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The Open University

Developing leadership practice in voluntary organisations

About this free course

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Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University

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Introduction and guidance

1 Our leadership, this course

This is a course that seeks to develop your understanding of leadership and begins the task of helping you develop your leadership practice. The work is continued, with more of an emphasis on practice, in our other optional leadership course, [Collaborative leadership in voluntary organisations](#). Both of these courses are aimed at anyone working in or around voluntary organisations – people employed by them, people who volunteer for them and people who run them. Why such a broad base of people? Because it is our case that we can help build leadership, we can all invest leadership with meaning, as long as we learn to think differently and more ambitiously. We will make the case in these courses that leadership is something that many people can contribute to − that leadership should be thought of as a practice, as something we nurture, feed and critically reflect upon, rather than as some personality characteristics possessed by a particular person or collection of people. This course will help you feed and nurture a practice that can be shared between a number of people.

Week 1 introduces the concepts of leadership and management, and invites you to reflect on your existing knowledge of what these terms mean. You will also be offered a definition of leadership and be invited to judge it.

In Week 2 you will begin to explore leadership as person. This position holds that leadership is equated to the characteristics and behaviours of certain people. Rather than focus on individual leaders as role models for leadership, you will instead be urged to think of leaders *as symbolic resources* that can teach us a lot about what the sector does and does not value.

In Week 3 you will explore leadership as person in more depth. The focus will be upon the most influential of leadership perspectives, transformational leadership. You will explore some of the underlying problems with ceding too much authority to people in positions of leadership. Leadership as person will be turned on its head and you will reflect on what kind of symbolic leaders might be made to matter for the voluntary sector.

In Week 4 you will explore leadership as ethics. Our account of leadership as ethics explores the work a purpose can do within leadership and urges that such purposes become the sites of contest and healthy debate. This week also introduces the idea of the ethical dilemmas – how you work through them and after them in leadership.

In Week 5 you will explore leadership as practice. Focusing on practice draws your attention to the work of leadership, rather than the personality of leaders. You will focus on three dimensions of leadership practice – processes, spaces and technologies. You will explore how these dimensions can act as points for reflection but also brought together in interesting ways to generate new approaches to leadership practice.

2 Take control of your own development: join in with our development community

Throughout the course we will keep referring to 'development' rather than alternative terms such as 'teaching' or 'education'. You will spend some time learning about different approaches to leadership, particularly in this first course. However, the main focus of your work will be on developing yourself as a practitioner, as someone confident and capable of stepping into leadership work.

This does mean that you will need to take control of your own learning. You will be introduced to our thinking on leadership and provided with case examples along the way. You are expected to reflect on these in relation to your own working environment. More than this, you will be asked to try out certain ideas in your work context or to gather certain information along the way that will aid your development.

We have set up a discussion forum where you can discuss and debate the course content with your fellow learners and with us, your course authors. You will also see that you have a learning journal where you can record your own thoughts on your development in leadership. Key members of the OU's Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership will be able to see what you write and we may anonymise and draw on some of what you say for future research – we see this as a circular relationship where we develop one another's knowledge. The aim is to build a community of learning: we are all in this together.

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3 Your learning journal and discussion forum

You will notice that throughout this course we will point you to an online space where you can reflect on your learning, engage with the activities we set you here and talk with others pursuing the course. This space is comprised of two main areas.

The first is your learning journal . Only you and the course team (Owain and Carol) can see what you write here. The space is designed to enable you to reflect on your own development as you progress. Keeping a learning journal is good practice because it allows you to connect your learning to your work explicitly and also allows you to track progress over time.

The second area you will notice is a discussion forum. This is a space where you can debate and discuss ideas generated in the course with others. It is not solely a space for text and we will be asking you to post photographs in addition to writing. We encourage challenge and debate but please do maintain a civil tone and keep things focused on ideas rather than on personalities. The area will be facilitated and we do reserve the right to delete any contributions we think run counter to the spirit of generosity and robust challenge valued on the course.

Finally, we expect to be challenged ourselves, so if you find yourself taking issue with any aspect of the course or if there is something you think should be explored in more depth – please post something online or email us directly.

4 Who we are

Owain Smolović Jones is a lecturer in organisation studies at The Open University Business School's Department of Public Leadership and Social Enterprise. His main research focus is the political in leadership development and leadership. Prior to working for the OU he worked in leadership development facilitation and research at the New Zealand Leadership Institute (NZLI), University of Auckland. He secured his PhD at Cranfield University, basing his thesis on public sector leadership development programmes. Prior to earning his PhD he worked in professional politics – but that seems like a long time ago now …

Carol Jacklin-Jarvis is a lecturer in management at The Open University Business School's Department of Public Leadership and Social Enterprise and is currently (2019) the Director of the Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership. The focus of her research is collaboration between voluntary and public sectors and the practice of leadership in the collaboration context. Carol completed her PhD at The Open University after a career of over 25 years in voluntary and public sectors. At the weekend, she is often found volunteering in her local community, cooking and serving community breakfasts and dinners – and cleaning up afterwards!

