

**Leadership – an exploration of issues relating to leadership
in the public domain.**

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Executive summary

This paper provides an exploration of the concept of public leadership. The starting point was to state the significance of leadership in human endeavour. The connotations of the word are not necessarily favourable, and for many people a shadow is cast by evil-doers with strong leadership capacities. Better to do without leadership altogether, some people would argue, than to have it used for the wrong purposes. However, that would be to discard all benefits that leadership can bring to large and complex human systems which otherwise might be too mechanistic to offer real value.

In the first section of the paper, we examined the three main schools of thought in the academic literature on leadership – which is drawn from the disciplines of psychology and organisational sociology, and currently lacks a focus on ‘public-ness’ and the special leadership issues of the public domain. These schools of thought are concerned with the behaviour and character of leaders, with the organisational setting they are in and the tasks they face, and with their relationship with others, particularly their own staff. While they have each been in favour at different times, with the last, transformational leadership currently being dominant, all can be found in various current approaches to leadership development, and all have insights to offer.

However, this literature draws so heavily on the private sector – with the exception of the work of Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe - that it must be open to question how far it applies in the public domain. In the next section of the paper, we build on Allason’s famous statement that the public and private sectors are alike in all unimportant respects, to explore differences in kind or in degree or scale with which the public manager has to deal. Multiple, overlapping and conflicting objectives, distributed processes of power and authority, the complexity involved in delivering better service, rules of public accountability and their interpretation within the culture, and finally issues involved in working outside the organisation, using influence rather than direction in order to achieve outcomes – this list provides a formidable set of challenges to potential leaders in the public domain. These differences make the case for investing in a better theory of public leadership, which more appropriately reflects the reality lived by practitioners.

Although it is easier to characterise the public domain as something that the private sector is not, positive formulations of the public domain and public service are harder to find. One new formulation is the notion of ‘public value’, as developed by the staff of the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit. This model sets out three basic elements – responsive public service, better outcomes, and the building of trust and legitimacy in public institutions. These three purposes must be pursued at the same time, and any trade-offs made in the light of the need to sustain all three factors.

If we take this threefold set of tasks as what public leaders are meant to do it follows that a range of qualities, skills and competences are needed in order for leaders to flourish.

- The transformational leadership which involves leaders being aware about and reflective about how they are perceived (particularly) by their staff should also apply to relationships with stakeholders in partnerships required to deliver outcomes.
- Achieving better outcomes requires organisational leaders who are skilled at working to influence those who cannot be directed because they are out of the line of management. Effective public leaders are able to do that and to understand what makes those partners work the way they do, understanding culture, accountabilities, politics etc. outside their own direct experience.
- Respecting the public is at the core of public leadership. This involves a connectedness which goes beyond rational analysis and is about the fundamental ethics of the role.
- Public leaders work to optimise the contributions of elected people in creating the political drive for change and the contribution of the essential knowledge which comes from permanent employment in the policy and service field. Recognising the importance of this connection and having the skills to facilitate it is core to what public leaders can offer.
- In addition to all of the features that are special about public leadership, leaders also need to be good at the conventional task of organisational leadership, having both the intellectual capacity to provide the strategic thinking that is needed to get the organisation on the right track, and the transformational leadership skills to ensure that the service delivered to the user is of the highest quality possible.

This is a challenging agenda both for public leaders themselves and for those responsible for their development, but much depends on being able to achieve the necessary change.

1 Introduction

This paper explores some of the complex issues around leadership in the public domain. It draws broadly on two sets of literature; literature relating to managerial leadership, where the research base is predominantly private sector organisations and much of it based in the United States; and a diverse literature on the public domain, drawn from public administration, public management and policy work. The paper seeks to build a bridge across these two areas and reflect on the leadership role of public officials.

The working definition of leadership in this paper is 'behaviour which persuades other people to release discretionary effort in pursuit of given purpose'. In other words, leadership is as much about followership and how to achieve it as it is about leaders themselves. But to set this definition in context, we need go back to basics. The concept of leadership is invested with mystical qualities. Stories from myth and legend about heroic acts and success against the odds resonate in the sub-text of modern discussions about leadership. Still today we feel our lives being shaped by leaders of movements and nations, who by some means express vision and direction in such a way as to attract people to follow them. We know that this can be for good or ill, and that crimes against humanity have been committed by the followers of certain leaders, as well as the advancement of the hopes and aspirations of oppressed peoples in other cases. If leadership can be viewed as good or evil, it can also be examined from a non-normative perspective, as a quality or process is worth understanding so that it can be applied to purposes which do produce beneficial social results. This paper seeks to examine the concept, then to explore its application by public officials.

