

REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

BRIEFING PAPER: CIVIC LEADERSHIP

Jean Hartley

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Warwick Institute of Governance and Public Management
Warwick Business School
University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL

Phone: +44 (0) 24 7652 2311
Fax: +44 (0) 24 7652 4410
Email: Jean.Hartley@wbs.ac.uk

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Civic leadership is of increasing interest to public service organizations. There is sometimes a view taken that community leadership or “strong” political leadership is a concern principally of the current UK Government to which public services must respond. But the issues are broader than this: a considerable number of writers have argued that forces in society and the economy are shaping a more substantial rethink of governance and public services in contemporary society. Giddens (1998), for example, has argued that:

“In a society where tradition and custom are losing their hold, the only route to the establishing of authority is via democracy (p.66).

Benington (2000) has pointed to factors such as the globalisation of economies, the increasing role of the European Union, information and communication technologies, and changing demographic composition as all affecting the legitimacy of leadership. We can also add increasing disenchantment with mainstream politics (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). These each and together demand a rethink of how we govern our communities and localities.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (2001) notes that civic is an adjective “of or relating to a city or town”. For a public administration context, we can argue that this is not only an urban concept (i.e. city or town) but one about other types of geographical area bounded by a sense of identity and/or community. Civic duties or civic leadership remind us that the actions and behaviours are on behalf of a defined community within a democratic setting.

Who exercises civic leadership? There are a number of roles, elected, appointed and informal, through which civic leadership may be exercised, to a greater or less degree. Elected members in local government, chosen through the ballot box, have long been regarded as civic leaders. They derive authority through the electoral process, and are essential to civic leadership. However, their role is changing, and there are also a number of challenges to

their authority from declining participation in formal politics by citizens, lack of diversity in representatives, and through leadership being exercised from other roles and locations. Civic leadership may also be given by appointed representatives, from members on partnership bodies, by appointed managers and professionals, and from community and voluntary organizations and individuals. The contribution of each of these groups is considered in the paper.

The paper proposes a model based on three concentric circles of influence upon civic leadership. Democratic leadership from local government is at the centre, but there is a wider circle of civic leaders who are working through appointment or influence, and with a brief to act on behalf of the whole community. The outer circle represents those who may claim to represent and lead civic opinions, but who in practice are acting from popular or sectional interest rather than civic interest.

The paper examines approaches to leadership, exploring how leadership can be seen as the characteristics of an individual, as deriving from office, or as a dynamic occurring between groups of people. Each has value but is incomplete alone. The paper explores the current interest in transformational and transactional leadership. It also argues that adaptive leadership is particularly relevant to civic leadership.

Civic leadership contributes to society by working on behalf of the local population in four arenas (working with grassroots communities, negotiating and mobilising partnerships, voicing the need and interests of the local community in regional, national, European and international arenas) and providing clear strategic direction for local public services. It has a clear role in providing advocacy and voice for local communities; for representing a sense of common purpose (both at times of grief and at times of celebration); envisioning the future; and for building local capacity. There is evidence that civic leadership makes a difference in terms of building social capital, economic and social well-being and contributing to the democratic health of

the community. However, these are large challenges because societies can be uncivil as well as civil. Meeting the needs and aspirations of a range of varied stakeholders is complex and long-term.

The paper concludes with reflections on how to build skills in civic leadership, both at an individual level and also across groups, networks and organizations. It argues that building such skills are essential for elected members and other civic leaders to face the challenges ahead. The paper uses a number of examples to illustrate ways in which local authorities are providing innovative, imaginative and constructive civic leadership.

CIVIC LEADERSHIP

The context for civic leadership

Leadership is of increasing interest to public service organizations. An examination of policy and academic papers on the modernisation and improvement of public services indicates a high frequency for the word leadership. The Cabinet Office report (PIU, 2000) was influential in shaping thinking about public service leadership, both political and managerial. The Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland consultation document (2003) highlights the need to consider civic leadership as a key element of public services.

Some councillors may feel that the emphasis on community leadership or “strong” political leadership is a concern principally of the current UK Government to which public services must respond. However, a broader set of pressures are in play. A substantial number of writers have argued that forces in society and the economy are shaping a wider rethink of governance and public services in contemporary society beyond those drivers coming from the UK Government. Giddens (1998), for example, has argued that:

“In a society where tradition and custom are losing their hold, the only route to the establishing of authority is via democracy. The new individualism doesn’t inevitably corrode authority, but demands it be recast on an active and participatory basis” (quoted in Davies, 2004).

Benington (2000) has pointed to factors such as the globalisation of economies, the increasing role of the European Union as a political, economic and social force, the role of information and communication technologies, and changing demographic composition (eg an ageing population in European countries, more single person households, the changing structures of families). We can also add increasing disenchantment with mainstream politics (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). These each and together demand a rethink of how we govern our communities and localities.

Local public services are no longer in a financial or legal position to provide mass and universal services solely through the mechanism of the post-war welfare state (Stoker, 2004). On the other hand, the emphasis on the private market as a mechanism of service delivery may have helped to improve quality and offer a focus on users as “customers”, but the market is unable to provide long-term solutions to complex social problems and does not address issues of local democracy (Stewart, 2003; Benington, 1996). Some writers are suggesting a shift to new political and organizational forms of public service, which are citizen-centred and based on networks across the public, private and voluntary sectors (Benington and Hartley, 2001; Newman, 2001).

The “modernisation” agenda of the UK Government is one attempt to address some of these underlying issues. Benington (2000) argues that it has three main intentions. First, the aim is to shift the centre of gravity beyond the state and towards civil society, including active participation and engagement of users, citizens and communities. Second, the aim is to develop “joined-up” vertical working between different tiers and spheres of governance (local, regional, national and European). Third is the development of new patterns of leadership and the management of influence, taking place through inter-organizational networks and partnerships within and across areas.

This suggests that local and devolved government needs to take into account its inter-relationships with the non-state sectors. Civic leadership has to be able to take a holistic not a state-centric view of community well-being.