Figure 1 Course leaders, Owain Smolović Jones and Carol Jacklin-Jarvis

Thursday 12 March 2020

Week 1: Thinking leadership

Introduction

Welcome to Week 1 of this five-week course.

This week reflects on different views of leadership, especially in relation to its frequent comparator: management. You will consider the difference between the two approaches, see how they work in practice, and consider why leadership is particularly relevant for the voluntary sector. As the week finishes, we will offer our own definition of leadership, one that will stake out our position and provide you with a way of interpreting our arguments as the course unfolds.

After completing this week we hope that you will be able to:

- differentiate between leadership and management
- offer an account of the appropriateness and strengths of both a management and a leadership approach
- notice examples of leadership and management in your own organisation
- offer a critique of others' definitions and accounts of leadership (starting with ours!)
- make a case for the significance of leadership for the voluntary sector.

1 Slippery leadership, significant leadership

It's a grey autumn day in an out-of-town, out-of-hope office block. It's time for you to attend the weekly staff meeting. Armed with your novelty tea mug and last traces of summer tan, you make your way to the meeting room. Every step along the nylon carpeted path, you sink a little lower. This is a familiar feeling – not one of dread, that would be to exaggerate. No, this is more a blurred and indistinct sadness, a muffled cry for help you know will be stifled as soon as you get down to the business of the day. There's nothing *essentially* wrong with these meetings. They come. They linger a bit too long but go away soon enough in the scheme of things. You like most of the people there: decent, honest people who seem committed to the cause, if somewhat marked by the organisation's inevitable traces of weariness. It's good to catch up and find out what people are up to. It's good to hear that you seem to be doing well enough as an organisation to survive another year or so, at least.

Something is missing though. You usually pay no attention to these feelings of uneasiness or unhappiness, or at least push them aside, allowing everyday work to take over. But today is different. Today you pay attention to how you feel at work, to how you respond to

the organisation's routines, its habits. As the meeting enters its second hour, you notice how frustrated you are beginning to feel with the seemingly pointless procedural pontifications. The occasional pitter-patter of drizzle on the windows seems symbolically apt: this meeting is so flat that nature itself can't even be bothered to give us some proper weather. You are suddenly angry with people's seemingly endless capacity for back-biting and back-covering. With the comfortable mediocrity of some of the contributions. With the flat fatalism. 'Such and such issue will never change. We've been trying for three millennia.' 'That X, Y or Z department or organisation, always stopping us doing good things.' 'What does this have to do with the organisation's mission and values?' This is not organisational failure, as much as organisational drift.

Figure 1 A typical meeting?

Out of nowhere you jump to your feet, the chair clattering to the floor behind you. This is it. The moment. You're going to appeal to people's sense of purpose, why some of them started this organisation in the first place. Stop moaning and start getting creative. 'Excuse me, sorry, that was a bit dramatic, I just really need the loo,' you say as you excuse yourself and leave the room. Not the time. Not ready yet. You feel like you have yet to make proper sense of your feelings and of what could be done better around the place. You know you would like a different approach to leadership but this concept seems imprecise. You need to reflect more, to talk more to colleagues and come back with some more developed thinking. You know the organisation needs more and better leadership, but what does leadership mean, in general as well as within the voluntary sector? Time for some answers, or if not answers at least some more refined questions!

Figure 2 There are many theories of leadership, management and related ideas

Most of us will be familiar with some of the above feelings that our organisations or teams could be achieving so much more given a more effective set of work practices, ideas or more inspired group of people. For many people, leadership seems to answer this call.

Pulling us in through our heartstrings, leadership is an alluring and emotive idea, something that seems to appeal to us beyond our more rational training in organisational

ideas and language. Leadership seduces with promises beyond the mundane, or even tangible. Perhaps leadership is as much a feeling as it is a concept: a feeling that a group with an important idea or purpose has momentum, is lifted beyond the ordinary limitations one finds in organisations and societies. Perhaps leadership is better spoken of in poetry rather than prose, as artwork rather than work of science.