The essence of leadership might be found in the origin of the word. The English language uses the Germanic term rather than the alternative Latin, (where there is an interesting convergence between the concept of educating and leading). Leadership is linked to the Germanic term *Leitmotiv*, the name for the banner, and by implication the person carrying the banner, which troops followed into battle, giving them a sense of direction, but inevitably exposed to enemy action. Carrying the leitmotiv was an act of bravery and self-sacrifice for the greater good, and such altruism was venerated by those who benefited from it. English chooses the Latin base for 'management', having its origins in the word for hand – hands-on, handling, concerned with task rather than direction, and altogether more humdrum. These two ideas, one rather exciting and inspirational, and one not, have an uneasy co-existence in the leadership and management literature and in the lives of organisational leaders and managers.

The next section of the paper gives an account of the main themes within the literature on leadership, illustrating the themes by reference to current examples of practice in the public sector. In the third section of the paper we highlight problematic issues for leadership in the public domain. Finally, section four introduces the concept of public value and suggests that it forms the basis for extending our concept of the leadership role of public officials.

2 Review of the development of concepts on managerial leadership

Specialists in this field come from a number of disciplinary sources, with a predominance in psychology and organisational sociology. There is a vast array of conflicting and overlapping studies stretching back over most of the last century. Major reviews of the literature have been conducted by Stogdill (1984), Yuki (1989) and Alimo Metcalfe (1998). A recent study of the literature for the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU, 2001) rather despairingly began its literature review chapter by quoting Yuki '...most of the theories are beset with conceptual weaknesses and lack strong empirical support. Several thousand empirical studies have been conducted but most of the results are contradictory and inconclusive' (PIU, 2001)

Most reviewers tend to classify the literature into three categories, namely

- Trait and behavioural theories
- Contingency and situational theories, and
- Transformational theories.

This paper will follow the same categories. Each in turn seems to have a different primary focus. Trait and behavioural theories focus on the leaders themselves, contingency and situational theories focus on the organisational context in which leadership takes place, and transformational leadership theories focus on the relationship between leaders and followers. The next section of this paper will follow this route.

Focus on the leader - trait and behavioural theories of leadership

Leadership has always been a subject that has fascinated both those who aspire to be leaders and those who research and write about such people. From Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and writers, to Machiavelli, to modern biographers of the great, all have reflections on the nature of leadership. Modern social science-based studies of leadership, however, began by focusing on what it was about these people – in a variety of contexts such as military, government, business – that made them effective leaders.

Studies were undertaken of the qualities or traits of such people, lists produced, and conclusions drawn about how people need to be in order to be leaders. The problem with all of this effort is that results from various studies were inconsistent with one another. Instead of producing a definitive list of characteristics true in all circumstances of all leaders, we had a proliferation of ideas. For those wishing either to develop themselves as leaders or responsible for developing others as future leaders this did not take us very far.

One of the key problems in this early literature, is that it was culture-bound. Alimo Metcalfe calls this school the 'great man' school of leadership (Alimo Metcalfe, 1998). It reflected the society which commissioned most of it, dominated by white male culture in the United States corporate and military

sectors, and was insensitive to gender and ethnicity-based differences in leadership and management.

An elaboration of the notion of discovering leadership qualities came via attempts to use empirical research methods to observe leadership and management behaviour in action, rather than through the reported traits of the occupants of those roles. Following Blake and Mouton (1964), this developed as a logging of different sets of personal styles, such as the following

- Task orientated leadership – strong emphasis on getting things done and a concern for productivity
- People orientated leadership – recognising people not just as units of production but also as human beings with a range of needs and of gifts
- Directive leadership – taking responsibility for making decisions and expecting instructions to be followed.
- Participative leadership – sharing decision making with others in the organisation, accessing their knowledge and ideas.

This framework seems to provide the academic basis for the development work done by Richard Olivier, who uses the plays of Shakespeare to elucidate leadership styles. His terms for the above styles are

- warrior
- mother
- good king, and
- medicine woman

(Olivier, 2002)

Leaders' whose behaviour was observed tended to be stronger in some styles than in others. The benefits of Blake and Mouton's managerial grid work was that they extended the range of what we think of as 'leadership', which had previously been dominated by task –orientated and directive styles. This paved the way for thinking more about the application of particular leadership styles in particular contexts, and led to a focus on the organisation rather than the leader. We will explore these developments after looking at some examples of work drawn from the trait and behavioural schools of thought.

Trait and behavioural theories remain an important component of the body of literature on leadership. The production of lists of desired traits is a growth industry in the field of leadership development. The Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership (CEML, 2000), a body sponsored by the DTI to look into the state of leadership in UK business and to make recommendations for improvement, commissioned work on this subject. A literature review was commissioned and interviews with more than a hundred senior managers in large, medium and small enterprises. The resulting

computerised analysis produced 1013 management and leadership abilities, and these were clustered into 83 ability sets. These in turn were compressed into 8 meta-ability sets, involving three primary qualities – thinking skills, people skills and task skills. The eight meta-ability sets are

- Thinking strategically
- Leading direction and culture
- Managing relationships
- Managing and leading people
- Managing the self
- Managing activities and quality
- Managing resources
- Managing information

Each of these meta-ability sets has around 10 components, which themselves were the product of the qualitative analysis of the data gathered. While the term 'managing' is more in evidence in this list than 'leadership', it is appropriate to see this collection of traits as what effective managerial leaders bring to their role. Comparisons can be made with earlier work. Under the Management Charter Initiative which aimed to set out a framework of competencies which applied at different levels of management and in all contexts, similar lists were produced which were then used as a means of aligning generic management qualifications and single silo professional or sector qualifications, leading to portability of qualifications and hence labour market flexibility.

