Leadership
http://lea.sagepub.com/

Leadership Configurations

Peter Gronn

The online version of this article can be found at:

http://lea.sagepub.com/content/5/3/381

Published by:

$SAGE

http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *Leadership* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://lea.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://lea.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://lea.sagepub.com/content/5/3/381.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Jul 28, 2009

What is This?

Leadership Configurations

Peter Gronn, *University of Cambridge, UK*

Abstract *In this article I argue for a revised unit of analysis in leadership. I refer to this unit as a configuration. The need for this revision arises out of a reconsideration of 'distributed' as a valid and accurate means of representing leadership. While aggregated, rather than holistic, understandings of distributed leadership have assumed prominence in educational circles and the public sector, aggregation is an indiscriminate approach to demonopolizing the idea of solo leadership and decentring 'the' leader. By treating pluralities of leaders as numerically equivalent or all-of-a-piece, for example, an aggregated understanding makes little allowance for different levels of leadership and for qualitative differences among leading units. In a number of empirical accounts of distributed leadership, however, individual leaders still figure prominently as agents of influence, although they frequently do so in company with a variety of emergent 'small number' formations. For this reason, the totality of such arrangements represents a time-, space-, context- and membership-bound configuration of influence-based relationships, the dynamics of which, due to the mixed patterning of the formations, are most accurately characterized as 'hybrid'. Some suggestions are made concerning the significance of this proposed unit revision along with their implications for research into leadership practice.*

Keywords *configuration; convergence; distributed; hybrid; influence; leadership*

> In every single social-historical configuration, there operates a number of reciprocities among the elements, which can probably never be wholly enumerated. (Simmel, 1964: 200)

Introduction

The time of writing this article coincided with the final campaign stages and outcome of the 2008 US presidential election. As this momentous event raises some interesting questions concerning the ways in which scholars conceptualize leadership and, in particular, about the appropriate ways to 'configure' it as a real-world phenomenon, some brief reflections on the election at the outset of this article seem to be warranted.

There is no need to summarize the details of the result or to dwell on its political significance, for these features have been widely canvassed. What is of particular interest for those of us with a stake in leadership is the way in which this

election took on a life of its own and became a media spectacle. Whatever else it might have been, this election represented a triumph of celebrity politics: the sense of expectation in the lead-up weeks to Tuesday 5 November was both ubiquitous and palpable. There was a lot of talk about destiny and defining moments. In its pre-election issue, for example, the *New York Review of Books* invited 14 scholars, authors and journalists to discourse at length in a symposium entitled 'A Fateful Election' (which, in turn, was partly reproduced as a lift-out supplement in a leading daily UK newspaper). In trying to absorb as much of the campaigning as I could from my vantage point 'across the pond', I was astonished by the numbers of UK reporters and journalists on stand-by at various locations in the USA. Such was the depth and extent of the coverage of the BBC and Channel 4, for instance, that legions of news readers, presenters and commentators relaying the latest voter intentions, offering tips from party insiders and communicating soundbites from candidates were to be found across the country. Likewise, the *Guardian* and *The Times*, to take just two newspapers, counted down the last days to polling day with page after page of column inches devoted to the fluctuating percentages of esti- mated support for the two candidates, graphs of oscillating voter allegiance over the previous year or so, scintillating campaign tit bits and gossip, loads of expert commentary and considerable speculation about the global implications in the event of a victory by either candidate. By any standards, this was a blitz. Moreover, the coverage displayed a level of personal intrusiveness into the lives of two public figures (the younger of the two, in particular) that simply has to have been without precedent. During the frenetic final fortnight of the campaign I was conscious of myself at times trying to will the outcome. After it was all over, there seemed to be a collective sighing of relief. But the joy was far from universal, because when I last checked *The New York Times* website (early December 2008), more than 58 million of the nearly 125 million Americans who had cast a vote, voted *against* the winning candidate. Reality bites.

What is this spectacle all about? What does it mean? One thing that it might mean, as I commented to a class of postgraduate students on voting day, is a likely resurgence of scholarly interest in charisma or even heroic understandings of leader- ship more generally. Only time will tell. On the other hand, now that the counting of ballot papers is well and truly over (unlike in 2000), it is as if a line has been drawn in the sand. Reality really did begin to bite quickly, for the media's attention switched straight away onto national and international problems, and speculation about the likely composition of the President-elect's team. This was not just because the tran- sitions to office of the two previous Democratic Presidents had been rather untidy, but because at the end of the day the Presidency, as it is referred to in US political discourse, is an 'administration', that is, a collective entity. With an estimated 3000 executive and senior appointments to be made, this might look like a fairly solid platform of evidence on which to build a persuasive case for a distributed, rather than a heroic, view of leadership. In my view, however, a rush to judgment in either of these two directions would be premature, not to mention inaccurate.

