Trends in leadership writing and research: a short review of the leadership literature

Susanne Burns
Consultant Director, Centre for Cultural Leadership, Liverpool John Moores University

Susanne Burns is a freelance management consultant with 28 years of senior management experience in the cultural sector. She recently completed the evidence based *Dance Mapping* research for ACE and has extensive experience of working in higher education.

Kerry Wilson
Lecturer, Centre for Cultural Leadership, Liverpool John Moores University

Kerry Wilson is an academic at Liverpool John Moores University and Associate Fellow at the University of Liverpool Management School. She has completed a number of research projects within the cultural management domain for funding bodies including the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council.

ABSTRACT

This paper begins with an introduction to viewing the 'map' of leadership theory and frameworks through the different contextual lenses of academic, practitioner and learner. It affirms the complementary importance of theory and practice and the ability of everyone to be a learner in terms of leadership development. The paper then provides a short review of generic leadership literature, highlighting the more significant trends in leadership research and writing. It concludes with a challenge to the cultural and creative sector to reflect on practice and develop its own theoretical frameworks.

Keywords: leadership literature, practice based, empirical research, theory, framework

Introduction

The first part of this paper is written from the perspective of someone who has been a practitioner in the cultural sector for many years, and who is now working in the academic world directing a cultural leadership programme: hence my interest in how practice and theory complement each other. Kerry and I hope that our short literature review that follows will provide a useful way into key leadership theories and texts and encourage more learning about, as well as through, leadership.
Susanne Burns

The leadership map and lenses

Leadership development is not unique to the cultural and creative industries. Recognition that there is a critical relationship between leadership development,

strategic orientation and organisational performance has led to a plethora of leadership development interventions across sectors and within the cultural and creative sector, we have seen a new approach to leadership development within the early years of this century.

This new attitude has created a hunger for resources and a theoretical underpinning to learning and development. Research within the field is growing as more academics become interested in the field and practice based research is becoming more robust. However, the literature that supports leadership development programmes remains largely generic. As Sue Hoyle, Director of the Clore Leadership Programme stated:

> There have been many books published about leadership – tap 'leadership' into Amazon's search engine and up comes a list of over a quarter of a million titles. Add 'arts' to 'leadership' and the number drops to under 8,000, of which almost all are about the 'art' of leadership. So there is probably a real need for a book dealing authoritatively with the subject of leadership in the arts, and providing lessons from the arts to leaders in other fields such as business, public and third sectors (Hoyle, 2008).

Hoyle highlights that although we have much to offer other sectors, the dearth of available literature appears to force us to contextualise what we do within more generic frameworks.

The literature emerging from the cultural and creative industries is largely practice based, consisting of reports and articles published by lead agencies, including the Cultural Leadership Programme, within industry journals and through 'think tanks', such as Mission Models Money[1], now called Designing for Transition (DEFT). This useful and evolving literature is largely **practice based**, which raises some interesting issues for the development of this field of study.

In the opening pages of *Simulations,* Baudrillard (1983) uses the metaphor of map and territory to argue that, within contemporary society, the simulated copy had superseded the original object and the map had come to precede the geographic territory. This long standing metaphor has pertinence for any discussion of cultural leadership. The 'map' of leadership theory and frameworks does not precede the practice of leadership. Instead, the territory or practice precedes the map, and theory should be both a reflection of as well as a guide for what is happening on the ground.

The leadership map can be viewed through different lenses: the practitioner, the academic and the learner. In the same way as we change lenses for reading, driving or sewing, an individual may look at knowledge in different ways depending on context. The challenge is to integrate this vision to make connections between the different approaches and, through reflection, to make sense of the whole.

The **practitioner** gathers a body of knowledge through experience and practice. Their research is applied and often not shared or communicated to others. It may be

---

[1] http://www.missionmodelsmoney.org.uk/

structured research (audience surveys, box office data analysis, programme evaluation) but it serves a purpose internal to the organisation and is utilised in a business specific context. Action learning and reflective practice occur in unstructured as well as structured ways. This knowledge is not often validated and the practitioner will not always have confidence in its relevance to others.

The **academic** develops a body of knowledge through empirical research. This research leads to theoretical frameworks which are published and disseminated through academic channels. The research may have limited relevance to the real problems being faced on the ground and even when it is of relevance, both the discourse from which it has emerged and the contexts through which it is disseminated, may mean that it is not immediately accessible to the practitioner. And yet, it is this knowledge that is deemed to be valid within academic research systems and procedures.