Two other current public service initiatives also have sets of abilities and qualities built into them – the NHS leadership qualities framework (NHS Modernisation Agency Leadership Centre 2002) and the framework from the National Schools Leadership College. The former, following a research project by the Hay Consultancy, sets out the following set of qualities

- Personal qualities – self-belief, self-awareness, self management, drive for improvement, personal integrity
- Delivering the service – leading change through people, empowering others, holding to account, effective and strategic influencing, and collaborative working.
- Setting direction – broad scanning, intellectual flexibility, seizing the future, political astuteness, drive for results.

Interesting in the light of this paper on leadership in the public sector are the qualities listed under the last bullet point. Whereas the first two bullet points seem generic and could be found elsewhere in the literature, you get a strong flavour of the NHS from the last one – highly political, with a big and a small 'p'. Notable by its absence is any focus on users of service and citizens. This framework suggests that serving political masters rather than the public is most valued in leadership in the NHS.

The framework which guides the work of the National College for School Leadership also reflects the culture within which it was produced. It springs from a report produced by a group of senior people inside the educational community, formed into a 'think tank' to work on the qualities needed in school leadership. The result reflects a strong consensus inside the profession about the importance of learning in leadership. The framework is as follows School leaders will

- Be purposeful, inclusive and values driven
- Embrace the distinctive and inclusive context of the school
- Promote an active view of learning
- Be instructionally focused
- Be a function that is distributed throughout the school community
- Build capacity by developing the school as a learning community
- Be futures orientated and strategically driven
- Be developed through experiential and innovative methods
- Be served by a support and policy context that is coherent and implementation driven
- Be supported by a National College that leads the discourse on leadership for learning.

This paper could continue more or less without end listing sets of qualities which are observed in effective leaders – either through observation or as a statement, drawn from practice, of the qualities that are needed. Some of these frameworks are linked to psychometric tests which seek to diagnose how far individuals already fit the desired framework, and what areas they need to develop in order to help them become better leaders. The best known of these is the Myers-Briggs inventory which provides a battery of questions and indicates where individuals are located in relation to others who have taken the test on a number of different dimensions. The test and feedback from it are saleable products in the market place although the research on which they are based is usually in the public domain. (Myers and MacCaullay, 1985).

Focus on the organisational context – situational and contingency theories

Blake and Mouton's managerial grid which had led to a discussion of leadership styles formed the bridge into a new way of thinking about leadership, which was to focus on the context the leader operated in rather than on the leader and his or her style. The work was taken forward by Fiedler and others who believed that leaders could have a repertoire of styles, and a good leader adopts the right style for the context – or situation – that they find themselves in. (Fiedler, 1967) Fiedler's work offered up a view that it was not easy for a leader to change to reflect changed situations, so the situation should be structured to suit the leader where possible. Where this was not, alternative leaders could be recruited whose own predilections better suited the situation.

The three factors which were relevant in Fiedler's eyes to the selection of an appropriate style related to the task and the formal and informal relationships between leaders and followers

- The relationship between leader and followers - if staff in the organisation like or respect the leader then he or she is likely to be more effective.
- The structuring of the task - if it is possible for the leader to set clear goals and task targets, this will increase his or her influence – but this is less possible in some task environments than in others.
- The positional power of the leader – if the formal authority of the organisation reinforces the leader, he or she is likely to be more effective. This only works where this authority is reinforced, not where it is undermined by informal practice.

The interplay between these three factors produces a range of optimal styles to employ in given situations, and Fiedler believes that it is possible for skilled leaders to operate in many different styles appropriate to the situation. Other theorists – called contingency theorists to distinguish them from those who stress the importance of situations being made to fit the leader are more inclined to talk about a repertoire of leadership styles which can be adopted by an individual to suit the contingencies he or she finds themselves in.

Hersey and Blanchard (1982) added to the components of the situation described by Fiedler a dimension referring to the 'maturity' of followers, by which they meant not only the knowledge and experience of staff, but also their propensity and willingness to participate in decision-making. They drew up a set of four leadership styles which reflected different combinations of the two dimensions 'task' and 'people' that were revealed by Blake and Mouton. Their framework of styles involves the following

- Telling – this style is characterised by a highly structured task. Subordinates are given detailed direction about how to undertake the task. This suits circumstances where staff are new or where there is a tight deadline which precludes consultation
- Selling – the leader gives a lot of direction on the task but also encourages staff to buy-in This can be used when staff do not have the necessary ability to undertake the task with less direction but are willing to learn.
- Participating – decision-making is shared by leaders and followers. The leader gives high level of support to staff, facilitating their efforts and is not likely to give very much direction. Staff are moderately 'mature' in the sense described above
- Delegating – the leader identifies the problem but leaves it to followers to find the solution. The assumption is that they have both the knowledge and the motivation to do this.