Descending from the lofty and ethereal heights of presidential politics to the mundane realms of life in organizations, then, there are some important lessons to be learned from this recent clash of aspiring presidential titans. The one on which I want to focus in this article is what I have come to regard as the pointlessness of

pitting focused and distributed approaches to leadership against one another in a battle for the high ground of superior insight. Quite apart from anything else, what the Obama victory tells us as students of leadership – and the point, I shall argue, applies with equal force in universities, schools, colleges and in other spheres – is that it is not a case of either/or, but that both leadership understandings, individual and collective, count. Indeed, together they make up what I have come to think of as a leadership configuration (i.e. a pattern or an arrangement of practice) and that, because these comprise a mixture of elements, such configurations are most accurately understood as examples of hybrid leadership.

The need for a new category

For about a decade or so in the field of leadership studies and beyond, there has been a groundswell of interest in the idea of distributed leadership. This interest has arisen for a variety of reasons, although it is fair to say that a key factor has been dissatisfaction with what became known as the 'hero paradigm' which consolidated itself in leadership studies from roughly the mid 1980s, due to the popularity of transformational leadership and a revitalization of charismatic leadership. Enthusiasm for distributed leadership as a kind of post-heroic alternative translated itself into an accumulating body of literature which encompasses conceptual discussions, empirical investigations and a handful of studies that measure the impact of distributed leadership. While limitations of space preclude an extended review of this corpus of material, the uptake of distributed leadership includes such domains as school education (Gronn, 1999; Spillane, 2006), further education (FE) (Collinson & Collinson, 2007), higher education (HE) (Bolden et al., 2008a, 2008b), health care (Buchanan et al., 2007) and business (Heenan & Bennis, 1999).

The argument of this article is that, notwithstanding the contribution made by studies of distributed leadership in advancing situated knowledge, a distributed perspective provides part of the picture of practice but by no means the entirety of it. In the next section of the article I consider the forms taken by distributed leadership and the interpersonal and situational dynamics these entail. I show that, despite their reaction to individualist approaches to leadership, solo leaders continue to figure prominently in accounts that purport to be distributed and that distributed leadership apologists have not adequately clarified the role and contribution of individuals as continuing sources of organizational influence within a distributed framework. The difficulty here emanates from one of the two main ways in which 'distributed' has been broadly construed, that is, 'large numbers', or the aggregated sharing of influence in organizations (Gronn, 2008b). In retrospect, however well intentioned the initial motivation of trying to reconstruct leadership as the monopoly of one individual, by stretching it across the organization, to paraphrase Spillane et al.'s (2000) metaphor, 'distributed' as a discourse for representing the ensuing practice of potentially numerous individuals seems slightly anomalous. It is conceivable, for example, as I have suggested elsewhere (Gronn, 2008b), that a hypothetical pattern of leadership in an organization may comprise some teams, networks and a series of individuals whose influence stems from their presumed charismatic inspiration – a handful of mini-Obamas, as it were. At one level, the totality of such a mix is clear evidence of distribution, as distinct from a monopoly

383

of leadership anchored in one influence source. At another level, however, distribution does not pass muster as a description because it does less than full justice to the range of concentrated and dispersed formations that co-exist and co-mingle within that mix.