The **learner** develops a body of knowledge through the integration of the two – a kind of varifocal lens. Learners on structured programmes of study will be encouraged to link the two processes and through applied learning and reflective practice develop a more holistic approach to theory and practice – the map and the territory.

These definitions are not mutually exclusive in terms of individual experience. Academics can be practitioners and practitioners can teach in academia – this is quite prevalent in our sector – and in informal, if not always formal ways, we are all learners as we seek to develop our work.

Theory does not replace practice or supercede it in validity but complements it. In learning and development then, the body of knowledge gathered through practice is as important as the body of knowledge gathered through theory. The most powerful learning occurs where knowledge of both the map and the actual territory can be cross referenced and tested for validity through reflection, where the map can inform our understanding of the territory and vice versa.

The challenge for leadership development provision is to move the relationships between the lenses to ensure that, whether it is sector or academic led, it balances the need for theory and practice. This paper helps the practitioner towards a varifocal lense in providing a background to leadership literature developed through academic research and supporting an enhanced understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. In this context, our purpose is not to explore what has been written about *cultural* leadership, but rather to introduce cultural sector practitioners to the concept of leadership and its development as presented in the generic, interdisciplinary literature.

In *Meeting the Challenge: Leadership development in the cultural and creative industries*, Devlin et al. argue that 'leadership development in the creative and cultural industries should be put in the context of its prioritisation across many other sectors – in the UK and elsewhere' (2008: 17). There is much to be learned from a cross sector approach.

Reviewing the literature

The quest to understand leadership, across various sectors and disciplines, has meant that the body of existing literature is vast. After decades of research a generally accepted, comprehensive theory of leadership appears to elude us. The issues are complex and as Bennis and Nanus (1997) state, '... leadership is the most studied and least understood concept of any in the social sciences'.

The paper therefore does not present definitive propositions or conclusions on leadership, but introduces the reader to various ideas on its theory and practice. Leading is a fundamental human activity so, predictably, there are many researchers and writers who have developed their own interests and areas of expertise within the field. The purpose of this short review of the literature is to guide the reader through the more significant trends in leadership research and writing, tracking the evolution of the discipline and providing a framework for understanding and contextualising our own leadership development. The review is by no means exhaustive, and uses only *selected* popular management and scholarly texts.

The dominant identified trends in the literature are as follows:

* distinguishing leadership from management: managing to *lead*
* trait theories and behaviours: focusing upon *leaders*
* conceptual models: constructing and defining *leadership*
* practicing leadership: considering the act of *leading*

It is important to note that trends in leadership writing and research have not necessarily occurred chronologically or been surpassed by another at any point in time in terms of their significance, the attention paid to them and their relative credibility. Rather, different theories and perspectives on the study of leadership occur in synthesis, illustrating the range and implied value of critical approaches in the field.

Distinguishing leadership from management: managing to *lead*

Locke (1991) describes leadership as '…the process of inducing others to take action towards a common goal'.

Leadership is therefore relational. It involves followers and the process is one where the leader does something that induces others to act. In this way, leadership has emerged as a practice distinct (although not necessarily mutually exclusive) from management. A now famous article by Abraham Zaleznik published in 1977 observed that the difference between managers and leaders lies in their conceptions of and response to 'chaos and order': managers, it is argued, embrace process, seek stability and control, and instinctively try to resolve problems quickly; whereas leaders tolerate chaos and lack of structure and are willing to delay problem-solving in order to understand the issues more fully.

Locke (1991) suggests that the leader establishes vision and strategy while the manager implements the vision and controls the means to reaching the goals set by the leader. Kotter (1990) observes that management is about coping with complexity

and leadership about coping with change, again by 'creating a vision' whereas managers will 'develop a plan'. The inference that effective leaders must be able to influence and guide using vision and direction, suggests that they posses more sophisticated personality characteristics. Adair (2003), for example, discusses leadership as an art form, as compared to the science of management, whereby leadership is associated with personality and vision, management with structure, routine and methods. Personal attributes associated with leadership, such as creativity, are the 'added value' that leadership brings to management (Adair, 2005: 62).

