that *pluralizing leadership* offers many potential benefits. These scholars start by explicitly or implicitly assuming that power and authority are naturally concentrated and that the concern is one of diffusing leadership roles to others. Mayrowetz (2008) noted three usages of the term “distributed leadership” that imply its added value. Two of these are largely instrumental: pluralizing leadership is believed to be important because it leads to group or organizational effectiveness or because it contributes to capability development and organizational learning.

In both cases, plurality directly or indirectly delivers organizational performance. The third usage is more normative and complements the others: here pluralizing leadership contributes to organizational democracy and is valued for its own sake. As we have hinted in the discussion of the different streams, many studies have clear ideological undertones, and it is sometimes quite hard to distinguish instrumental and normative arguments. The irony behind this view is, however, that the argument for diffusing or pluralizing leadership is strongly grounded in a basic assumption that sharing is a *choice* on the part of hierarchical leaders who empower others. The capacity to lead must be given before it can be taken.

In contrast, for other scholars, and especially those who have examined leadership in professional, knowledge-based or inter-organizational settings, the starting point is entirely different. These scholars assume that power, authority, and expertise are in any case widely dispersed and that a multitude of individuals will inevitably exert influence in particular situations. For these scholars, plural leadership is essentially a “theoretical lens” for understanding a complex phenomenon (Mayrowetz, 2008). Rather than being concerned with *pluralizing leadership*, these scholars are more likely to be concerned with the problem of *channeling plurality* in such a way as to generate a form of coherence. The normative objective may not be to enhance democracy, but to find ways to cope with it and mobilize it once it is there. In such circumstances, plural leadership is likely to be seen as “effective” (i.e. influential) when it is coalitional and succeeds in overcoming the natural tendency toward disintegration or inertia that plagues such organizational settings (Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2007). Here, leadership is taken, not given, and a plurality of leaders is needed because no single individual alone could conceivably bridge the sources of influence, expertise, and legitimacy needed to move a complex social system forward constructively.

The two perspectives are to a degree in dialectic tension with one another. For example, it is perhaps no accident that several advocates of pluralizing leadership emphasize its particular importance in areas where work is complex and interdependent and requires creativity (Davis & Eisenhardt, 2011; Pearce, 2004): these are precisely the domains where power is in any case relatively widely dispersed. However, in these contributions, there might be more awareness of the fact that when formal leaders “share” leadership with others, they are perhaps not so much *delegating* leadership influence to others (pluralizing leadership), but rather attempting to mobilize the influence that others naturally have in a direction that is likely to favor overarching group goals (channeling plurality). The dialectic tension between these two poles is nowhere clearer than in the discourse of “distributed leadership” in academia (Bolden et al., 2009) where the notion that top management might “distribute” leadership to other levels seems ironic in a context where leadership has always come in large part from the bottom up (Mintzberg, 1979) and where formal leaders have often been viewed as struggling to

exert some kind of influence within an “organized anarchy” (Cohen & March, 1986). From a managerial perspective, channeling influence through the mobilization of coalition of plural leaders is a useful means to achieve collective goals. From a critical perspective, the ideological tone that sometimes accompanies the discourse of sharing, pooling, spreading, and producing leadership may be seen as hiding an agenda of control beneath a veneer of democracy.

Nemeses of Plural Perspectives: Disintegration and Romanticization

The above observation leads us to two concerns or warnings that it seems important to raise in closing. The first relates to the whole notion of leadership itself and the danger of the disintegration of the concept as it becomes generalized to the collective. The second, in contrast, relates to the potential for reification of leadership in the plural and to the apparent inescapability of romance in any discussion of leadership, be it singular or plural.

Indeed, as we examined the different perspectives described above, we began to see that while there are many opportunities for development, there are also dangers that through generalization the very notion of leadership might become meaningless and that alternative concepts might sometimes be more useful in capturing the phenomena studied. For example, in the first perspective on “sharing”, and particularly in cases where vertical leadership and shared leadership are considered simultaneously, there are close similarities between shared leadership notions and notions such as empowerment. Moreover, the literature on shared leadership shades rapidly into a broader literature on teams and team leadership. Morgeson et al. (2010) reviewed this literature, identifying a wide range of possible leadership functions. Yet, as these functions become more finely delineated into multiple categories carried out by a variety of different people, it becomes, in our view, harder and harder to distinguish what is definable as “leadership” and what might be seen as an ordinary element of “teamwork”.

Similarly, the literature on “pooling” leadership at the top shades into the literature on top management teams (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Most of this literature has focused on how team characteristics (e.g. demographic diversity) affect performance, where the team is seen as a *de facto* collective leader without much attention to its internal functioning. However, some of this work looks at patterns in top team decision-making (Eisenhardt, 1989; Roberto, 2003) and some has looked at how power and politics play out in teams (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). Again, there is a fine line between what might be described as pooled leadership and what might be better represented in terms of decision-making, power, or politics.

Some of the literature on “spreading” leadership is also vulnerable to the charge that different labels might be as or more relevant than “leadership”. For example, several studies of collaboration across boundaries have not found it necessary to invoke leadership, but have rather talked about

phenomena such as coordination (Kellogg et al., 2006) and brokering (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010). These categories may actually be more revealing of the content of what is taking place than the more generic notion of leadership.

Finally, as described above, the notion of “producing leadership” through interaction has many attractive qualities, but it appears particularly hard to pin down in an operational way. The interactive processes whereby leadership is produced easily shade into decision-making, collaboration, or simply work. When “leadership” can no longer be attached to individuals at all, there is a danger that it may become a chimera.

Yet, there is currently enormous enthusiasm in certain parts of the literature for notions of plural leadership to the point where other authors have begun referring to it as a “discourse”. For example, shared leadership has been touted as offering potential to ameliorate corporate social irresponsibility (Pearce & Manz, 2011) and to improve the performance of sales teams (Perry et al., 1999) and of boards of directors (Vandewaerde et al., 2011). “Distributed leadership” has been widely promoted in the fields of education and health care (Mayrowetz, 2008). Furthermore, several authors have associated the notion of relational leadership with democratic ideals and have promoted it as inherent to successful and humane organizations (Hosking, 2007; Raelin, 2005).

Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich (1985) introduced the idea of the “romance” of leadership, a tendency to see leaders as heroes and thus to use “leadership” as a catch-all explanation for the successes and failures of organizations. As suggested above, leadership in the plural does not avoid its own form of romanticization. We would argue that scholarship in the field of leadership does not necessarily gain by moving from a view of leadership as individual heroism toward an equally naïve democratic ideal in which leadership is an organizational quality shared by all.

However, as we hope to have shown in this review, there is much to be gained by considering leadership to be a collective or plural phenomenon. It is the common experience of life within and beyond organizations that leadership and leaders are to be found in many places. In a shared power world, plural forms of leadership where different people bring different resources, capabilities, and sources of legitimacy (and yes, followers) to the table offer a path to getting things done: not an idealized path, and not a path that always succeeds, but a key component of organizing nonetheless that needs attention from organizational scholars.

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