Despite these difficulties, it is this stretched or large-number view of distributed leadership, rather than the (in my view) infinitely more interesting small-number holistic (Gronn, 2002) or person-plus (Spillane, 2006) definition, that tends to have received popular acclaim. This preference is evident in the injunctions to head teachers now commonly heard in professional gatherings of school educators, for example, in which they are urged to actively distribute leadership in their schools. As Hartley (2007) notes, this instrumentalism is evidence that distributed leadership has been politically domesticated or legitimated and is now promoted as part of the discursive armoury of official policy making. The effect of this presumed desirability of 'distributing' as an intentional act on the part of head teachers has been (in effect) to relegate small-number distributed units to the status of poor relation. It is not hard to see why: apart from the idea of teams which has resonated rather easily with practitioners, the very notion that a significant part of the reality of workplace relations might be captured by holistic units (as evident, apart from teams, in couplings, partnerships, triads and quartets etc.), let alone any potential virtue that might accrue from understanding the dynamics of such units, is not an easy idea to sell. In essence, then, with one understanding of distributed leadership there is a clear take-home message, while with the other the message is far less obvious. The irony here, of course, is that these seemingly less sell-able holistic units are exceptionally well documented in the research literature. Pairing, for example, is a regular feature of practice, as I have demonstrated empirically on two occasions (Gronn, 1999; Gronn & Hamilton, 2004), and Alvarez et al. (2007) cite a survey in which more than 10 per cent of companies had two or more CEOs. Likewise, triangular psycho-social relationships among senior executives are not uncommon (Hodgson et al., 1965). Indeed, the lineage of theorizing about the complexities of small-number relations stretches back as far as Simmel's (1964) sociology at the turn of the 20th century, followed by Becker's amplification of this at the height of the popularity of small group research in social psychology (Becker & Useem, 1942), all of which has culminated recently in Alvarez and Svejenova's (2005) masterly synthesis of research on shared power dynamics.

In light of these concerns (to be amplified shortly), my argument is twofold. First, a term such as hybrid would be a more accurate description of situational practice that includes both individual leaders and holistic leadership units working in tandem than distributed, because the notion of hybrid signals a mixture of types. The corollary of this substitution, of course, is that hybrid is not intended to define a new type of leader but is employed as a more advantageous means of characterizing situations. Second, I am suggesting that, for the purposes of better comprehending practice, the unit of analysis be broadened slightly from distributed leadership to 'leadership configuration'. There is nothing especially privileged about the word 'configuration' and, of a number of other possible candidate terms, such as constellation, ensemble, assemblage, gestalt or conglomeration, constellation is preferable although usage of it may have been precluded by its prior adoption by Hodgson et al. (1965) to typify trios. In the next section of the discussion I substantiate the case for hybridity by

384

considering a number of examples in which individual and distributed forms of leadership have been shown to co-exist. This is followed in the succeeding section by a detailed explication of the idea of a hybrid configuration along with some research implications.

Necessary perhaps, but by no means sufficient

Recent research into patterns of leadership practice in the school education, FE and HE sectors provides strong grounds for a rethink of a purely distributed approach to understanding leadership. Some examples from each area are reviewed briefly.

School Education sector

At the time of writing, the vast bulk of the empirical investigations of distributed leadership have been undertaken within primary and secondary schools in North America, the UK, New Zealand and Australia. Firestone and Martinez's (2007) recent discussion of school district-level distributed leadership patterns is a good illustration of how distributed can inadvertently mislabel a situation in which the influence of a number of individuals continues to be significant. Spillane and Diamond (2008) provide six other instances with their case studies of principals (and there are three other examples discussed in Gronn, 2008b).

Firestone and Martinez (2006) examined the influence of districts on classroom teaching in disadvantaged New Jersey schools receiving special funding for a US Mathematics-Science partnership project. This field study showed that district curriculum supervisors intervened to closely monitor classroom teaching by observing classes and examining test scores, procuring and allocating instructional materials and schedules, providing professional development and controlling the use of textbooks. For such reasons, teacher leaders were 'largely the creatures of the districts' and 'occupied formal positions created by the districts to work with other teachers' (p. 23). They influenced their fellow teachers by providing materials, and monitoring and supporting their growth and development. In overall terms, leadership was shared between these two groups:

> Our findings suggest that teacher leaders complement the district efforts.
> Teacher leaders and districts contribute to the same leadership tasks: procuring and distributing materials, monitoring the improvement effort, and developing people. However, they do so in different ways. Districts operate at a distance and rely on formal authority and substitutes for leadership while teachers rely more on close relationships to lead. (p. 9)

From a distributed perspective, the results highlight the aligning of work practices to ensure that solo and paired actions are as much as possible complementary. Clearly, there is evidence of pluralities of sources of influence in this study. In this sense it is a distributed analysis. On the other hand, distributed may do less than full justice to the ways some sources of influence carry more weight than others, and are anchored in different sets of resources.