It may not be possible to finally know or master leadership, but that does not mean that it is not worth the attempt. On the contrary. It is the project of *pursuing* leadership, not its final capture, that is of most value to voluntary organisations. There is a great energy and possibility invested by people in leadership that simply does not exist to the same extent within related but alternative organising concepts – management, strategy, influencing, networking, communicating, and so on. The boundaries and possibilities of leadership are slippery. They can also be vague at times. No sooner do you think you are close to understanding the secrets of leadership, than such answers slip away. You keep pursuing answers, however, because leadership is usually equated with something significant, something that addresses the core of what we think we are about as people and organisations. This core question of 'who are we?' is particularly relevant to voluntary organisations facing the challenges of contemporary society.

Now that you have started to think about the distinctiveness and value of leadership, you will move on to think about the difference between leadership and management.

2 Leadership and management: what's the difference?

First, try the following activity to reflect on your existing views on leadership and management.

Activity 1 Your views of leadership and management
Allow about 5 minutes

In the box below, write down some words that you would associate with (a) leadership and (b) management.

> Leadership:
> Management:

Comment

Did you find that you could make a clear distinction between leadership on the one hand and management on the other? Or did you find you wrote similar or overlapping terms? You may have found that the terms you used to describe management were more operational and those to describe leadership got more at the complexity and messiness of organisations and people.

Leadership is often characterised as contemporary, alluring and dynamic, as distinct from the predictability of management techniques. This is unfair, as management can often be innovative, whereas leadership can be a code word for the very old-fashioned idea of 'defer to the person in charge'. That said, it is our case that leadership does indeed offer something distinctive to management. If management seeks to make work more predictable and efficient, leadership disrupts, bringing out new issues and ideas.

This course's position on leadership and management

As a way of differentiating between management and leadership, this course adopts a similar position to that offered by leadership scholar Keith Grint (2005). Grint approaches management and leadership from the perspective of problems rather than the personal qualities of practitioners. He sees these concepts in terms of the issues and challenges faced by organisations, rather than the personal qualities of employees. This is an important shift in thinking because it suggests that a particular issue exists because people think and practise the issue into being, not because the issue *really exists like that* in the first place.

Here is an example. A new chief executive is appointed to a charity that is facing falling private donations and as a result it is becoming more reliant on alternative sources of income, specifically government grants and large sponsorship or partnership deals with businesses. So what is the problem here? A managerial way of thinking about the problem might focus on the processes and systems of fundraising: database management, methods of collecting money and marketing channels. A leadership approach might

ask some more fundamental questions about the meaning of the organisation – perhaps people are giving less because the organisation's purpose is not as important anymore?

For Grint, management 'tames' problems through applying technical thinking, making problems less intimidating, easier to think about and to tackle. It involves working with systems, policies, guidelines and rules to make life more manageable (for want of a better word).

Leadership, in contrast, makes problems more 'wicked'. It approaches a problem that may at first glance seem relatively straightforward but recast that problem as something much more fundamental. A problem with falling donations, for example, could be one indication amongst others, of an organisation that needs to rethink its purpose. Leadership tends to approach problems as if they are complex and difficult, requiring the sustained efforts of a diverse group of people. Leadership, then, can be thought of as a disruptive force within organisations, something that asks the awkward questions and leads others into fresh thinking that was previously off-limits. It is also something that confronts the status quo, seeking conflictual, if participative debate and discussion about what matters for organisations and the people they serve.

Please watch the following video, where Chair and founding Director of the OU's Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership, Professor Siv Vangen, discusses what leadership can offer voluntary organisations.

Video content is not available in this format.

Siv flags up in the video the proposition that leadership is best thought of as linked to major, wicked problems, and that voluntary organisations are accustomed to such problems. Key in facing such problems, Siv states, is approaching leadership as a practice that is shared between people in organisations and across organisations. Thinking of leadership in this way – rather than being all about the characteristics of individual leaders – is something that we will develop throughout the course.

In reality, organisations need a mix of leadership and management. They also need professionals, experts in their field, to execute strategy and to innovate. Finally, they all need good administrative systems that help, rather than hinder, progress. Having worked with the conceptualisation of leadership and management, the course now turns to consider how you might differentiate between the two in practice.

3 Leadership and management in practice

Management offers a complicated but also comforting language and set of techniques. A consequence of this is that when faced with problems, the default position of managers tends to be to try to 'tame' problems with management tools (Carroll and Levy, 2008). Leadership, on the other hand, can seem more mysterious and tougher.

Such associations with leadership fit nicely with findings of a research project that course author Owain is involved with (Carroll et al., 2012), which tries to understand the mindsets of people as they proceed through leadership development programmes designed to be critical and collaborative. As people engage with leadership in more critical ways, they have to contend with four types of mindset that feel, initially at least, unusual, or even foreign, to more regularised ways of thinking and working.