Focus on the relationship between leaders and followers – transformational leadership.

In discussing the 'maturity' of followers, Hersey and Blanchard provide a bridge into the next and still emergent body of work on theories of transformational leadership. Bass (1985) and Kouzes and Posner (1987) provide the key texts. Some writers point to the significance of this new theoretical school referring to it as a 'paradigm shift' (Alimo Metcalfe, 1998). The need for a paradigm shift reflects the problems of corporate America in the 1970s and 1980s – as it faced industrial competition from the other side of the Pacific. Previous approaches to management and leadership tended to focus on the large conglomerate, multi-layered organisation, with roles tightly structured. Such organisations may have been good at delivering high levels of industrial production at a time when competition was limited, but as the far eastern economic miracle took off, and particularly as the rate of technological innovation speeded up, theories of leadership which saw followers as little more than cogs in a machine had to give way to new ways of thinking about organisation which stressed speed, adaptability, customer focus and closeness to market. Valuing staff as key contributors to a successful future in the new strategic environment needed new ideas about leadership which recognised that.

The term 'transformational leadership' actually originated in work done by Burns, where he contrasted transactional leadership, which was based on the notion that staff are motivated to perform by doing a deal with leaders, a transaction where one party exchanges with the other, with transformational leadership, which was about inspiring followers to aspire to higher level purposes. Confusingly, the same terms are used to define different sorts of task in the organisation by Kotter (1990) who regards both as important. It is important to distinguish between transformational leadership as a type of motivation and transformation as a set of management tasks

However, as used by Bass (1985) and Kouzes and Posner (1987), the term 'transformational leadership' is used to refer to a new empowering and enabling approach to leadership, which recognises that influencing followers is crucial to effectiveness, particularly in times when they are the repository of market and process information and creativity which could be crucial to organisational performance. Both Bass and Kouzes and Posner undertook large-scale empirical studies amongst managers in the 1980, investigating what they saw as the best leadership they had experienced. The two separate studies produced broadly comparable results, imparting some validity to the findings.

Bass's model of transformational leadership was based on the following elements

- Charismatic leadership, where the leader was highly esteemed by followers. Regarded as a role model, and having a vision which they wished to align themselves with.
- Inspirational leadership, where optimism about the achievement of the mission is provided, but not necessarily the role model and emulation characterised by charismatic leadership.
- Intellectually stimulating leaders encourage followers to look at problems from new angles and be more creative
- Individually considerate leaders work with individual followers to understand their needs and encourage them to aim for higher level satisfactions, as on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954)

The crucial point here is that the test of a good leader lies with the followers and what they make of him or her. It is crucial therefore for leaders not only to understand themselves, but also to have an understanding of how they are perceived by others, particularly subordinates, whose views they may not previously have heard. A new form of psychometric test has been established which records perceptions of the qualities of the leader by subordinates, peers and superiors – hence the term 360-degree feedback. Properly analysed and fed back of the analysis enables the person to understand how others see him or her, and to develop plans for responding to the diagnosed weaknesses. The anonymity of the process enables effective communication, Aggregated test results may also be used to draw general conclusions about groups of leaders, and enables the individual being tested to see where their scores are in relation to wider populations. (Alimo Metcalfe, 1998)

3 Problematic issues for leadership in public administration

Graham Allison suggested that 'the public and private sectors are alike in all unimportant respects' (Allison, 1980), thus drawing attention to the differences between the two sectors. Since the body of literature which has just been reviewed emanates almost entirely from research done in the private sector, we need to proceed to analyse what is different about leadership in the public sector.

Allison's compelling phrase should not cloud the degree to which there are similarities in leadership in the public and private sectors. There are many similarities, but it does draw our attention to the unique nature of the public domain and its impact on the concept of leadership. The term 'public domain' is used in order to escape in this analysis from the notion of 'ownership' as the dividing line between public and private. (Stewart and Ranson. 1988) Private sector managerial concepts tend to relate to markets, firms / organisations and relationships between firms, and customers, although it is also clear that private sector leaders may also have to deal with the public domain of contested policy and regulatory issues. While private sector leaders are faced with a degree of complexity, it does not match the complexity of the public domain which includes all of the above, together with multiple, overlapping and contested purpose, distributed power and authority, high visibility and exposure, legacy systems of public accountability which are not tailored to present circumstances and an uneasy alignment with the dynamic of political change. No small task, then, leadership in the public domain. More about these differences follows.