It was with similar qualms in mind about the descriptive adequacy of distributed that, in regard to the pattern of leadership activity evident from fieldwork in a

385

secondary school, I suggested that practice be characterized alternatively as hybrid (Gronn, 2008a). Part of the aim of this case study was to obtain an understanding of the division of labour across a range of operational areas of schooling. Beginning with sociometric data, it was found that a range of individuals and groupings were attributed with leadership by colleagues. Interview evidence supplemented by observational data revealed how the range of portfolios of responsibilities among senior teachers and the school's administrators was divided up and operationalized between a number of individuals sometimes working autonomously and alone, and at other times coordinating in pairs, small groups and networks. There was also a formal committee and participatory structure alongside which there was evidence of emergent forms of activity based on the need to address problems rapidly, and to inform colleagues after-the-fact rather than constantly referring matters up-the-line for official endorsement of proposed resolution strategies. In short, in conjunction with the spine of formal responsibilities there co-existed a series of more ad hoc, adaptive arrangements. As will be seen from the following examples, this pattern was far from atypical.

Further and Higher Education sectors

Equally, if not more, compelling evidence of the need for a rethink of distributed leadership is evident in Collinson and Collinson's (this issue) 140 interviews with a range of staff (from principal to lecturer) in seven FE colleges. This yielded a similar pattern of hybridity. Asked to define effective leadership in the FE sector, their informants preferred a mix of hierarchically and laterally anchored leadership which is referred to as 'blended'. Bolden et al. (2008a, 2008b) similarly investigated leadership in 12 UK higher education institutions (HEIs). These authors noted a tendency to distribute leadership widely across UK universities, except that the ways in which the various structures operate are still 'largely dependent on the holders of formal leadership positions' (Bolden et al., 2008a: 60). Two types of leader were believed by informants to be influential: formal position holders exerting top-down influence along with a range of colleagues exercising interpersonal influence. Another way of describing the cross-cutting interplay of these sources of influence is the 'dynamic tension' between recent pressures towards corporate managerialism and traditional values associated with collegiality (Bolden et al., 2008b).

On reflection, both these results are hardly surprising. Notwithstanding the emphasis on distribution and a strong commitment to collective leadership, a 'striking finding' by Bolden et al. (2008a: 62), for example, was that their HE informants still expressed a need for 'inspirational or visionary individuals'. This was 'particularly in times of change or transition (or to bring about these)'. Such a finding is doubly significant. First, this type of expectation of HE leaders, especially vice-chancellors (or rectors, presidents and principals), offers additional confirmation of what, since the publication of Calder's (1977) pioneering paper, has become known as the attributional basis of leadership. The strongly held collective expectation of appointees to such high-status positions as vice-chancellors and deans is that a large part of what they are there to do in their roles is to articulate the institutional mission of HEIs. With 'Leadership for What?' (the title of a recent paper), Shattock (2008) framed a question that goes to the heart of this idea of institutional mission. This

framing is entirely consistent with the thinking of such foundation thinkers as Chester Barnard and Philip Selznick. It was Barnard (1938/1982: 282, 283) who observed that organizations endure 'in proportion to the breadth of the morality by which they are governed. This is only to say that foresight, long purposes, high ideals, are the basis for the persistence of cooperation'. For this reason, it was the job of executive leaders, he intoned, 'to bind the wills of men [and women] to the accomplishment of purposes beyond their immediate ends, beyond their times'. Likewise, Selznick (1957: 28) believed that what he termed the institutional leader was 'primarily an expert in the promotion and protection of values'. Senior leaders in HEIs, then, may not be perceived merely as mouthpieces for the articulation of such missions, but also as living embodiments of them.

The other point of significance of Bolden et al.'s (2008b) finding is its emphasis on the activation of attributions of individual leaders during transitions. Leader succession and induction are arguably the key transition periods for most organizations. First-hand observation – during three decades or so of employment in the HE sector – (at moderately close range) of the appointment of five vice-chancellors and (at even closer range) of the appointment of five faculty deans, has provided me with strong personal confirmation of Bolden et al.'s point. More importantly, Neumann (1995), in her two-year case study of the appointment of William Alden to the presidency of Blue Stone College, has systematically analysed the mechanics of this activation process and how leaders learn to embody an institution's mission. As her analysis of Blue Stone's elite leadership sub-culture indicates, Alden's agency and his degrees of freedom as a new president in winning colleagues' hearts and minds were far from unlimited. He set out to change the perceptions of the senior personnel (and, through their mediated influence, those of the wider faculty) of the identity of the college and its standing. Alden disavowed 'vivid oratory or flamboyant action' (Neumann, 1995: 258). In this respect his actions resonated more with the managerialism of 'a Clinton [presumably Hilary]', as Shattock (2008: 5) expressed it, than the leadership of 'an Obama'. He worked closely with his colleagues to assist them to rediscover and rearticulate the College's vision of itself. 'There was nothing magical about his action', suggests Neumann (1995: 264), as 'he did it by listening carefully and by talking and acting based on what he had learned by listening'. Having learned from what he had heard, Alden then 'converted his learning into a "vision" which he passed back to them'.