WHAT IS CIVIC LEADERSHIP?

Given this changing context, what is civic leadership? The Concise Oxford Dictionary (2001) says that civic is an adjective “of or relating to a city or town”. For a public administration context, we can argue that this is not only an urban concept (i.e. city or town) but one about other types of geographical area bounded by a sense of identity and/or community (eg a local authority administrative area). Civic duties or civic leadership remind us that the actions and behaviours are on behalf of a defined community within a

democratic setting. (The Oxford Dictionary also notes that “a civic” ie the noun, is an elected, community-based, body concerned with local government in the black townships in South Africa, and we may reflect on the key role they played in the ending of apartheid by providing an alternative source of authority and vision.)

Who exercises civic leadership? There are a number of roles, elected, appointed and informal, through which civic leadership may be exercised, to a greater or less degree.

Elected members in local government

Elected members, chosen through the ballot box, have long been regarded as civic leaders. They derive authority (rather than influence alone) through the electoral process, and they are essential to civic leadership. However, their role is changing, and there are also a number of challenges to their authority.

Over the last decade there has been, and continues to be a stronger emphasis on community leadership or community governance. This means “enabling the community to face issues, deal with problems, and realise aspirations in the most effective way” (Stewart, 1995, p. 14). Community governance is based upon three inter-related assumptions (Benington, 1996):

- that the purpose of a local authority is not simply to commission, deliver and/or manage services but also to govern the local community. This includes not only representing the needs but also developing the voices in the local community (individuals and groups).
- that the local authority has a unique and distinctive role in governing the local community because of its democratic mandate to balance the needs of the whole community rather than just its diverse and separate parts, and to represent future generations as well as current users
- that the local council cannot govern the local community on its own, but needs to do this in partnership with a wide range of other bodies in the public, private, voluntary and informal community sector.

These developments have profound consequences for civic leadership by local authorities:

- the needs, expectations and resources of communities will shape the kinds of leadership which are possible or desirable rather than services being defined solely by the controlling group on the council or the professionals in departments.
- Consent for leadership has to be given by local communities rather than assumed from elections. This is therefore leadership won not only through the ballot box, but through policies and actions in which local communities have confidence
- in the context of partnerships, leadership may have to be through influence, persuasion and negotiation as well as through command and control

We must note that while working with a variety of groups and partners, civic leadership is not the same as populism. Civic leadership requires important skills in listening, reflecting on different interests, shaping agendas, influencing outcomes, protecting a diversity of voices and views, while also ensuring that the outcomes are beneficial for the civic area overall. This is not an easy task, requiring a strong sense of leadership purpose and the ability to help others to achieve feasible outcomes.

Central government's approach to local authorities places an emphasis on leadership having:

- Clarity of vision: the capacity to identify and focus on clear priorities for action
- Community leadership: the capacity to develop connections with local stakeholders and local communities
- Visibility: the capacity to generate recognition on the part of the local population and so strengthen accountability.

This is also captured in the Audit Commission's work on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of English local authorities, which places an

emphasis on leadership. The Audit Commission is expanding and elaborating its approach to leadership for the next round of assessment in 2005/6. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) for England has explored community leadership through the Local Government Improvement Programme, which includes a set of benchmarks for the community leadership focus of local authorities.

However, there are new challenges to the civic authority of elected members. First, is the challenge of the democratic mandate. Election through the ballot box is no longer sufficient on its own. This is shown most clearly in declining voting patterns, evident across Europe but with average turnout in UK local government elections less than half that of other European countries (Shaw and Davidson, 2002). Some people vote in national but not local elections. In addition, the decline in voting in the UK has steepened in the 1990s (Rallings and Thrasher, 2003).

Second, there is an argument that elected representatives need to be as diverse as the populations they represent if democracy is to thrive (e.g. Newman, 2001). This is not to suggest that local authority elected members can only speak for those who share a similar background, identity or experience. Part of the skill of an elected representative is to be able to understand and advocate for all constituents. However, a failure to reflect diversity is likely to reduce the quality and variety of debate and to reduce legitimacy in the eyes of constituents (Hartley and Rashman, 2003).

The evidence on formal politics is not very encouraging, though there are some promising developments. At the local level, in a survey undertaken in 1997 in England and Wales, diversity was limited (Canavon and Smith, 2001). However, a number of developments may help support diversity, including new forms of selection and election for candidates (cf the National Assembly for Wales), community leadership and e-governance (Hartley and Rashman, 2003).

Third, while elected members in local government are necessary for civic leadership, they are not the only voices influencing local priorities, values and actions. Civic leadership cannot be exercised through formal authority alone but needs to engage with citizens (e.g. Donnison, 1998). Others also have a part to play in civic leadership, and so it is to these voices of influence that we now turn.

Appointed public body membership

Appointments to public bodies (e.g. quangoes, non-departmental public bodies or, in Northern Ireland, boards) represent another element of civic leadership. However, the situation in Northern Ireland illustrates some of the difficulties for appointed officials in being seen as civic leaders. Northern Ireland has a high proportion of public expenditure through public bodies, with some concern expressed that the process of appointment is still too daunting and therefore excludes some sections of the community (RPA, 2003). In addition, the perceived lack of representativeness has led to questions about accountability. Across the whole of the UK, there has been concern about the degree of openness and accountability in non-elected bodies (Leach and Percy-Smith, 2001; Skelcher and Mathur, 2004).

Partnership bodies

Local authorities are now working with a range of partners to articulate priorities and deliver services. In England, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have been developed to provide strategic leadership and the prioritising of services for a locality. Research at Warwick has shown that the top priorities for LSPs are developing community strategies, securing full community participation and partnership building. To what extent are LSPs developing a role as the voice for the locality, and exercising civic leadership? Are they supplanting the civic leadership role of the local authority? The evidence is as yet, too tentative to be clear.