Thomas (2004) describes five distinctive leadership nuances supposedly 'not found in management', including the ability to:

- give direction
- provide inspiration
- build teams
- set an example
- be accepted

While the ability to give direction and build teams are arguably also management skills and responsibilities, providing an example of the symbiotic relationship between the practices of management and leadership, the remaining three nuances described by Thomas again relate to an individual's personality and their interpersonal relationships with others. Leigh and Maynard (2003) define two types of leadership: 'enabling' and 'inspirational'. The former is considered to be more of a management trait, and is associated with operational roles at junior and middle management level. Enabling leaders are thus described as supporters, facilitators and motivators. Alternatively inspirational leaders adopt behaviours that are less prescribed, such as likeability, integrity and initiative. This substantiates the emerging theory that the 'charisma' of individuals is therefore vital to their success as leaders.

Brown (2000) upholds the charisma theory by presenting six dynamics of leadership that explicitly characterise leaders and their behaviours, personalities, actions and performance, each implying a certain level of judgment on each. These include definitions of leader as:

- hero
- actor
- immortalist
- power broker
- ambassador
- victim

Cartwright (2002: 116) describes several, incremental, differences between managers and leaders, including suggestions that the leader *innovates* where the manager administers; the leader *originates* where the manager copies others; and the leader *challenges* where the manager accepts convention. The leader therefore, in this example, adopts higher levels of creativity and risk taking. Sloane (2007)

advocates innovation as the main distinction between managers and leaders, stressing that successful and competitive organisations are led by people who demonstrate and encourage a culture of creativity, enterprise, and risk taking.

Trait theory and behaviours: focusing upon *leaders*

The idea that leaders' personalities, behaviours and associated characteristics are significant and influential reflects a considerable body of work and research that explores a *trait theory* of leadership. The focus here is upon the leader as an individual, as a person, and as a performer of discernable acts, traits and behaviours. Popularised in the latter half of 20th century leadership research, the premise of trait theory is that those of *successful* leaders should be studied and emulated (Shriberg et al., 1997). Trait theory is believed to be founded on storytelling in leadership writing and research, as in telling the stories of great leaders and what made them great (Dym and Hutson, 2005). It has also encouraged and sustained a practice of diagnostic self and peer-evaluation, usually in the form of self-scoring questionnaires with pre-determined leadership attributes, amongst practising and emerging leaders seeking to define, develop and strengthen their core leadership traits and skills (Gordon, 2003).

Levine (2008) offers a concise analysis of trait theory, explaining that while, in its earliest form, it began to explain the 'complex set of individual characteristics that together form a leader', and was rooted in the idea that *great* leaders are 'born and not made', this notion is 'no longer uncritically accepted'. Trait theory itself has evolved to consider its relative limitations in trying to establish a causal link between an individual possessing particular personal traits and ascending to successful leadership positions. Reiterations of trait theory have sought to categorise the many identified traits of effective leaders into broad characteristics or 'factors' that can somehow predict and evaluate leadership ability. Levine concludes that trait theory alone is not enough to explain or validate successful leadership, but can perhaps be used as a credible 'precondition' based on the amount of research done in this area.

Critics of this approach note that trait theorists have failed to provide a definitive list of leadership traits that can be changed or acquired in the training and development of leaders. The approach has historical limitations in failing to acknowledge the situated act of leadership and situational effects upon leaders, who may have traits that enable them to lead in one situation but not in another. Critics also point to the highly subjective interpretation of the value of individual traits amongst different researchers and writers (Northouse, 2007).

Conceptual models: constructing and defining *leadership*

From the study of individuals and their leadership traits and behaviours, there has also been a body of work that considers collective, adoptive approaches and practices, described as *models* of leadership. The more prevalent models in the leadership literature broadly represent theories of traits and behaviours, contingency and transformation, and include (though are not limited to):

Situational (or 'contingency') leadership

Situational leadership occurs when different leadership styles are adopted depending upon a particular situation. Developed by Blanchard and Hersey (Blanchard et al., 2004), leadership style is characterised depending upon the amount of direction and support given by a leader to followers within a given situation based on 'supportive' and 'directive' behaviours (directing, coaching, supporting and delegating). Leadership styles are dependent upon the 'development level' of those being led; the chosen leadership style will directly correspond to the development level of the follower(s). Leadership as such is not only concerned with the individual characteristics of the leader, but with complex interactions between leader, followers, the situation or the historical moment in which they are operating (Maurik, 2001). Critics of the situational model assert that the relevant balance of concern for task and production with concern for people is now inappropriate when dealing with 'the realities of constant change' (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005).