Clearly, then, on the basis of these data, accounts of leadership which seek to exclusively privilege distribution still have to find ways of adequately factoring in the influence of individuals, be they Obama-like or not. Switching focus from individuals to the increasing trend to collective activity noted by Collinson and Collinson, and Bolden et al., Whitchurch's (2008) research into emerging third-space role identities in HEI workforces augments the weight of evidence in favour of hybridity. With the increasing erosion of the conventional distinction between academic and administrative appointments, new third-space HEI roles are now being occupied by professionals whose responsibilities encompass or bestride activities from both domains. Typically, this is a space which comprises 'mixed teams of staff who work on short-term projects such as bids for external funding and quality initiatives' (p. 386). Personal experience of two recent faculty associate deanships illustrates how third space operates. My duties included:

1. Establish portfolios or working groups to advise on, or manage, specific tasks including to:
   - submit tenders;
   - develop and vet proposals for specific new initiatives;
   - develop partnerships and business arrangements.
2. Chair the Development Committee of the Faculty and, in collaboration with the Faculty Manager, oversee the operation of the Faculty's Development Office and International Office.

The implication of third spaces for leadership is that they facilitate the kind of blending of leading noted earlier by Collinson and Collinson (this issue). Thus,

> Where such working occurs, it becomes difficult to pinpoint, for instance, in a discussion about an academic development and how it relates to institutional strategy, where ideas emerge from, and whether or not they are attributable to a manager from an academic or a professional background. (Whitchurch, 2008: 386)

In short, in response to internally and externally generated pressures to change, the division of academic and quasi-academic labour in HEIs has been evolving and adapting in boundary-spanning ways. The indicative evidence on the trends considered in this section highlights the need to revisit distributed leadership as the preferred unit of analysis.

Revising the unit of analysis

While the historian in me resists citation of one particular research study as encapsulating the spirit of an era, provided Crozier's *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (1964) can be taken as representing the quintessence of a command and control period, then we have some idea of how far the division of leadership labour has undergone modification between then and now, with the current reliance on flexible workplaces. Although the subject matter of Crozier's case studies was not education, and despite the rigidities of the creaking structures he describes, it is still possible to detect evidence of leadership in small cracks and crevices. Whereas the formal structures of organizations (in Crozier's case, the Parisian Clerical Agency (PCA), a branch of the civil service, and Industrial Monopoly (IM), a state production plant) stand for a division of rights, rules and responsibilities, and are the source of legitimate authority, the division of labour arises from the flow of work and includes a range of *de facto* working agreements, processes and relationships for undertaking the totality of the labour required. These are the sources from which influence and leadership emanate. If the relationship between these two domains can be thought of as dialectical or reciprocal, then those vested with authority can decree occasional changes in the labour process by the issue of simple directives. Alternatively, where revisions to work practices run ahead of existing authorized relationships, then this imperative dictates the need for periodic organizational restructuring (of the system of rights and authority), of which there has been a considerable amount experienced across the human services during the last two decades. Put crudely, what has

388

happened between the 1950s as depicted by Crozier is to be seen less, in broad terms, as a surrender of control by the domain of rights to the division of labour, than an expansion in the locus of initiative inherent in the latter.

Units of analysis, as I have indicated previously (Gronn, 2002), refer to bounded sets of elements that make up entities or, it should be added, set of relations, which are the focus of research. Such entities or relations can be thought of in static terms but are most productively construed dynamically. Indeed, it has been the recent dynamism inherent in the fast-changing division of labour in educational and other service sector organizations that has prompted questioning of the appropriateness of a unit of analysis which is dependent on a simplistic bifurcation of presumed sets of relations between leaders and followers. While 'distributed' leadership has been the most recently popular candidate term for trying to capture the letter and spirit of that dynamism, the argument of this article is that 'hybrid' provides a more accurate mode of description and analysis. The virtue of 'distributed' has lain in its recognition of the centrality of collectively performed activities as the basis of the completion of organizational work, at the heart of which lie relations of interdependence (Gronn, 2002). As the evidence discussed previously suggests, however, not all the tasks that have to be integrated to give shape to these activities are accomplished collectively. As part of the division of labour, particularly as it is performed in the types of educational organizations considered earlier, some tasks are still performed alone. Moreover, in HEIs, there are a lot of solo performers, quite apart from presidents, who are attributed with leadership: the informants in Birnbaum's (1992: 106) research into US universities and colleges, for example, nominated 11 such categories of individuals (and one grouping), on the basis of which the author concluded that leadership in academic institutions 'involves many figures' and 'a rich mosaic of interaction and influence that goes well beyond the simplistic notion that organizational functioning results from the actions of a single leader'.