A different partnership, the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme, in 39 areas of social exclusion, aims to reduce the gaps in deprivation and

inequality through area-based regeneration in small neighbourhoods (typically up to 4,000 households). The programme is delivered through a set of partners from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. With an emphasis on community-led regeneration, some NDC schemes have used non-statutory elections to provide community representation. Shaw and Davidson (2002) argue that such elections have increased turnout rates, have included some people who are usually excluded from local elections (eg young people between 16 and 18; asylum seekers); and have been able to use a broader range of methods of election. Others are more critical of self-managed democracy. It might be argued that NDC elections, based on small areas, are actually about *community* leadership rather than *civic* leadership, because the elections are to represent *part* of an urban area not the *whole*. (However, the processes and voting rates suggest some imaginative ways of engaging people beyond the traditional voter.)

Innovations in partnerships to provide some urban services are emerging as a form of civic leadership, such as the partnership boards responsible for some city centres. Prefiguring, in some ways, the USA-style Business Improvement Districts, they may provide services on contract to a local council. An example is CVOne, a not-for-profit partnership covering Coventry city centre. It was initiated by Coventry City Council and was established to encourage participation by businesses in the revival and running of the city centre after a period of economic depression. CVOne enabled businesses in that defined area to vote on which additional services they wish to pay for to improve their operating environment. CVOne has been effective in reducing crime in the city centre, improving security with CCTV cameras and dedicated street wardens, and improving street cleaning. It also claims to represent member interests within the local authority. To what extent can the Board, and indeed its fee-paying members, claim to exert civic leadership? They operate for the economic and social good of the city *centre* and can act as ambassadors for the city. (For further details see www.visitcoventry.co.uk/members/schemes)

Partnerships provide a fuzzy picture of civic leadership. They illustrate the interdependencies of the state, the market and civil society. They may hold some formal authority, delegated from, or on contract to, the local authority. They can certainly operate civic leadership through influence and profile. Unless elected members from local government find ways to work effectively with such influential partners in a representative capacity, there is a danger that their contribution may be sidelined in the longer-term.

Appointed managers and professionals

In the past, traditionally, the role of appointed officials (e.g. officers and managers providing a range of public services), was to implement the policies of the elected executive, without question or passion, based on the theory of the separation of policy-making from implementation. However, the distinction between policy-makers and implementers is increasingly untenable (assuming that it was ever feasible). First, “street-level bureaucrats” i.e. those providing front-line services, have to exercise discretion in the way in which they implement policies on the ground. Second, the governance element of public services means that how public services are delivered is important as well as what is delivered (e.g. social services which provide physical care but which undermine the self-confidence and independence of users is a case in point). Innovation and improvement in the quality of services is in part shaped by political values and societal debates. Third, the increasing recognition of complex, cross-cutting issues in society means that managers and professionals need to contribute to the identification and addressing of problems, working with partners and communities (e.g. Moore, 1995). Hartley and Allison (2000) showed that leadership is increasingly distributed, with roles played by managers as well as elected representatives in community leadership. Moore (1995) argues that public managers need to become:

“explorers commissioned by society to search for public value. In undertaking the search, managers are expected to use their initiative and imagination. But they are also expected to be responsive to more or less constant political guidance and feedback.” (p. 299).

Informal civic leadership

Some individuals and organizations act with a sense of public interest in influencing and shaping local debates and actions. Those who lead voluntary and community sector organizations (e.g. church or trade union leaders, campaigning groups, voluntary groups) may act as civic leaders. So may some business leaders taking a community-focused interest in local or national issues. Their role is not automatically that of civic leadership, but it can be where the focus is wider than their immediate sectional interest, and where the intention is to engage in activities which foster and support social inclusion rather than social exclusion.

The media

Press, television and internet organizations can play a role in civic leadership, through the power of information and commentary on and about local and national matters of interest to the well-being of communities. In order to avoid the hijacking of civic issues by local papers or electronic bulletin boards, elected members can find it useful to reflect on the image and identity of the authority, and how it interplays with other civic players. This may be a novel stance for some members and managers, more used to working out of the glare of the media or acting defensively on the assumption that the media will always try to put the authority in a bad light. Seeking out active engagement and understanding of the media may be necessary - and not just left to the public relations unit (see also Hartley, 1998).

Some local authorities have proactively harnessed the power of information and communication technologies to encourage debate and deliberative democracy. The civic leadership role of local authorities argues for using technologies to support not only information exchange but also two way communication and interaction. Although most UK local authorities now have web sites, there has been criticism that they can be too concerned with providing a limited amount of information from the council to the user rather than learning from the public - "interpassive" rather than "interactive". There are now many examples of local authorities using the internet to encourage

the sharing of information, the development of two way communication and interaction between government and citizens, which are the hallmarks of a thriving democracy. ICT's can help to assemble and to disseminate :