- **Partiality:** as leadership is concerned with exploring the unknown dimensions of problems, people become accustomed to working under conditions of uncertainty.
- **Dissipation:** as previously held assumptions are challenged by colleagues in leadership, people become better at working with knowledge that seems to move and become less clear at times, as participants explore its nuances and complexities.
- **Disruption:** good leadership does disrupt the everyday routines of people in their work. It is confrontational and conflictual in positive, generative ways – because conflict points at what matters to people and it stops complacent thinking and habits.
- **Sensation:** leadership involves a high degree of bodily and emotional awareness. It can feel awkward, thrilling, frustrating, maddening, dangerous, illicit, inspiring, and more. Leadership involves paying attention to how we feel as well as how we think.

Getting to leadership and staying with leadership can be hard work, but can also hold great promise: of more meaningful, participative, caring and energetic work around issues that matter. Having considered leadership in practice, you will now move on to consider the specific relevance of leadership for voluntary organisations.

4 Why is leadership relevant for the voluntary sector?

Leadership in the voluntary sector comes with its own specific challenges.

Figure 3 Facilitating discussion

Here are some reasons why leadership is particularly relevant for the voluntary sector:

- **Working together:** most voluntary organisations start as the result of a passion held by an individual or small group of people. If this passion starts to gather momentum and interest, small organisations can become victims of their own success. They grow: they accumulate funds, employees, volunteers and users. Problems become more difficult and people have to find new ways of working together.
- **Identity and ethics:** the issue of a distinctive identity for the voluntary sector and its organisations remains an important one. As organisations engage more in partnership working – with business and government – it is perhaps only natural that a certain amount of the initial purpose of the organisation, its reason for being, may become more opaque. Good leadership will help organisations stay in touch with – and adapt – their fundamental reasons for being.
- **Independence:** partnerships can also encourage dependency, particularly when partners bring crucial funding to the table. This raises the question as to how leadership maintains independence whilst building partnership.
- **Energetic campaigning:** a crucial aspect of many voluntary organisations is their campaigning work. Successful campaigns involve exciting one-off ideas but a fair amount of resilient team graft is also needed to sustain any campaign. Leadership helps keep people alert, fosters innovation but also keeps people going through the tough days as well as the good days.
- **Online dynamics:** the online revolution has transformed the way we live our lives and interact. Voluntary organisations are no different. Online platforms mean that leadership can spring up from unusual and unexpected sources. Team working often now also happens online, in discussion forums and via social media. It may also provide new opportunities for members, volunteers and other stakeholders to be involved in decision making, for example, the campaigning organisation 38 Degrees consults its members on what campaigns it should undertake.

Activity 2 How people in your organisation talk about leadership
Allow about 15 minutes

This week, spend some time paying attention to what people talk about and how people talk within your organisation. Write a concise account of your views and experiences in your learning journal using the following questions to help you:

• In your view, are people in your organisation mostly engaged in leadership, management or something else?

• What makes leadership work in your organisation?

• Did you identify any opportunities for leadership that were not taken?

Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 1 Activity 2.

Comment

What you may have noticed is that leadership is, in most cases, much less common than the commonness of the word itself might suggest. People may dream of leadership but more often practise management, administration and professional work. Hopefully you spotted some opportunities where leadership might have been employed more emphatically or explicitly. Finally, you may have started to think about how you could inject a little more leadership into your place of work.

As the course moves on, we think it is important to be up front with you about our own views and definition of leadership. The next section provides a definition of leadership and a supporting argument for the relevance of that definition.

5 A definition of leadership

Here is our working definition of leadership:

> Leadership is a collaborative, political and participative practice that provides direction, energy and critical engagement on issues that are made to matter.

This is a more radical way of approaching leadership with eight components:

1. Leadership is approached as a **practice** rather than a set of personality characteristics. People involved in leadership ask how they can improve the practice, not refine their personal competencies.
2. Leadership is **collaborative** because it seeks to bring diverse groups of people together.
3. Leadership is **political** because it works with people's values, beliefs and commitments.
4. Leadership is **participative** because it provides a (conflictual and confrontational) arena within which people debate and challenge one another.
5. Of course, leadership must provide **direction** to a group or organisation. Providing direction can sit in tension with democratic practice because they seem to prioritise different things. But it is precisely that tension between engagement but also moving forward in a purposeful way that is the source of much of the energy of leadership (Smolović Jones et al., 2016).
6. **Energy** is our sixth dimension of leadership: leadership should provide excitement and momentum, a sense that you are together addressing matters of significance.
7. Good leadership has to be **critical**. By critical we mean engaging with ideas and propositions with a curious and questioning mindset.
8. Finally, leadership is about **making issues matter**. Note the active sense of this last sentence – it is our case that issues do not pre-exist leadership: leadership makes issues matter because it brings certain things to prominence.