If, indeed, the reality of leadership practice in organizations has been trending away from the kinds of rigidified cultures and structures depicted by Crozier (1964), towards a diversified and mixed combination of solo performance in combination with dyadic, team and other multi-party formations, then 'hybrid' is the most credible term for capturing this complexity and fluidity.[1] Hybridity has been chosen deliberately to contrast with the notion of 'one-size-fits-all'. The implication of a one-size-fits-all understanding is that instances of a general class of phenomena are very close replicas or even mirror images of the others. That is, their features are standardized or homogenous. To take the opposite tendency of divergence, rather than convergence, here the totality of the units displays diversity and heterogeneity. Hybridity, however, is not synonymous with heterogeneity. Consider, for the moment, the idea of focused individual leadership and that of distributed leadership which has arisen in reaction to it. Both these understandings are contrasting points of possible convergence. But the hybridity for which I am arguing is a mixture, in which varying degrees of both tendencies (i.e. focused and distributed) co-exist, with the understanding that within the distributed segment of the mix there are, potentially, a range of plural member formations. There is some historical continuity in this reasoning with Crozier (1964) for, while he did not utilize 'hybrid' to characterize the power relationships he documented at PCA and IM, he did find evidence of group forma-

tions and partnerships that co-existed with the numerous direct supervisory relation-ships between workers and mangers.

Discussion

While I am commending hybrid as a preferred representation of practice, for the reasons given, in ontological terms I am suggesting that the unit of leadership analysis be thought of as a configuration or pattern of relationships. In short, in any organization in which there may be evidence of persons and units leading, that configuration is simply one of 'leadership', unqualified and unembellished, the practice of which happens to be shaped in contextualized ways. Two implications follow from what I am proposing.

Reorienting research

In regard to practice, Leithwood et al. (2008: 281) note, it is important to be clear about its 'anatomy'. If there is little point in thinking of leadership practice as converging around either a focused or distributed pattern, then a key challenge for researchers is try to determine the range of hybrid patterns or configurations of practice and to contour them. This is leadership practice anatomized. But because such leadership configurations are likely to be dynamic (in response to changes in the division of labour), this mapping of practice would need to be designed longitu-dinally in order to track elements of continuity and discontinuity, along with a range of modifications, improvisations and adaptations. Such a strategy suggests an obvious role for ethnographically inspired research designs, perhaps in tandem with network analyses. A parallel strategy would be to ascertain whether these configura-tions are potentially infinite in number or whether they cluster and consolidate around a smallish set of sub-types. This form of analysis would provide a basis for docu-menting the incidence and frequency of sub-types across an organizational system or sector (e.g. schools, HEIs) – that is, a clear role for quantitative analyses – along with causal explanations for their occurrence, followed by a consideration of the impact (both intended and unintended) of different configurations. One methodolog-ical implication of the adoption of such strategies might be a privileging of realist rather than discursive ontologies.

The texture and grain of particular site- or context-based patterns or configura-tions are also likely to be determined by an interplay of both macro- and micro-level factors. In the former case, these include an apparatus of rules (as with Crozier's two cases), auditing and accountability requirements (as currently prevail in schools and universities) to which organizations may be legally bound. These simultaneously constrain and enable the activities of agents operating at what Mouzelis (1993) terms the figurational (or practice) realm. In combination with these externally imposed frameworks, a series of local-level attributes also shape practice. Taking schools as the illustrative case, these are likely to include scale (e.g. student enrolments, reten-tion rates, number of sites); type and level (e.g. specialist or generalist curriculum emphasis); prescribed tasks (e.g. key learning stages, learning and teaching targets, operational responsibility areas); technologies (e.g. routines, tools, skill sets) and resources (e.g. staff expertise, demography and attrition; SES location).