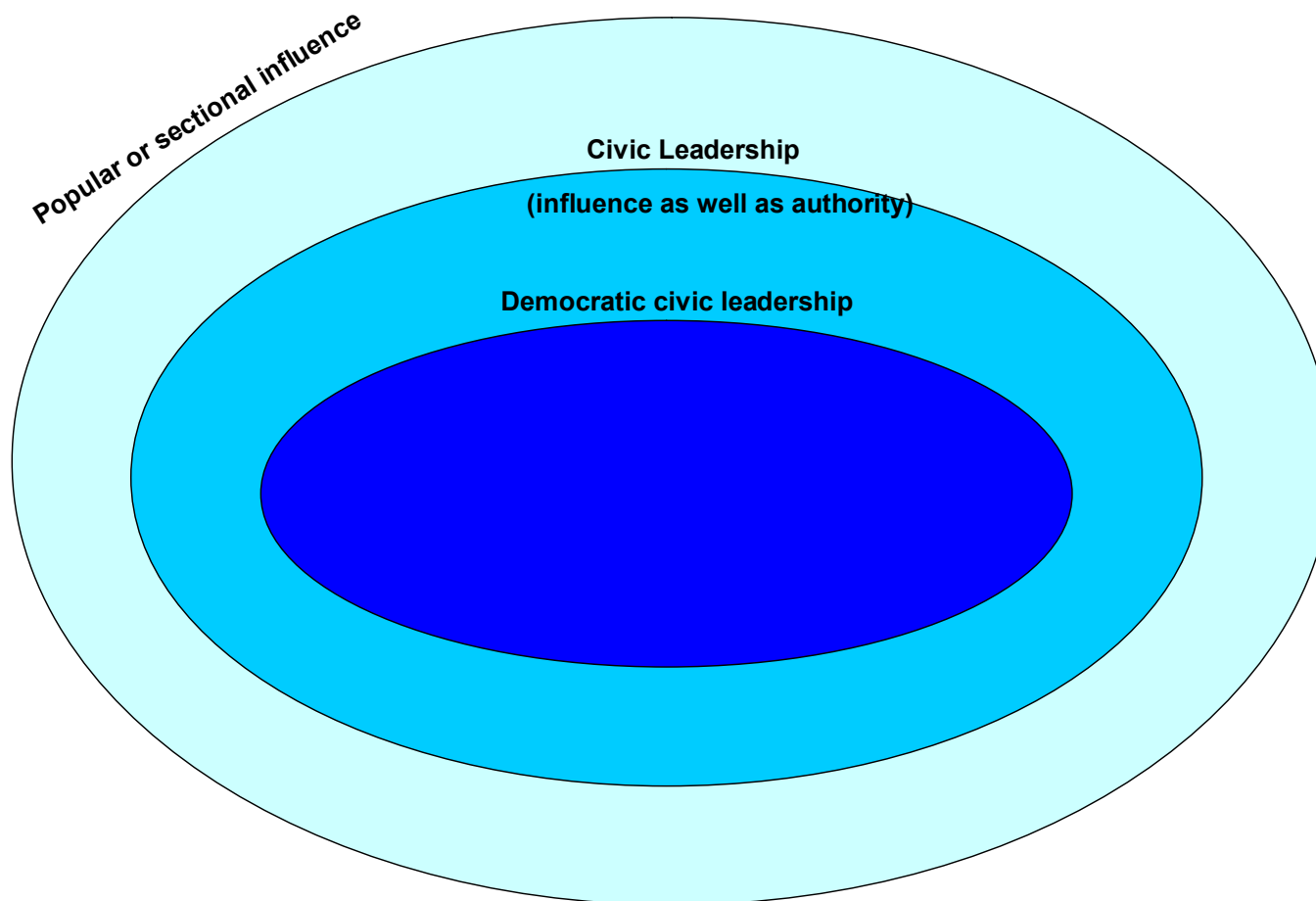
- Information about the local economy, to support regeneration, employment and training
- Information about services to enhance health, education and quality of life
- Information as a prerequisite of participation in democratic processes (reaching an informed opinion, debate and discussion, voting, decision-making, open government)
- Information about rights, entitlements and obligations
- Information for social contact, interaction and the pursuit of interests (as part of lifelong learning, and social inclusion, for example)

A MODEL OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP

The different contributors to civic leadership are expressed in the following model (Figure 1). Democratic civic leadership is at the heart, because elected representation on behalf of the whole locality is key. Encircling this, civic leadership exercised by individuals and groups through appointment or influence who have been chosen or invited to act on behalf of the whole locality, and who are accountable either to the locality directly or to central or devolved government. Finally, beyond that circle is leadership which aims to influence the whole locality but which is partisan in outlook – populist, sectional or sectarian.

This model is shown on the next page.