Activity 3 Definitions of leadership
Allow about 15 minutes

This week we provided our definition of leadership as: 'Leadership is a collaborative, political and participative practice that provides direction, energy and critical engagement on issues that are made to matter.' Now you will develop your own critique of this definition.

1. Go to the discussion forum, and post a brief critique of our definition of leadership. The following questions may help get you started:
   ○ Is our definition of leadership something you can sign up to or do you see some problems with our definition?
   ○ Have we undersold a particular dimension of leadership or over-stated something?
2. Post your own definition of leadership.
3. Comment on at least two other people's posts to keep the discussion flowing.

Thursday 12 March 2020

6 Key practice: observation

This week you were asked to pay attention to the interactions and dynamics within your organisation, and this kind of activity is called observation. Observation is a crucial but under-utilised organisational practice. Contrary to what you might think, observation does not mean that all opinions and commitments must be set to one side in order to be neutral. It is in fact impossible to be completely neutral in observation work. Rather, we should try to be aware of our own subjective biases and try our best to see the scene from a different perspective.

Figure 4 Looking through the sunset

Curiously, not many people in leadership take the time to observe the world around them. They are too busy getting caught up in the day-to-day busyness of work. That is a shame because we can carry around with us all kinds of assumptions that prove to be incorrect.

Observation does not mean that you try to remove all subjective feeling. On the contrary, you should pay close attention to how certain events, behaviours or interactions make you feel. Feelings are important clues as to what might be going well, or not, within an organisation.

Thursday 12 March 2020

7 Summary of Week 1

This week was dedicated to defining and exploring the value of leadership. You considered how leadership can be differentiated from management and we offered our own definition of leadership, which, as with everything in this course, is of course open to debate and challenge. You started to use the discussion forum and learning journal. If you are studying this course with others in a formal or informal group, you should also have begun to interact with one another, and begun to understand your different perspectives. Finally, the purpose of observation in leadership for your practice was underlined. Observation is a great overlooked dimension of leadership, usually because people think of it as quite a passive activity, but paying attention to the dynamics of organisation is crucial to understanding how to engage positively with others.

Next week, the course moves on to consider leadership as embodied in particular people: the most common way of approaching leadership and a perspective that holds significant pitfalls for organisations, as well as possibilities.

Week 2: Leadership as person: traits leadership

Introduction

During this week you will be introduced to the idea of leadership as embodied in the figure of the individual leader. This is the dominant approach to leadership in academic studies, despite the fact that such research is fraught with conceptual weaknesses. Traditional trait views of leadership are also problematic in the sense that they tend to promote a certain kind of leader, often masculine and white, over alternatives.

Despite its weaknesses, viewing leadership 'as a person' does involve a definite figure who you can identify, criticise or praise. As a result, this approach includes a certain amount of accountability which is missing in other accounts of leadership. With this in mind, we will encourage you to think about an ideal, albeit imaginary person evoked by your organisation and ask that you reflect on how (a) this person is brought to life through practices and processes and (b) how this image might be challenged, questioned and adapted.

After completing this week, you will be able to:

*   describe the basic features of the leadership traits perspective
*   describe the strengths and weaknesses of the traits perspective of leadership in relation to a specific case, that of Camila Batmanghelidjh and Kids Company
*   evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your organisation's leader preferences.

1 Leadership as traits

It is likely that you have worked with many leaders in voluntary organisations, many of whom may have built their organisations from the ground up. What is it specifically that mark these people out as leaders? Is it possible to come up with a set of leadership characteristics suitable for all voluntary organisations?

Activity 1 Leadership as traits
Allow about 10 minutes

In the box below, jot down some traits that you think are important for leaders in the voluntary sector to possess.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Did you include any of the following traits? Intelligence; alertness; insight; responsibility; initiative; persistence; self-confidence; masculinity; adjustment; dominance; extroversion; conservatism; achievement; cooperativeness; tolerance; influence; dominance; drive; motivation; integrity; cognitive ability; task knowledge.

Or how about: energy; height (tall); weight (not too much); hair (baldness is out for leaders, apparently); clothes (business formal, naturally); aggression (you're a winner!); enthusiasm (motivational speeches rule, OK); originality; sense of humour; sensitivity (presumably to compensate for the aggression); prestige; tact; judgment.

Finally, if these accounts do not satisfy you, how about: dedication; charisma; intelligence; love; championing behaviour; the ability to deploy convincing and persuasive argumentation?

Phew! Being a leader is truly a demanding task, it seems. The first group of traits just listed were compiled by Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014) from five major leadership studies dating between 1948 to 1991. The second group was compiled by Taylor (2015), based on trait theories of the 1980s.