Multiple, overlapping and conflicting objectives. While private sector leaders have to deal with this issue, it is usually possible to work out a hierarchy of purposes which suits the ultimate end – market share, profitability, or whatever indicator is chosen to represent success in the market. There is no higher order purpose, the equivalent of success in the market, which acts as a beacon within the public domain. One of the tasks of leaders is to try to set 'the target that beckons' (Bennis, 1969) Influencing others, inside and beyond the organisation, in order to create this common ground, is clearly a crucial component of leadership in the public domain.

But some issues are not susceptible to this approach and have to be treated differently, to be kept opaque, as to make them clear would be to risk damaging the delicate coalitions of support which are needed to achieve change. Here the traditional skill of the 'mandarin' comes into play – the capacity to draft the note of a meeting which means five different things to five different stakeholders, thus keeping them all on board. A good example of this would be English education policy on raising school standards, which is promoted as a policy which has widespread benefits for all children. To make serious inroads into the low achievement which keeps average standards down, however, requires focusing resources and benefits on a minority of children. To raise the overall standard it is necessary to address the particularly entrenched educational problems – and wider social and economic issues – of children and young people from poor families. Holding

the larger coalition together to achieve the second objective requires high-level skills in public leadership. There are two potentially conflicting objectives hidden within the one purpose (and this shows when implementing the policy). Ability to work within a high level of ambiguity seems to be a unique pre-requisite of leadership in the public domain.

Distributed power and authority. Much effort over the last twenty years has gone into strengthening line management. During the Thatcher era, this was seen as the key to achieving that government's overarching goal for public services, increased efficiency (Metcalfe and Richards, 1991). And yet despite all of that effort, power and authority remain irredeemably distributed and contested in the public domain, in a way which has no real parallel in the private sector. To an extent, you could argue that this aspect of the argument is tautological – finding resolution to what is contested is what the public domain is about.

Some of this relates to the professionalised nature of much of public service. Public service professionals are wedded to their professional values, the fulfilment of which is the chief motivation that leads them to do the job they do. Their affiliations tend to be to networks which go beyond the organisation and cluster around the professional bodies. Reining in the autonomy of professionals has been a consistent theme of public service reform over the last 20 years – with greater success amongst lower status professionals such as teachers, social workers and probation officers, rather than higher status groups such as doctors, police officers and judges. However, where there has been a reduction in autonomy, difficulties in recruitment have often followed, supporting the notion that the opportunity to pursue professional values forms a substantial part of the motivation of these groups.

Changes in the technology and processes of knowledge management, including the introduction of practice protocols based on 'what works' evidence are being introduced, but the essential element of professional work – distinguishing, in Mintzberg's terms, 'professional bureaucracy' from 'machine bureaucracy' (Mintzberg, 1983) – is the discretion held by the front line professional to define the needs of service users. There is little prospect of this changing, so sharing leadership between managers and professionals seems to be a permanent fact of life differentiating the public and private sectors.

At one time, the same would have been said about power shared with the trade unions, but this seems now less of a distinction between public and private. It is testimony to the changes brought about, particularly by the Thatcher governments, but also more generally to policies on using the market and competition in public services that this now seems less of a distinguishing feature. This might be different in particular localities, where there may be sufficient overlap between local party politicians – however constrained by national policies – and local trade unions to constitute a substantial public/private difference, but this seems a marginal case.

Complexity of achieving outcomes A key difference between the private and public sectors, and the leadership of organisations within those sectors, is the degree of complexity involved in achieving desired objectives. Private sector leaders are able to establish control over much of their operation – whether this is ‘made’ in-house or ‘bought in’ on contract – although of course they cannot usually control the market for their product and must rely on influencing it through market research and advertising.

Some leaders of public organisations are in such a situation – but most are not. For most leaders of public organisations, achieving outcomes requires them to influence a much wider range of stakeholders. In the example cited above, raising the educational standards of poor children rests not only on managing change within educational institutions, but it also on contributions from a wide range of other sources, including the benefits system, social services, the health service, the youth service, criminal justice agencies, community organisations and employers. Creating and leading such inter-organisational coalitions is a key public leadership skill.

If all that concerned the public domain were outputs, the difference between the two sectors might not be too great. For private organisations, outputs and outcomes are closely related, with market share and share price – the outcome – closely related to the output of the right product or service at the right price and quality. But too great a focus on outputs in the public domain produces sub-optimal behaviour and the growth of ‘wicked issues’ – behaviour which is rational in improving outputs in one part of the public service, but with effects on the system as a whole which reduces the performance of the system as a whole in achieving outcomes. Excluding difficult pupils from school contributes to the school performance on league tables – an output – but reduces outcomes in a wide range of social exclusion-related fields.

The changes introduced into the public service in the UK since 1997 have begun to recognise this difference, but there is still a legacy of output-oriented process. Organisational leaders therefore need to operate a dual system – delivering the outputs while also influencing the achievement of better outcomes. This is particularly tough, as the actions required may be contradictory. This takes us back to ambiguity and paradox as key contextual features of the public domain.