Transactional leadership

Transactional leaders choose to motivate followers by inspiring a vision of what is to be accomplished, in an approach that is task oriented, and facilitated by the ability to solve problems, plan and organise and ultimately obtain results (Northouse, 2007). In a more systematic approach to leadership, the transactional model is perceived as having three dimensions: 'management-by-exception passive'; 'management-by-exception active'; 'contingent reward' (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005). Such definitions suggest a reactive needs-based approach to leadership. Maurik (2001) observes that many approaches to leadership have a transactional quality, in ultimately representing a transaction between leader and follower, but that essentially transactional cultures are hierarchical and characterised by high levels of command and control.

Organisational leadership

The organisational model is associated with collective team leadership and linked to innovation and ideas within an organisational context: perceiving leadership itself as a component in the organisational system (Blanchard, 2007). The starting point for this is that, for an individual to function as an organisational leader, there needs to be established perspective, trust and community in that organisation. By treating leadership in this manner, it is argued that greater acknowledgement can be made of the social context within which an organisation operates, and of the organisational objectives within that society. Designed to help develop a 'robust leadership strategy', the approach incorporates the following key themes: responses to external environment; mapping of the organisational context; identification of appropriate leadership culture; attaining leadership competence; managing leadership throughout the organisation (Northouse, 2007).

Emotional intelligence leadership model

Goleman (2003) asserts that a leader's success depends not on *what* they do but *how* they do it, which in turn depends on their ability to inspire and drive emotions. Goleman defines emotional intelligence leadership competencies as *self-awareness* (including emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence);

self-management (self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative, optimism); *social awareness* (empathy, organisational awareness, service); *relationship management* (inspiration, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management, teamwork and collaboration). Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) noted the growing significance of emotional intelligence when considering the future study of leadership, particularly with reference to the relationship between leadership and organisational behaviour. Accepted emotional and social relations of new paradigms of leadership include self-awareness; emotional resilience; intuitiveness and interpersonal sensitivity. Emotional maturity is also cited as a key competency within the trait theory debate, and is considered to be a key attribute of effective individual leadership (Maurik, 2001).

Transformational leadership

The transformational model is similar in approach to the organisational theory, but places a greater emotional emphasis on the individual to inspire organisational leadership. The transformational leader is an effective agent of change, who thinks beyond the conventional bounds of the immediate situation and identifies opportunities for growth and increased effectiveness (Maurik, 2001). Transformational leadership seeks to motivate others by appealing to higher ideals and moral values, with the relevant leaders being expected to create a sense of trust, incorporating long-term vision, empowerment and coaching. Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) describe the transformational model as the 'dominant approach to studying leadership'. Recent research conducted by key proponents and analysts of the transformational model (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005) reports a new paradigm in transformational leadership which challenges 'heroic' approaches to leadership and focuses on the development of the individual within an organisational context. Using a UK sample of NHS managers at all levels, the most important aspect of transformational leadership was revealed to be 'valuing others' (genuine concern for others' well-being and development). Integrity was also regarded as an important contextual leadership variable in accordance with the public sector service ethic.

Practising leadership: considering the act of *leading*

Whilst the leadership models outlined above have been positioned as the analysis and definition of accepted *norms* of leadership, researchers and writers are also interested in leading *in action.* This is the situated act of leading: what actually happens in the moment and what might have been more effective, rather than accepted and perhaps *chosen* models of collective leadership and *assumed* traits or behaviours.

Riggio and Conger (2007) note, in their edited collection of writing and research on different elements of leadership practice, that leading effectively is essentially complicated because of the frequent caveat 'it depends': good leadership involves doing the right thing in particular circumstances, accounting for the task, followers, situation, timing and process. This more detailed consideration of the practice of leading in action has evolved in tandem with a focus on leadership development and the practice of learning to lead. This again brings the practice of leading back to the

individual and their actions in becoming leaders, above and beyond personalities and behaviours.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, leadership development has become part of contemporary educational culture, symbolised by the plethora of graduate, undergraduate and professional courses and centres established for that purpose (Shriberg et al., 1997). Turnbull, James and Ladkin (2008) observe certain patterns in interventionist strategies in leadership development. These include the development of individual leader's characteristics and behaviours; the idea that leadership development can 'fix' existing deficits; and leadership as a contextualised activity.