390

Jettisoning adjectives

A corollary of this strategy of mapping or contouring practice is to subvert the rationale and validity of what might be termed normative leadership advocacy. To divert for the moment to consider the domain of power: like leadership, power (along with influence, persuasion, coercion, force and manipulation) is a means of characterizing a variety of modes of human interaction and activity in organizations, and accounting causally for the key outcomes which are realized and the particular sets of interests which prevail. One way in which power analyses differ, however, is that, unlike leadership, these tend not to lend themselves to an endless proliferation of lists of adjectival varieties of power. There is simply power: sometimes the configuration is one of concentration and monopoly (e.g. by a dictator or an elite) and sometimes there are elite pluralities so that power is configured polycentrically. French and Raven's (1959) classic discussion of reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert power perhaps gives the lie to the general point about varieties of power, except that these five 'types' are really *bases* or foundations on which power rests. Likewise, while Mann (1993) makes a four-fold distinction between versions of social power (i.e. ideological, military, political and economic), the force of his distinction emanates from the differing institutions and sectors in which that power is manifest. As with power, then, so with leadership: if there is simply leadership in the way that I am proposing, and it happens to be configured in particular ways that encompass differing degrees of focus and distribution, then this longstanding tradition of 'adjectivalism' becomes redundant and can be safely circumvented. It simply loses its relevance. To retain such normatively preferred types or templates of leadership as 'strategic', 'authentic', 'servant', 'instructional', 'visionary' and so on in the face of circumstances of hybridity would seem to serve very little point, particularly as these are mostly framed with the behaviour of strategically positioned high-profile individuals in mind. And, as we would no longer be concentrating solely on the deeds of individuals, a useful by-product here might be the cessation of the conceptual demarcation disputes that occur periodically between closely aligned normative models and typologies (e.g. the overlap between transformational and charismatic leadership).

Conclusion

Deliberate cross-breeding of plants and animals on the one hand, and randomized adaptation to environmental stimuli on the other hand, are both mechanisms that impact significantly on existing patterns of variation in the world of flora and fauna. In each case, the outcome is a new species. While the configurations argued for in this article may not be the equivalents of species, as far as the sphere of leadership is concerned parallel organizational processes (intentionally planned decisions, and spontaneously emerging decisions, adaptation of structures, cultures and routines) nonetheless yield sets of arrangements that are similarly hybridized. Hybridized configurations of leadership, I have been suggesting, fuse or coalesce different degrees of focused and distributed tendencies. They also highlight the potential for aligning and misaligning resources with structures, processes and routines, and the need to monitor and make adjustments (Day et al., 2007). The risk that the current high-profile accorded distributed leadership runs, on the other hand, is simply

replacing one longstanding pattern in leadership, in which understanding and representation of practice converges around focused individualism, with a polar opposite pattern of convergence: dispersion or distribution. The sample of evidence discussed in the main sections of this article, however, casts doubt on the validity of this focused-distributed continuum. First, in a number of empirical investigations that purport to be studies of distributed leadership, individual leaders still figure prominently. They do not leave the scene, but continue to exercise significant and disproportionate influence in comparison with other individual colleagues. Moreover, the expectation that they do so persists in the perceptions and attributions colleagues have of their roles. Second, given that a range of other plural-member formations co-exist simultaneously with such persisting evidence of individualism, and are equally significant sources of influence, acknowledgement needs to be given to the reality, over time, of a unit of analysis that encompasses both temporary and more enduring leadership features. That unit, I have argued, is a configuration and, equally, the most accurate way of characterizing a leadership configuration is as hybrid.

Acknowledgements

Note

1. This and some of the succeeding paragraphs draw on Gronn (2008b, 2009).

References

Alvarez, J. L., & Svejenova, S. (2005) *Sharing Executive Power: Roles and Relationships at the Top*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Alvarez, J. L., Svejenova, S., & Vives, L. (2007) 'Leading in Pairs', *Sloan Management Review* 48(4): 10–14.

Barnard, C.I. (1938/1982) *The Functions of the Executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Becker, H., & Useem, R. H. (1942) 'Sociological Analysis of the Dyad', *American Sociological Review* 7(1): 13–26.