Embedded rules of the game.

Constitutional rules and conventions represent an agreed settlement about the allocation of powers and accountabilities. Over time these arrangements become embedded and institutionalised, meaning that for most people they just become accepted as the norm, not to be questioned, and adhered to without questioning, providing codes of behaviour and guidance on how we should operate. Some aspects of the existing constitutional settlement are clearly very much up for review and change – as no one knows better than public servants in Northern Ireland. But even in the context of radical change in some aspects of the constitution, there are clusters of formal and informal

rules of the game which are not under discussion and which have a major bearing on how public leadership is exercised.

UK public administration owes much to Weberian concepts of bureaucracy - the classic triangular-shaped organisation where direction comes from the top and responsibility for achieving the goals is cascaded down through the layers towards the front line. This model fits very neatly with the split responsibility of elected political leader and appointed organisational leader. The political leader decides on the policy outcomes to be achieved and then holds the organisational leader to account for their achievement. Organisational leaders use their knowledge of what is practicable to influence the shape of policy goals, and then lead their organisation in delivering.

As a legitimating myth, this notion has some resonance, but it was established at a time when there seemed to be a fit between the system of accountability and the organisational form adopted. In both the public and the private sectors, organisations tended to take pyramid form, to adopt a planning approach to achieving their goals, and to operate in a world of predictable and incremental change, where taking direction and reporting back up the line seemed a sensible way of ensuring co-ordination and control.

The organisational model has been abandoned as unsuitable for today's turbulent times in most parts of the private sector, driven by market forces to compete with flatter and faster structures. At the same time, there have been pressures to change the nature of organisations in the public domain. However, the form in which public accountability is exercised has not been addressed, thus creating a disjunction between the constitutional rules of the game and organisational structure and process.

The managerial revolution of the Thatcher era was aimed at changing the culture of the public service, injecting dynamic leadership at the top of public organisations, dedicated to taking the objectives of political leaders and delivering with efficiency and quality. Executive agencies were created, the term 'chief executive' used for the job title of the organisational leader, and great things were expected. Some moderate improvements in the management process were achieved, but where the new approach butted up against the old rules of the game on public accountability – such as Home Secretary Michael Howard's decision to involve himself in the detail of running the prison service, it was the old rules that prevailed at the expense of the new world of managerial leadership. Instead of being given the opportunity to flourish within a strategic framework set by ministers, the wings of the new managerial leaders were clipped.

Other experiments in seeking to inject new dynamism were made in other parts of the public sector. The NHS has injected massive resources in building the managerial leadership capacity of the system, creating through joint executive / non-executive trust boards an innovative governance framework. But in practice, the Secretaries of State for Health over the years have felt unable to devolve real freedom to these bodies, but instead have subjected them to the kind of command and control approach they might have

experienced within one very large Weberian pyramid, but in this case achieved through setting targets and the mysterious interventions of the servants of the Secretary of State who work at levels above that of local commissioner and provider of health service.

The face-to-face relationship between political and managerial leaders at local government level looks more promising. Surely here it is possible to create a system of rules on public accountability that give scope for organisational leadership to achieve significant change. There are some good examples of this in English local government, such as Liverpool, Newcastle, Suffolk and others. But the overall picture is one where both local political leaders and local managerial leaders find themselves on the receiving end of detailed instructions from above, and subject to shame and penalty if they do not comply. So even where they are still responsible for significant functions such as education, social services and housing – which have been removed from local government in Northern Ireland – they are still subject to interventions by the relevant secretary of state and his agents. This builds a behaviour pattern based on compliance rather than leadership, and seems likely to be a self-defeating way of improving public service.

An outcomes orientation. The final problematic piece of the jigsaw included here on current rules of the game relates to the need for public organisations to work for outcomes rather than just outputs. (see previous section). In order to achieve many of the policy outcomes on the current agenda it is necessary for public organisations to work in partnership with other bodies - public, private and voluntary. Effective partnership working cannot happen if the officials engaged in it need constantly to check back up their own hierarchy to get agreement on new developments. This slows the process of developing agreements for change and makes partnership unwieldy and therefore untenable. The diverse nature of the relationships between political and organisational leaders within different policy and service silos makes this even more problematic.

Partnership working is a major aspect of the public domain and likely to remain so. The exercise of inter-organisational leadership to achieve the gains of good partnership working will depend on the development of notions of public accountability which licence organisational leaders to work under the general framework set by their own political leadership, but without being bound into a system of detailed control.

4 Leadership for public purpose

This paper has outlined the main elements of the academic and practice literature on leadership, and then suggested that there is a lack of fit between that literature and the nature of the public domain. This is not a suggestion that the public and private sectors are wholly unlike each other, or that there is not a lot to learn for public officials from private sector ideas and cases. Rather that there is significant difference which is not recognised and responded to in the body of work on leadership. This is not a surprising

position, given that the literature has been produced by and for people working in the private sector. The third section of the paper focused on some of the features of the public domain which are unique - either in kind or in scale – suggesting key issues which need to be encompassed in any notion of public leadership.