Thomas (2004) states that existing organisational leaders have an obligation not just to continually develop themselves, but also to enable and support the development of emerging leaders via training, reading, analysing and following the example of 'good' leaders and by assessing, monitoring and improving their own performance.

Learning leadership therefore requires the freedom to practise leadership and critically reflect on our own representations of leadership and its emotional and cognitive complexity (Antonacopoulou and Bento, 2003). It is this notion of reflection on practice that must now inform the cultural and creative sectors as we move forward in developing our own theoretical frameworks of leadership that can build on the generic developments outlined above.

REFERENCES

Adair, J. 2003. *Effective Strategic Leadership*. London: Pan Books.
Adair, J. 2005. *The Inspirational Leader: How to Motivate, Encourage and Achieve Success.* London: Kogan Page.
Alimo-Metcalfe, B. and Alban-Metcalfe, J. 2005. "Leadership: Time for a new direction?" *Leadership*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 51-71.
Antonacopoulou, E.P. and Bento, R.F. 2003. "Methods of Learning Leadership: Taught and Experiential", in *Current Issues in Leadership and Management Development*, J. Storey, ed., Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 81-102.
Baudrillard, J. 1983. *Simulations.* MA: MIT Press.
Bennis, W. and Nanus, B. 1997. *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge.* 2nd ed. New York: HarperBusiness.
Blanchard, K. 2007. *Leading at a Higher Level: Blanchard on how to be a High Performing Leader.* Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
Blanchard, K., P. Zigarmi and D. Zigarmi. 2004. *Leadership and the One Minute Manager.* London: HarperCollins Publishers.
Brown, A. 2000. *The 6 Dimensions of Leadership.* London: Random House.
Cartwright, R. 2002. *Mastering Team Leadership*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
Devlin, G., H. Carty and N. Turner. 2008. *Meeting the Challenge: Leadership Development in the Cultural and Creative Industries.* Cultural Leadership Programme. Available from:
http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk/uploads/tx_rtgfiles/MeetingTheChallenge.pdf

Dulewicz, V. and Higgs, M. 2005. "Assessing leadership styles and organisational context." *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 105-123.

Dym, B. and Hutson, H. 2005. *Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Goleman, D. 2003.*The New Leaders: transforming the art of leadership in to the science of results.* London: Time Warner Paperbacks.

Gordon, J. ed. 2003. *The Pfeiffer Book of Successful Leadership Development Tools.* San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

Hoyle, S. 2008. Bookshop: Review of Thomas, MT. *Leadership in the Arts – An Inside View*. Authorhouse. *Arts Business,* Issue 176: August.

Kotter, J. P. 1990. *A Force for Change: How Leadership differs from Management*. New York: Free Press.

Leigh, A. and Maynard, M. 2003. *Perfect Leader.* London: Random House Business Books.

Levine, K.J. 2008. "Trait Theory," in *Leadership: The Key Concepts,* A. Marturano and J. Gosling, eds., Abingdon: Routledge, p.163-166.

Locke ,E.A. 1991. *The Essence of Leadership.* New York: Lexington Books.

Maurik, J.V. 2001. *Writers on Leadership*. London:Penguin Books.

Northouse, P.G. 2007. *Leadership: Theory and Practice.* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Riggio, R.E. and Conger, J.A. 2007. "Getting it Right: The Practice of Leadership," in *The Practice of Leadership: Developing the next generation of leaders,* J.A. Conger and R.E. Riggio, eds., San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shriberg, A., C. Lloyd, D.L. Shriberg and M.L. Williamson. 1997. *Practicing Leadership: Principles and Applications.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Sloane, P. 2007. *The Innovative Leader*. London: Kogan Page.

Thomas, N. 2004. ed. *The John Adair Handbook of Management and Leadership.* London: Thorogood.

Turnbull James, K. and Ladkin, D. 2008. "Meeting the Challenge of Leading in the 21st Century: Beyond the 'Deficit Model' of Leadership Development," in *Leadership Learning: Knowledge into Action*, K. Turnbull James and J. Collins, eds., Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 13-34.

Zaleznik, A. 1977. "Managers and Leaders: Are they different?" *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 55, p. 67 -78.