Finally, the third group was compiled by the course authors having analysed a lot of the media coverage of Camila Batmanghelidjh and Kids Company. The case of Batmanghelidjh and Kids Company is an important one when considering leadership as embodied in a person (as it illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of this approach) and you will consider the case throughout this week and the next to help illustrate and reflect on the points made.

This opening exercise was almost a trick because everyone has their own definition of what makes a good leader, making the potential list in the comment section almost endless. In fact, if you ever meet someone possessing all of the traits listed, it is advised that you immediately contact the intelligence services and military, as it appears that an alien invasion is underway; surely no human could ever fulfil such demanding criteria.

Figure 1 Everyone has their own definition of what traits make a leader. Only an alien could embody all of these

However, the fact that people in the west tend to have a very clear view of what makes a good leader is telling. There is something particularly individualistic about western liberal-democratic cultures that seems to result in people developing a fascination with those who hold leadership ambition – in public life, sport and business. In many ways this interest is quite understandable. Sole individuals provide someone definite and knowable when it comes to making judgments about the merits of a particular organisation.

Now watch the following video, an interview with Christine Pearce, Chief Executive of the Milton Keynes Centre for Integrated Living. In the video Christine describes some of the problems organisations face if they rely too much on individual leaders.

Video content is not available in this format.

Christine is honest in the video about her big character, as well as her desire to be involved with lots of interesting projects. In fact, this drive to get involved with everything can be interpreted as a social pressure, particularly a pressure to control all processes and outcomes. Christine acknowledges that this is an unhelpful perspective and her solution is to involve people from the early stage of projects. There is a pragmatic dimension to this way of approaching leadership – people in formal leadership roles rarely have enough time. But there is something more important at play: Christine notes that it is in the organisation and users' interests for a diverse range of people to be involved in leadership, as they can bring a range of opinions and expertise to a problem.

The voluntary sector seems especially smitten with individual leaders. Terry et al. (2019) show just how prevalent the idea of the leader as person is in the narratives of policy documents and academic writing about the sector. There is a good reason for this, as it is often people with great belief, talent and drive who establish successful voluntary organisations in the first place.

Another reason why people are bewitched by leaders is that the alternative is a much more complex consideration of an organisation as a whole, a complex grid of interdependencies and inter-relationships spanning a range of organisational factors, as well as the economic, the political, the professional and the ethical. You will now move on to consider the notion of leadership as embodied in a leader in the case of Kids Company.

2 Camila Batmanghelidjh and Kids Company

Camila Batmanghelidjh is a driven person, driven by a sense of 'vocation', as she puts it. As *The Guardian* reported in 2013:

> As a child, Batmanghelidjh would sneak food out of her home in Tehran and leave it on poor people's doorsteps; aged nine, she announced she was going to found an orphanage; by 14, she had written the business plan for Kids Company. She was influenced by her grandfathers – one a paediatrician dedicated to healing the poor children in his neighbourhood; the other an entrepreneur who was a multimillionaire at 21. She remembers her grandfather and uncles sitting around the table at lunchtime, 'and they would say, "let's build the biggest ski resort in the world," and within a month they'd started. So I had this model of people who made decisions and started on them. There was no barrier.'

(Saner, 2013)

Figure 2 Camila Batmanghelidjh

This newspaper report, in common with many before and after the collapse of Kids Company, refers to Batmanghelidjh as possessing personality beyond what one would expect of a normal human being: 'To describe Batmanghelidjh as a force of nature seems a bit inadequate' (Saner, 2013). Batmanghelidjh is no charlatan – she is an expert in child development and psychotherapy, completing her masters in psychotherapy at Regent's

University. Prior to that she gained first class honours at the University of Warwick (Alexander and Batmanghelidjh, 2015).

Establishing Kids Company in 1996, Batmanghelidjh's mission was to offer familial assistance to poor and vulnerable inner city children and young people. The organisation offered a mix of orthodox and unorthodox approaches to support: counselling, friendship, some (tailored) financial support and even massage therapy. The charity's core offering was a drop-in centre model and by the time of its closure it had opened four such centres in London, worked out of other centres in Bristol and ran an arts programme in Liverpool. By 2013, the charity was spending £23m a year. Batmanghelidjh herself had raised £120m during her time in charge of Kids Company (*Camila's Kids Company*, 2016). The charity employed around 600 members of staff.

Figure 3 Camila's Kids Company

The charity closed in 2015 because it simply ran out of money. A final government grant of £3m, some of which was used to pay its staff for the month, was not matched by private donors, many of whom were anyway turned away because the charity's trustees had taken the decision to close (Cook, 2015).