The argument can be taken only so far in negative mode – these are the issues that make public leadership unlike private leadership. That leaves unanswered questions about what public leaders should do and how best should we create development opportunities for them so that they have the skills and competences they need. This paper does not provide the answers to those unanswered questions, but it does give an account of one attempt to do so, and then reflects on what that model means for public leadership.

One positive model which sets out an overarching and coherent picture of the nature of public service – although not the nature of public leadership – is work being undertaken currently within the Strategy Unit in the Cabinet Office on ‘creating public value’ (Strategy Unit, 2002). This paper represents a conscious attempt to bring into a single model key elements of the public domain, creating a rubric which may be used for a number of purposes. The model picks up on the ideas expressed by Stewart and Ranson on the important role of public officials in enabling good governance to take place in public bodies, facilitating public discourse which builds consent, trust and legitimacy (Stewart and Ranson, 1988). But the model also focuses on service delivery and the need for responsiveness and efficiency, addressing the public not only as citizens, as in the case of Stewart and Ranson, but also as consumers and users of public service.

The intention behind the development of this model is to create a new synthesis which brings together notions of good public service with ideas about democratic governance in the good society. These two elements of the public domain have hitherto been addressed separately by different groups of writers. The virtue of the hybrid is that it can help to moderate excesses of a single strand approach. Indeed, public value as a concept has been specifically developed to replace the narrower concepts of value for money which currently drives behaviour in the public domain, embedded as it is in the processes of public finance.

Traditional concepts of value for money focus on the organisational transaction of delivering service. Public value is a concept which has three key elements – delivering public service, achieving outcomes and building trust and legitimacy. The three elements are of equal importance, and intertwined - achieving efficiency and quality in public service remains important, but not at the expense of the system’s capacity to achieve outcomes – see the example above about exclusions from school – and trust and legitimacy are seen as a key element. It is no good increasing efficiency in the short term if this results in a loss of trust amongst the public, and the danger of losing legitimacy for future action is highlighted. Similarly, the attempt to facilitate good democratic governance processes will not lead to trust and legitimacy if at the same time service problems are not addressed, a

process which sometimes requires tough action which can be unpopular with the producers of those services.

This more complex triumvirate of public purposes reflects the complexity which practitioners and observers of the public domain experience and by implication suggests values and methods of working which do provide a fit with the nature of the public domain. People who seek to lead organisations in the public domain need not only the skills and competences in delivering service that their private sector equivalents have, but they also need the skills required to work outside the 'command and control' mode, able to work in partnership with others in the public domain to achieve outcomes – and this is partnership across the professional silos of the public sector (and with private and voluntary organisations), but also partnership between levels of government. While horizontal partnership has received much attention in recent years, vertical partnership is a concept which has not been much explored. Finally, the model implies that trust and legitimacy is everyone's business, and that explaining, consulting, listening and building support for change are just as important as building quality service and achieving better outcomes. The quick fix on service that destroys trust - under the public value model - may well turn out to have produced negative value, rather than positive value for money as previously thought.

In the light of the model of public service and the public domain provided by ideas about public value, the question then remains of what kind of people with what kind of skills and competences we need to lead for public value. In the answer to that question lies the essence of public leadership. The following points emerge from the argument set out so far, although there is no suggestion that this is a complete list. Rather it is a starting point for a necessary and more elaborate analysis.

- In an age of complexity, leaders need the capacity for reflection – they need to understand themselves and also how they are perceived by others. Notions of transformational leadership focus on the relationship between leaders and those they lead. Under public value, leaders need to understand how their partners perceive them as well as how their staff do, and to be able to work in a way which encourages partners and staff to engage with their agenda.
- While some benefit can be achieved by developing people within the single service silos which are characteristic of UK public administration – and this is where most resources are – there are big opportunities from developing people across those boundaries, so that their learning journey is conducted with others with whom they need to interact in order to achieve outcomes. Achieving better outcomes – a key element of public value – depends on the availability of leaders who are capable of working across boundaries, but the deeply embedded silo nature of organisations, career trajectories, resources and governance structures all impede this development.