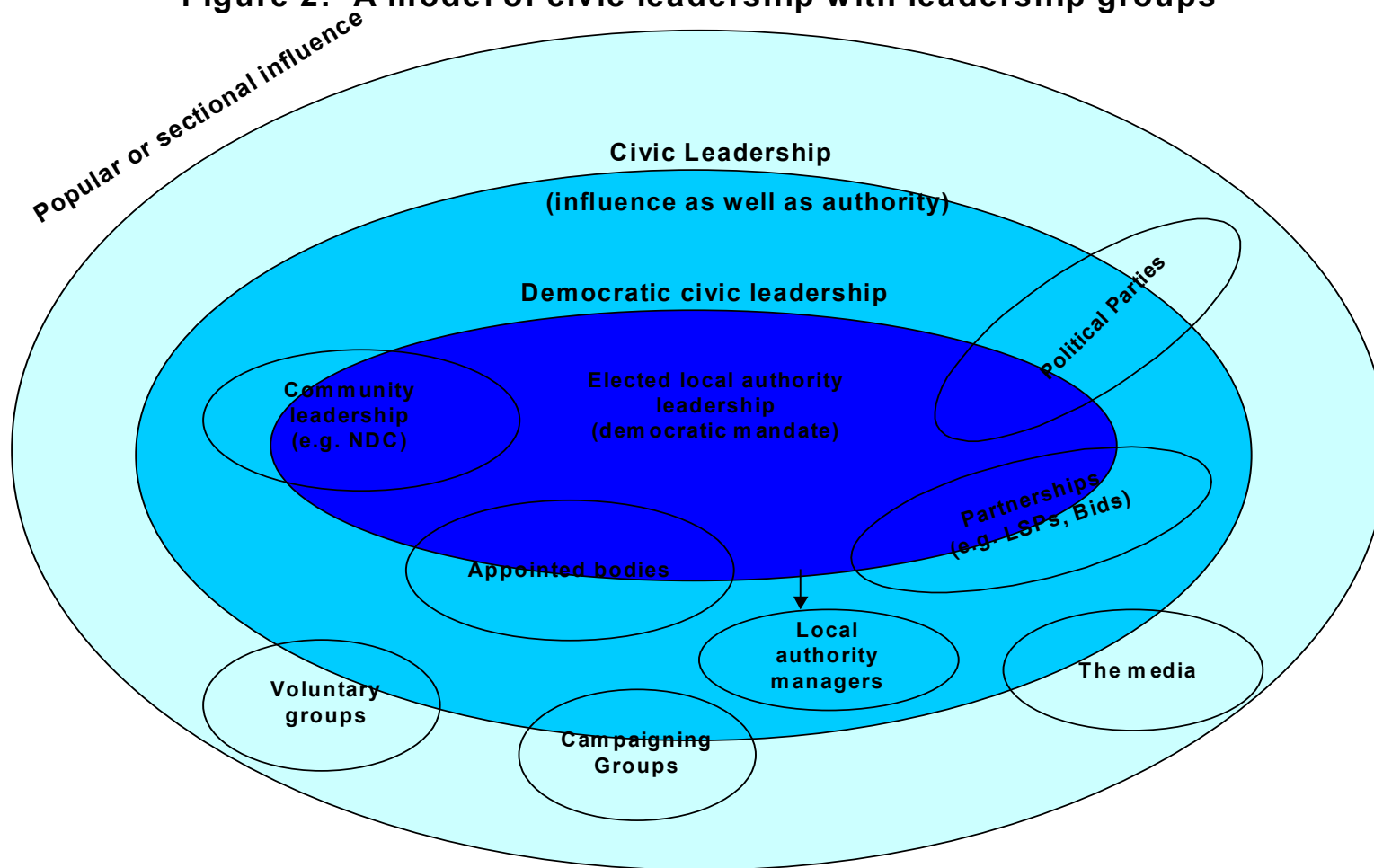
Figure 1: A model of civic leadership



In this model of spheres of influence from the democratic centre to the partisan periphery, it is possible to locate the contributors to civic leadership we have examined in the previous section. These are superimposed on the model, and this is shown on the following page (Figure 2).

This diagram shows that some individuals or groups may have dual (or even triple) roles, for example through democratic election, but also through appointment to represent the locality – or to pursue sectional interests. This emphasises the dynamic nature of civic leadership – some groups may play different roles at different times. It is possible to “map” a locality in terms of the primary roles played in civic leadership by particular individuals and groups. On some occasions, a group may play a central civic leadership role, while at other times operating through influence on behalf of the whole, or at other times simply pursuing particular interests. Deciding which part of the civic leadership “map” any group is working within is sometimes the focus of fierce debate. It is not necessarily objective but is shaped by values and dialogue. What is certain is that elected members have to share the stage of civic leadership with a number of other actors.

Figure 2: A model of civic leadership with leadership groups



APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP

What do we mean when we talk about leadership? There are a variety of ways in which the word leadership is used. Here, we distinguish the concept of *leader* from that of *leadership*. It is valuable to distinguish between the person, the position and processes, though they can co-exist in practice.

The person

The personal characteristics of the leader, focusing on skills, abilities, personality, styles and behaviours of individuals can be important. (e.g. Avolio, 1999; Burns, 1978). The role of individuals in shaping events and influencing groups at certain times is clear. A difficulty can be that such approaches can lionise individuals, assuming that they have pre-eminent capacity and power. The focus on the individual alone can underplay the importance of engaging others in the work of leadership (see Heifetz, 2003). Attention is shifting from focusing solely on the leader's personal style to the leader's role in defining, articulating, reinforcing and changing beliefs and values in a group or community.

The position

Leadership is sometimes used to refer to the formal position in an organisation for example, Leader of the Council, Mayor or Chief Executive. Such formal positions give authority though not necessarily leadership. Leadership requires more than holding a particular office or role, as it requires the ability to persuade, to influence and to negotiate. Elected members have civic leadership through authority but others may exert leadership more informally through influence.

The processes

The third approach is leadership as a set of processes or dynamics occurring among and between individuals, groups and organisations. This is a focus on *leadership* not on the leader. Here, leadership is concerned with motivating and influencing people, and shaping and achieving outcomes. Leadership involves processes which occur between leaders and participants (where

influence may flow in both directions). Leadership involves perceptions and actions by team members as well as by the leader.

The idea of leadership as a set of processes concerned with influencing people and achieving goals and outcomes is reflected in the key definition of leadership by Heifetz (1996) as “mobilising people to tackle tough problems”. This is very different from the conventional view of leadership of providing solutions to problems. The role of leadership is to work with people to find workable ways of dealing with issues for which sometimes there may be no known or set solutions.

The context of leadership

There is a danger that leadership theories are expressed as universals, appropriate in all circumstances. Yet individuals who perform well at leadership in one context may be less effective in another (Bryman et al, 1996). The work of the leader (the kind of task, the nature of the challenge) also has an impact on effectiveness. Additionally, the culture of the local authority and the locality, and its history and circumstances also affect the leadership approach. “Reading” the context is an important skill in itself.

Transformational and transactional leadership

Burns (1978) distinguished between transformational and transactional leadership and this has been widely used in thinking about leadership. *Transformational leadership* is characterised by inspirational motivation (the ability to create and build commitment to goals); challenging current reality and established patterns of thinking; and individualised consideration (fair but individual treatment of group members). Nadler and Tushman (1990) describe these as envisioning, energising and enabling. *Transactional leadership*, on the other hand, is concerned with embedding actions in a substantial way through the use of systems and rewards which support the objectives. The two forms of leadership need to be seen as complementary because both are important for leading organizational and cultural change (Hartley, 2002a). There is a question as to how far civic leadership is

concerned to help people to envision a new future (transformational leadership) and how far to help them implement existing ideas (transactional leadership).

As an example, the elected leadership at Cardiff Council, over the last decade, has been clearly transformational. Looking beyond the immediate pressures and priorities of the largest urban centre in Wales, the Lord Mayor worked with businesses, local communities and national government to create a vision of Cardiff as a capital city of European acclaim, with world-class sporting and leisure facilities, in order to benefit local people (jobs and quality of environment) and the country (regeneration and national facilities). The achievement of this goal required a clear sense of vision, an ability to work with a range of partners, and the capacity to continue to press for improvements in the face of considerable risks and obstacles.