A common theme of much of the analysis of Kids Company is that the charity is closely tied to the personality, strengths and weaknesses of its founder. Batmanghelidjh's charity enjoyed financial support from a number of celebrities and successful business people. Author and journalist Harriet Sargeant (2015), who featured an anonymised Kids Company in her 2012 book on gang life, reported the following encounter in a *Telegraph* newspaper article:

> At my first meeting at Kids Company, I watched [Batmanghelidjh] dazzle a group of businessmen with claims about the link between emotional development, brain size and violent behaviour. She talked passionately and with love, using not just the language of a mother – which has so charmed everyone from David Cameron to Coldplay – but a mother who had the backing of science for her method of loving.

…

In the middle of the meeting, she excused herself. One of her kids was having a crisis and needed to talk to her. The businessmen watched her leave admiringly.

One said, 'Imagine a kid like that interrupting us in the middle of a meeting!' They all shook their heads in envy. I marvelled at her cleverness.

(Sergeant, 2015)

Batmanghelidjh impressed successive governments (Labour and Conservative-led). An unnamed former government minister told the BBC that Batmanghelidjh had 'mesmerised' the Prime Minister, David Cameron (The Guardian, 2016). The National Audit Office (2015) found that throughout its life, Kids Company had received £46m of public funds.

Powerful and influential people were impressed by Batmanghelidjh's abilities, vision and personality. Media reports referred to her as 'captivating', 'charismatic', 'colourful', 'convincing', 'persuasive', 'dedicated', 'intelligent', 'passionate' and 'loving'. Ultimately, she manages to combine deep professional knowledge with forceful and persuasive personality attributes. You will return to Batmanghelidjh's leadership traits, and explore them in more depth, as the week continues. The course now moves on to consider the theoretical background of the traits perspective on leadership.

3 Leadership as traits theory: the basics

The traits approach to leadership is usually attributed to Thomas Carlyle's notion of the Great Man (sic) (see Grint, 2010; Spector, 2016). Carlyle (1795–1881) was of the 'born, not made' school of leadership. He believed that heroic leaders were a natural phenomenon but that simply being born with natural leadership talent was insufficient and that one also needed a certain drive to succeed, an ambition lacking by most 'men'. Taylor (2015, p. 29) distinguishes three defining features of the traits-based view of leadership:

1. Some people have them, some don't (in other words, observation of traits is used to distinguish people from each other).
2. They are a personal possession (in other words, they can't be given to you or taken away from you).
3. They are in place at birth (in other words, they're genetically determined).

This evolutionary and biological view holds that those who possess the correct traits will rise to the top due to their natural brilliance, so leadership will inevitably surface. However, one might ask an obvious question at this point: if leaders are naturally made, then why is there not a profusion of excellent leadership?

Before you embark further on the critique of trait-based models of leadership, let us first spend some time reflecting on whether traits do, after all, do have something to commend them. You will do so alongside a deeper consideration of Camila Batmanghelidjh.

There is no doubt that individual leaders can bring a sense of drive and passion to a cause. As hinted above, this is closely tied to the fact that founders of organisations (charities, in particular), often possess an extreme sense of vocation – they are certain of their cause and unbending in their dedication to it. Batmanghelidjh was said to work 11 hours each day, six days a week. She also lived in a fairly modest two-bedroom flat. Despite numerous suggestions that the charity should have spent its money more wisely, there was never any suggestion that Batmanghelidjh enriched herself materially – quite the opposite, in fact.

Most organisations would be very grateful indeed for a boss routinely described in the terms enjoyed by Batmanghelidjh. Such drive can help organisations become noticed and, vitally, can provide much of the initial energy required to start a successful voluntary initiative. You could also state that having such a visible leader fronting an organisation provides a degree of accountability. As the leader is so central to the organisation's identity, then it is to be expected that the leader will accrue significant credit when the organisation performs well and significant blame when the organisation performs badly.

Activity 2 Valued leadership in the voluntary sector
Allow about 20 minutes

In relation to the voluntary sector, is there a particular kind of leader who seems to be valued over other kinds of leaders? What do they look like and how do they behave? Are these leader characteristics a good thing, a bad thing or somewhere in between (and why)? Spend about 10 minutes jotting down your thoughts in your learning journal .

If you are studying this course in a group, then share your thoughts with the group and reflect together on the different insights of group members. Alternatively, arrange to

meet with a colleague or friend who knows the sector and ask them to share their views on these questions. In what ways are your perspectives similar or different?

After reflecting on the above questions, visit the discussion forum thread for this activity and spend 10 minutes posting your thoughts. Then respond to the thoughts of at least two of your fellow learners to keep the discussion flowing and develop the course learning community.