- Respecting and connecting with the public, winning and sustaining trust for performance and thereby maintaining the legitimacy of the organisation must be part of any set of public leadership competencies. Sometimes the public will be in the role of customer or consumer, sometimes in the role of citizen. While the former does conventionally appear in leadership programmes, the latter is rarely present. Senior managers feel unskilled in a public relationship with citizens, accustomed as they are to working behind the scenes rather than in public. Yet to leave all of that to elected representatives is to neglect core public purpose as set out in the concept of public value. Even for those who never actually come into contact with members of the public, an understanding and appreciation of public opinion is crucial, and crucial to achieve that understanding not only through conventional opinion research, but also through experiential learning, where emotional intelligence may be enhanced rather than relying solely on rational analysis. (Goleman, 1994) The ethics of public leadership rest on valuing the public, and facilitating their involvement as citizens. This ethical stance may be informed by rationality, but depends at a fundamental level on emotion or spirit.
- Relationships with elected representatives – absolutely crucial to achieving public value – are also notably absent from many leadership programmes. Developing a better understanding of what is needed, developing the capacity for both sides of the relationship appropriately to challenge each other, and seeing the world through the eyes of the other side – all of these seem crucial elements in leadership capacity. Legacy systems of public accountability provide a ready made excuse for not tackling this crucial relationship in public leadership. Being the servant of elected ministers or members allows public officials to fade into the background if they so choose, secure in the knowledge that when things go wrong it will not be their fault. But for things to go right, we need to secure the optimal combination of the political drive of elected politicians and the expertise garnered by those with a working lifetime's experience in the field. (Campbell and Wilson, 1995). The skill and confidence to manage that tricky relationship must be one of the core competences of public leadership.
- While the above points all refer to the outcomes and governance aspects of public value, equally important is the third leg of the stool, excellent service delivery. Since much of the leadership competence in this area does read across from the private sector, there is a ready made of not undisputed set of ideas about how to achieve excellent service delivery and the role of leaders in doing so. The key difficulty seems to be combining the staff-orientation of concepts of transformational leadership with hard-headed strategic thinking about how best to achieve public value. Without the former, the commitment of those who deliver service on the front line and those who serve them in the back office, the experience of service will be poor. But without a clearly thought through service strategy, which may go against the interests of those currently providing the service, the service will not

achieve public value. Leadership of people must be combined with thinking and acting strategically

Conclusion

This paper has provided an exploration of the concept of public leadership. The starting point was to state the significance of leadership in human endeavour. The connotations of the word are not necessarily favourable, and for many people a shadow is cast by evil-doers with strong leadership capacities. Better to do without leadership altogether, some people would argue, than to have it used for the wrong purposes. However, that would be to discard all benefits that leadership can bring to large and complex human systems which otherwise might be too mechanistic to offer real value.

In the first section of the paper, we examined the three main schools of thought in the academic literature on leadership – which is drawn from the disciplines of psychology and organisational sociology, and currently lacks a focus on ‘public-ness’ and the special leadership issues of the public domain. These schools of thought are concerned with the behaviour and character of leaders, with the organisational setting they are in and the tasks they face, and with their relationship with others, particularly their own staff. While they have each been in favour at different times, with the last, transformational leadership currently being dominant, all can be found in various current approaches to leadership development, and all have insights to offer.

However, this literature draws so heavily on the private sector – with the exception of the work of Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe - that it must be open to question how far it applies in the public domain. In the next section of the paper, we build on Allason’s famous statement that the public and private sectors are alike in all unimportant respects, to explore differences in kind or in degree or scale with which the public manager has to deal. Multiple, overlapping and conflicting objectives, distributed processes of power and authority, the complexity involved in delivering better service, rules of public accountability and their interpretation within the culture, and finally issues involved in working outside the organisation, using influence rather than direction in order to achieve outcomes – this list provides a formidable set of challenges to potential leaders in the public domain. These differences make the case for investing in a better theory of public leadership, which more appropriately reflects the reality lived by practitioners.

Although it is easier to characterise the public domain as something that the private sector is not, positive formulations of the public domain and public service are harder to find. One new formulation is the notion of ‘public value’, as developed by the staff of the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit. This model sets out three basic elements – responsive public service, better outcomes, and the building of trust and legitimacy in public institutions. These three purposes must be pursued at the same time, and any trade-offs made in the light of the need to sustain all three factors.

If we take this threefold set of tasks as what public leaders are meant to do it follows that a range of qualities, skills and competences are needed in order for leaders to flourish.

- The transformational leadership which involves leaders being aware about and reflective about how they are perceived (particularly) by their staff should also applied to relationship with stakeholders in partnerships required to deliver outcomes.
- Achieving better outcomes requires organisational leaders who are skilled at working to influence those who cannot be directed because they are out of the line of management. Effective public leaders are able to do that and to understand what makes those partners work the way they do, understanding culture, accountabilities, politics etc. outside their own direct experience.
- Respecting the public is at the core of public leadership. This involves a connectedness which goes beyond rational analysis and is about the fundamental ethics of the role.
- Public leaders work to optimise the contributions of elected people in creating the political drive for change and the contribution of the essential knowledge which comes from permanent employment in the policy and service field. Recognising the importance of this connection and having the skills to facilitate it is core to what public leaders can offer.
- In addition to all of the features that are special about public leadership, leaders also need to be good at the conventional task of organisational leadership, having both the intellectual capacity to provide the strategic thinking that is needed to get the organisation on the right track, and the transformational leadership skills to ensure that the service delivered to the user is of the highest quality possible.

This is a challenging agenda both for public leaders themselves and for those responsible for their development, but much depends on being able to achieve the necessary change.

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