Technical and adaptive leadership

Heifetz (1996) makes a useful distinction between technical and adaptive leadership. This is based on the type of challenge a group (or locality) is facing. He argues that technical leadership is appropriate where the group faces a challenge which is familiar in that it has been tackled by other groups or communities, and/or where the actions to address the problem are known and agreed. The group knows what it is striving to achieve, and requires the type of leader who can make this happen through e.g. project management or engaging different partners in different elements of the overall solution.

However, adaptive leadership is needed where the problem is difficult because the group has not encountered that problem before, or does not know which of several possible “solutions” might be appropriate - or where there is disagreement over how the problem should be defined let alone resolved. Many complex social problems requiring civic leadership fall into this category. Different groups have different suggestions as to what is wrong or how the problems should be addressed. In such situations, it can be counter-productive for the leader to attempt to solve the problem without

bringing others on board (as this can create high levels of dependency on the leader, may prolong conflict or enable the group to avoid facing up to uncomfortable issues which require their own efforts to change). This requires the leader to take on the challenge of mobilising groups to tackle the problem and to take ownership for its solution. This can be a hard position to take, as groups may wish the leader to own and solve the problem (and blame the person if success is elusive). Adaptive leadership has five strategic principles:

1. Identify the adaptive challenge
2. Keep the level of distress within a tolerable range
3. Focus attention on ripening issues and not on stress-reducing distractions
4. Give the work back to the people, but at a rate they can stand
5. Protect voices of leadership without authority

If civic leadership is to be successful, it often needs to make use of adaptive leadership. Having to take into account the interests of the whole community, not just sectional interests, means that the problem is likely to be multi-faceted, or that different stakeholders have different perspectives and/or values about what the problem is and what action might be taken.

As an example, Knowsley Council, on Merseyside, in the mid 1990s was a locality with pervasive problems of deprivation. Education was limited and many firms would not locate to the area because of the poor qualifications in the local labour market. Social deprivation and a sense of hopelessness was rife. As the information and communication technology revolution started to happen, the Council Leader was determined that the people of Knowsley would not be left behind. He worked with key managers and business partners to bring resources from the private sector and the European Union to the area. These resources were used not only to build the technology hardware and software, but also to provide support to students, staff,

businesses, the unemployed and citizens in order to build their confidence and motivation for improving skills and qualifications, gaining jobs, and making contacts across the globe. The Leader worked beyond a populist agenda to build support for a longer-term and more sustainable vision for the local communities.

THE VALUE OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP TO COMMUNITIES

We first consider the tasks which civic leadership aims to achieve. We then explore the degree to which there is evidence that civic leadership contributes to important outcomes.

Four arenas of civic leadership

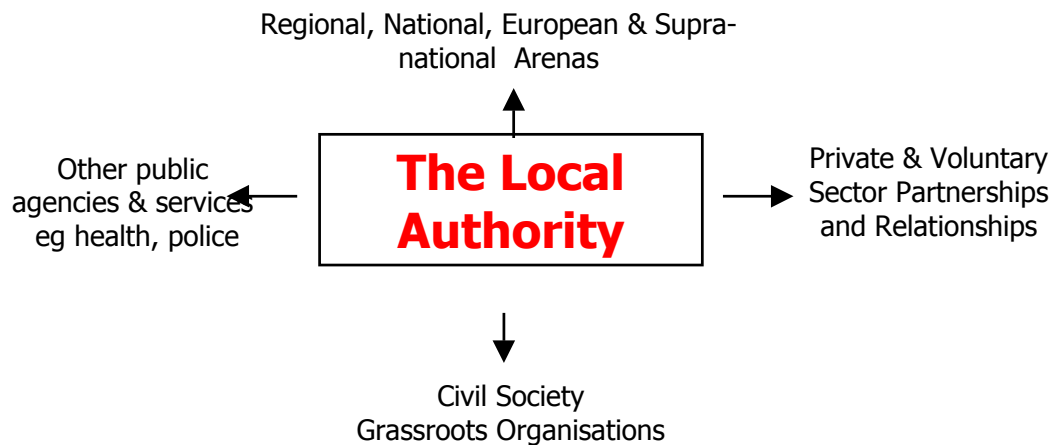
Taylor (1993) suggested that civic leadership, led by the local authority, can be exercised in four arenas:

1. Shaping and supporting the development of grass-roots communities
2. Negotiating and mobilising effective partnerships with other public, private and voluntary agencies
3. Voicing the needs and interests of the local community in regional, national, European and international arenas
4. Leading the local authority organisation and giving its services clear strategic direction

This is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Warwick model of the four arenas of civic governance

4 Arenas of Civic Leadership



There are many examples of elected members working as civic leaders in each of these arenas. For example, South Somerset District Council was a pioneer of community leadership, and developed a distinctive approach among members and officers in thinking about how to widen access, build confidence and engage stakeholders to improve local democracy and local engagement. Their activities to support this were legion: council meetings in different locations across the district, encouraging villagers to conduct a “village audit” about what they would like to improve or preserve, multi-functional working teams, citizens juries, mystery shoppers etc:

“You can’t make assumptions that people will come to you. There are all sorts of reasons why they can’t or won’t. So you have to think carefully about how to produce guides, how to consult people properly, what facilities they will need in order to become involved etc – you can’t take these for granted.” (quoted in Hartley, 1998).

This requires real engagement, as noted by Cheshire County Council:

“We may have to explain to a community group why we can’t do something. It’s important to explain why not. This can be hard and uncomfortable but must be done well - clearly and sensitively. It’s about listening and being

sensitive to what the community want even if you can't give it to them." (quoted in Hartley, 1998).

Civic leadership can contribute to local communities in a variety of roles, across the four arenas. Some of these are given below, with examples:

Advocacy and voice

Benington (1996) argues that a local authority's community governance role can take a variety of forms:

- Take short-term advocacy action to defend or develop a community's interests in relation to other agencies.