Birnbaum, R. (1992) *How Academic Leadership Works: Understanding Success and Failure in the College Presidency*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bolden, R., Petrov, G., & Gosling, J. (2008a) *Developing Collective Leadership in Higher Education*, Final Report. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

Bolden, R., Petrov, G., & Gosling, J. (2008b) 'Tensions in Higher Education Leadership: Towards a Multi-level Model of Leadership Practice', *Higher Education Quarterly* 62(4): 358–76.

Buchanan, D. A., Addicott, R., Fitzgerald, L., Ferlie, E., & Baeza, J. I. (2007) 'Nobody in Charge: Distributed Change Agency in Healthcare', *Human Relations* 60(7): 1065–90.

Calder, B. J. (1977) 'An Attribution Theory of Leadership', in B. M. Staw & G. R. Salancik (eds) *New Directions in Organizational Behavior*, pp. 179–204. Chicago, IL: St. Clair.

Crozier, M. (1964) *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press).

Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Harris, A., Leithwood, K., Gu, Q., Penlington, C., Mehta, P., & Kington, A. (2007) *The Impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes*.

Research Brief DCSF-RB018. London: Department of Children, Schools and Families/ National College for School Leadership.

Firestone, W. A., & Martinez, M. C. (2007) 'Districts, Teacher Leaders, and Distributed Leadership: Changing Instructional Practice', *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 6(1): 3–35.

French, J. R. P. Jr, & Raven, B. (1959) 'The Bases of Social Power', in D. Cartwright (ed.) *Studies in Social Power*, pp. 150–67. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.

Gronn, P. (1999) 'Substituting for Leadership: The Neglected Role of the Leadership Couple', *Leadership Quarterly* 10(1): 41–62.

Gronn, P. (2002) 'Distributed Leadership as a Unit of Analysis', *Leadership Quarterly* 13(4): 423–51.

Gronn, P. (2008a) 'Hybrid Leadership', in K. Leithwood, B. Mascall, & T. Strauss (eds) *Distributed Leadership According to the Evidence*, pp. 17–40. New York: Routledge.

Gronn, P. (2008b) 'The Future of Distributed Leadership', *Journal of Educational Administration* 46(2): 141–58.

Gronn, P. (2009) 'From Distributed to Hybrid Leadership Practice', in A. Harris (ed.) *Distributed School Leadership: Different Perspectives*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Gronn, P., & Hamilton, A. (2004) 'A Bit More Life in the Leadership: Co-principalship as Distributed Leadership Practice', *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 3(1): 3–35.

Hartley, D. (2007) 'The Emergence of Distributed Leadership: Why Now?', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 55(2): 202–14.

Heenan, D. A., & Bennis, W. (1999) *Co-leaders: The Power of Great Partnerships*. New York: Wiley & Sons.

Hodgson, R. C., Levinson, D. J., & Zaleznik, A. (1965) *The Executive Role Constellation: An Analysis of Personality and Role Relations in Management*. Boston, MA: Harvard University.

Leithwood, K., Mascall, B., & Strauss, T. (eds) (2008) *Distributed Leadership According to the Evidence*. New York: Routledge.

Mann, M. (1993) *The Sources of Social Power: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mouzelis, N. (1993) 'On Figurational Sociology', *Theory, Culture & Society* 10: 237–53.

Neumann, A. (1995) 'Context, Cognition and Culture: A Case Analysis of Collegiate Leadership and Cultural Change', *American Educational Research Journal* 32(2): 251–79.

Selznick, P. (1957) *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Shattock, M. (2008) 'Leadership for What?'. Paper presented at the *Leadership in Higher Education Conference*, Windsor.

Simmel, G. (1964) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press.

Spillane, J. P. (2006) *Distributed Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Spillane, J. P., & Diamond, J. B. (eds) (2008) *Distributed Leadership in Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2000) 'Investigating School Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective', *Educational Researcher* 30(3): 23–8.

Whitchurch, C. (2008) 'Shifting Identities and Blurring Boundaries: The Emergence of Third Space Professionals in UK Higher Education', *Higher Education Quarterly* 62(4): 377–96.

393

Peter Gronn is Professor of Education, University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Hughes Hall. At Cambridge he works in the area of leadership and school improvement. Previously he held chair appointments at University of Glasgow and Monash University. In 2006–7 he co-authored the Country Background Report for Australia which formed part of the OECD international project 'Improving school leadership'. With Cambridge colleagues he is undertaking research into school autonomy in England, and has recently co-authored a report for the Scottish Government on headteacher recruitment and retention. [email: pg348@cam.ac.uk]