For example, in Milton Keynes, the Leader of the Council, Isobel Wilson decided to listen to and help shape the demands from a campaigning group about a key local environmental issue, which "*blew up out of nowhere*". A landfill contractor applied for a large waste plant in the locality. The firm was not popular locally for having caused environmental problems previously. As the protest build up, the council leadership decided to work with the protestors to raise and resolve issues. So many protestors came to the first Cabinet meeting on the subject that they were unable to get into council chamber. The Leader insisted that they were found space in chamber, even though it became very crowded, and she also started the meeting again so that all protestors could hear. She encouraged members of the public to speak in the discussion. As the next meeting was likely to involve even more people the council meeting was moved to a larger venue - the city church. The council met regularly with the campaign group and other stakeholders until the matter was resolved and a "greener" approach to local waste adopted.

Ray Mallon's strategic agenda, as Mayor of Middlesbrough, is based on genuine consultation with local people, and has been developed further as he relatively quickly identified the key services areas in Middlesbrough which required his attention. Recognising the benefit of making an early impact, he built on his previous experience as a senior police officer to initiate a radical and original scheme for dealing with crime (a

comprehensive up-to-date information system combined with a task force of community wardens parking attendants and litter officers) which had a beneficial impact within 18 months.

- Develop strategies to plan ahead for the needs of a particular group or area (for example, using the local strategic partnership to steer economic and social regeneration, or to manage economic growth).

Mike Wolfe, Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent, has developed and fostered an imaginative long-term strategic vision based on a real understanding of the root causes of the decline in civic consciousness and low levels of empowerment in the borough. He recognised that community leadership is both his strength and a realistic role for him to emphasise

In the European arena, Birmingham City Council pioneered an office in Brussels as early as 1984, when it realised the importance of big cities being in close touch with EU policy and practice. Two decades later, this office has been transformed into West Midlands in Europe, representing all the region's local authorities, the Regional Assembly and Regional Development Agency alongside numerous West Midlands colleges and universities

- Act as the voice of the community, protecting it against external threats (for example, hospital admissions, community safety (hospital closure, or the planning of an airport extension)

When a new airport on agricultural land was proposed by national government, Warwickshire County Council quickly established a series of meetings across the affected areas in order to provide channels for concerns and to explore imaginative solutions to the pressures of air travel. They invited neighbouring local authorities, including those with airports already in their domain and "held the ring" as different interests and approaches were explored.

Representation of common purpose

Benington argues that the power of a community governance role by a local authority:

“to develop and to represent the community (the whole rather than the parts) is evident in many areas at times of crisis and of celebration. It was found at the time of the Lockerbie air disaster and the Hillsborough football disaster in Sheffield, that people turned to the local authority not only to co-ordinate the emergency services, and to restore safety and order, but also to help embody the community’s sense of grief.On the positive side, when Coventry won the FA cup at Wembley almost the whole local population came down to the Town Hall to welcome the team home and to celebrate the city’s victory.” (p 161-2).

The strength and symbolism of this representation lies in the civic leadership role of the local authority, which in turn is built on the unique democratic mandate of local government. This emphasises the fact that we can and should think of civic leadership beyond the material delivery of public services. Consideration of the democratic, civil and human engagement elements of communities is important. Such a role was also evident in the civic leadership of Mayor Guliani in New York, and from the mayor of Amsterdam when a cargo plane hit a block of flats in the early 1990s (Boin and t’Hart, 2003).

Envisioning the future

While market organizations can focus solely on current demand, civic leadership organizations must act as stewards for future generations as well as address current needs and aspirations. This is not always comfortable but is part of the responsibility to the locality.

For example, St Albans District Council was aware that it was rather out of touch with local citizens and groups and wanted to both reach out and look forward. It established a community conference, invited a range of stakeholders and groups to contribute envisioning the future. The exercise was both fruitful in vision terms and also in developing better engagement and mutual understanding between the council and local groups.

Aberdeen City Council set out to encourage a close look at the long-term future of the city. While still enjoying the oil boom, members and officers knew that they had to plan for when the oil ran out. They set up a series of debates about the priorities of the city in thirty years' time. While not initially popular, this was seen as a valuable act on behalf of the city and its hinterland.

Telford and Wrekin Council has a Leader who is passionately interested in (and knowledgeable about) public transport. As the council prepared for unitary status, the declining state of local public transport was addressed. Telford was built in the age of the car, but many people are socially excluded without access to a car, and bus services were declining steeply, as the routes were ill-suited to local needs. Working with the bus operator and engaging citizens in debate, the council took the courageous step of completely reorganizing bus service routes. Against a volley of protest, elected members and managers listened but stood firm in advocating for bus service redesign, linked to other road improvements for car users, pedestrians and others. They have now won a national award for their innovative public transport policies and practices, while bus service use has increased substantially. This approach involved taking a long-term approach beyond short-term advantage.

Building local capacity

A number of writers have examined how civic leadership can build capacity for community governance (e.g. Benington, 1996; Donnison, 1998; Putnam, 1993; Moore, 1995). This requires not only structural changes (eg the Local Government Act, 2000 for English local authorities or the Northern Ireland Act 1998 establishing the Northern Ireland Assembly), but also changes in the assumptions, objectives and imaginations of civic leaders and their organizations.

Benington (1996) notes:

“A local authority which recognises the positive attachment which many people have to their local community area, and the latent hopes which they focus on the elected Council as a channel for many of their desires for belonging, will be able to foster a new kind of relationship to its people. This will be a development relationship in which the local authority sees part of its job as to cultivate the capacity and the ‘author-ity’ of its community – its capacity to find its voice and to be the author of its own scripts for the development of the area and of its local economy and community.” (p. 162)

These are not easy challenges. Working with communities is complex and is not a panacea for societal problems. Societies can be uncivil as well as civil, and some communities may hardly exist as people seek to escape stressful local conditions (Donnison, 1998).

DOES CIVIC LEADERSHIP MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Does civic leadership “makes a difference”? A variety of indicators might be considered: social cohesion, sense of community safety, economic and social well-being, trust and reciprocity among members of the community, networks of collaboration, social capital, democratic health of the community. More work needs to be done to examine whether effective civic leadership leads to valued outcomes for citizens and communities, but there is some indicative evidence.

Putnam (1993) argues that the existence of social capital in a society helps to build good governance, and that good governance also contributes to the long-term building of social capital. He defines social capital as those features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, which build a sense of co-operation and a belief in generalised reciprocity (mutuality expressed now and at some time in the future). Putnam goes on to argue that:

“Those concerned with democracy and development.....should be building a more civic community, but they should lift their sights beyond instant results....Building social capital will not be easy, but it is the key to making democracy work” (p. 185).

Some concrete evidence on the relationship between civic leadership and turnout is given in the analysis of local government elections between 1973

and 2002 by Rallings and Thrasher (2003). Examining a number of factors, they came to the conclusion that:

“New research seems to indicate that areas where both electors and local political actors have an engagement with the community are more likely to turn out, even having controlled for social class and political marginality.”

But they also note:

“However, such feelings are unlikely to develop rapidly and in some places will never do so because of the structure of the built environment or the mobility of the population.” (p. 714).

This is a strong argument for the role of civic leadership in developing and strengthening that sense of local engagement. It may contribute not only to building local democracy but also may counter against febrile or alienated politics.

At a global level, the United Nations Development Program’s report (2002) entitled *Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*” is based on detailed country analysis and statistics of economic, social and political well-being. The report argues that democratic governance is important in its own right but also because it advances human development within countries globally.

DEVELOPING CIVIC LEADERSHIP

If civic leadership is to become a reality across local authorities, then skills need to be honed and council systems fine-tuned. Benington (1996) suggests a number of policies and practices by the civic leadership of local authorities:

- A listening local authority (ward councillors and front-line staff will represent the people to the authority not just vice versa. This involves listening carefully (both to what is said and what is not said) and responding with respect. There can be a variety of ways in which the authority can engage with its communities.
- A responsive local authority. Direct and open communication across the authority, with less emphasis on hierarchy alone and more on using networks and groups to identify and solve problems

- A developmental, capacity-building catalysing local authority. This involves not just providing public services, but thinking about social and political development
- A leading and governing local authority. This involves articulating the values and the vision for the locality and debating and deciding with others how the fairest balance can be struck between different interests and stakeholders.
- A learning local authority. With a reciprocal and interactive relationship with the people, with policies developed in and through partnerships and engagement. In such dynamic contexts, some mistakes will inevitably be made, so being able to learn from mistakes, and undertaking reassessment of the situation in the light of a changing context will be important.

These ways of working and engaging with others have implications for how elected members and others develop skills. For some time, political parties have perhaps assumed that leadership is either inherent in the individual (the “born leader”) or is achieved primarily through direct experience (“the school of hard knocks”), or some combination of the two. However, views are changing, and over the last five years there has been a greater interest in exploring how capabilities (skills, abilities, mind-sets) of individuals, as well as the leadership capabilities of groups and whole organizations and networks can be developed both more systematically and more rapidly. There is insufficient space here to examine all approaches but Hartley and Hinksman (2003) have reviewed the evidence for the efficacy of a range of approaches to leadership development in the public sector.

Individual development

The use of competency (capability or skill) frameworks to develop leadership are gaining ground (Boyatzis, 1994; Day, 2001). Only a small number of frameworks and courses have been developed specifically for public services. Development which builds on experiences can include coaching, mentoring,

action learning sets and 360 degree feedback assessment, all of which, in the right circumstances can be effective. 360 degree feedback is a valuable source of leadership development based on comparing the ratings of the person about their own leadership behaviours compared with how they are rated on those same skills and behaviours by people who know them well in their leadership role.

Collective leadership development

There is a range of approaches which can foster civic leadership within groups. For example, fast track and other cohort programmes are sometimes established with the express purpose of creating the leaders of tomorrow. (The service learning in civic leadership in the USA takes young people and provides them with experiential learning and then opportunities to reflect on that learning, with the aspiration of creating the civic leaders of the future). Organization development can also provide opportunities for civic leadership development, through programmes of cultural change, innovation development, improved performance management etc. A local authority which had gained a national reputation for its innovation in regard to community leadership saw organization development rather than management development as the key to fostering community leadership (Hartley, 2002b). Capacity building within the whole organization involves paying attention to and, if necessary changing, organizational structures and cultures in order to support organizational (e.g. Rashman and Hartley, 2003; Finger and Burgin, 1999).

Leadership development may also occur through partnership working. There is some limited evidence that partnership working contributes to leadership development (e.g. Geddes and Benington, 2001; Hartley and Allison, 2002). It has been argued that leadership capacity has to be built not within but across organizations in public services (see also Benington, 2004).

CONCLUSIONS

Civic leadership is a key issue for elected representatives at the local authority level, with a democratic mandate to govern communities for the good of the whole, including for future generations. However, changes in society have led to a rethink about the role of the elected member. A mandate from the ballot box is not longer sufficient because leadership has to be won and won on a regular basis to build trust and confidence from local people. In addition, there are additional sources of civic leadership, where influence occurs not through formal democratic authority but through appointment to a civic body or through persuasion, information and communication. What is clear is that this requires new ways of thinking about steering and leading local communities, and thinking about adaptive leadership to help communities tackle the tough and complex issues of our society. This is much more than populism or public consultation but a real engagement to achieve outcomes to support social inclusion.

Civic leadership is much more than providing public services. It concerns social and political development as well, and about expressing the hopes, fears and aspirations of the locality, both in difficult times and in ordinary times. There is evidence that the long-term work to build social capital achieves outcomes in terms of community well-being.

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