Comment

Identifying the kinds of people who are valued as leaders is a valuable method of critical self-reflection. One influential body of leadership theory, rooted in social psychology, maintains that organisations and sectors tend to choose leaders who are typical of the broader group (Hogg, 2001; Hogg and Terry, 2000). For example, if an organisation seems to value risk taking above all other things, then there is a good chance that it will select people deemed to be successful at taking risks as a leader. Our tendency to appoint leaders 'like us' means that groups tend to select people who they think best serve their interests, but one implication of this is that such groups can be less open to change.

Having considered the theory behind the leadership as traits perspective, you will now reflect on some of the critiques of this position. It is good to consider these criticisms as they both enable you to be a more critical thinker at work but they also set you up well to reflect on alternative approaches to leadership.

4 Leadership traits: the critique

Some problems associated with leadership trait theory are serious but perhaps also tolerable. Trait theory suffers from problems of accuracy and generalisability. Many traits are simply too context-specific and subjectively felt to be of more general applicability. Batmanghelidjh's particular combination of personality, behaviour and intellect apparently worked in a particular place and time for 19 years. But you would find yourself in a precarious position if you argued that her characteristics could be generalised as a rule of leadership.

It can be argued, quite convincingly, that viewing leadership as embodied in the traits of an individual is elitist. They inevitably set great value against the personal characteristics of people in senior positions and so do tend to marginalise everyone else. Followers are not entirely invisible but they are translucent, only relevant in as much as they hold opinions about the leader.

One could also state that trait theory is fatalistic, in as much as the underlying commitment is to the natural superiority of certain people: the best leaders ought to simply rise to the top of organisational hierarchies, in this case, as a matter of nature and biology.

Finally, leadership trait theory suffers problems of gender and racial bias and prejudice. Note here that not all people who buy into person-based leadership are sexists and racists. Rather, the perspectives themselves are problematic because they very often reflect the prejudices of a particular society at any one time.

There is by now well established research that demonstrates the cross-over between traits people commonly associated with 'leadership' and with 'men'. This is known as the 'think male – think manager' problem (Schein, 2006). Rosener (1995) highlights the problem well in her research when she demonstrates that words commonly linked with the concept of 'leader' (strong; rational; independent; linear thinking; aggressive; competitive) bear a close resemblance to words commonly associated with male (strong; in control/domineering; husband/father/brother; macho; power; rational).

We should be careful here, however, to not portray this as a sex-based argument, a male-female issue. Rather, it is better to refer to leadership as often evoking *masculine* connotations (i.e. not all men are particularly masculine, whereas some women are more masculine and macho than men), albeit that far more men than women appear to benefit materially from this masculine bias in leadership.

Watch the following video of OU academic Caroline Clarke, where she reflects on the problem of masculinity in leadership in more depth.

Video content is not available in this format.

Masculine behaviours, as Caroline states, can seem very normal to us, as they are engendered in people from an early age. Masculine behaviours, such as the need to control and hyper-competitiveness, can lead to unethical practices, as people compete to

outdo one another at work. It is worth recalling the statement from Christine Pearce in the previous video, where she stated that the desire to control everything as a leader is something that should be fought against, as it is hardly ever in the best interests of the organisation or the people who rely on the organisation. You can do something about overly masculine behaviours at work, as Caroline hints at in the clip. Organisations can choose what they reward and what they punish, so it is worth you thinking about the kinds of behaviours rewarded (or not) in your workplace.

Leadership, as well as being linked to masculinity, can also be fraught with race issues. The work of Ospina and Foldy (2009) and Ospina and Su (2009) has highlighted previous studies that demonstrate the tendency within the US and UK to view leadership as embodied in a white leader, with resulting issues for how people from racial and ethnic minorities are viewed and view themselves. Trait-based leadership tends to normalise a certain standard and set of behaviours so that it becomes difficult to see beyond these to new possibilities for leadership. In particular, the language of leadership in the UK has gathered momentum in the wake of a growing preference for individualism and competition over alternative values, such as community and collaboration (Ford, 2006).

Leadership can be co-opted by a growing individualising tendency in society, as a sort of currency of skills and achievements that sets people within and between organisations in competition against one another (Tomlinson et al., 2013). In other words, responsibility for organisations and communities becomes the responsibility of *individuals*, and their ability to self-master their potential (Clarke and Knights, 2015). *We* as individuals are the ones responsible for poverty, illness and poor education, rather than larger political and economic forces. The solution is always to conduct more work on the self, rather than to question and challenge how things are seen and done in the first place. The drive is to individualise problems rather than to approach them systemically and collectively.

When things go wrong with leadership, the temptation is always to fixate on the traits of the individual leader. Doing so can be far more straightforward than asking more difficult questions of the organisation or even our systems of thought that seem to place so much faith in individual leaders. In fact it is a major failing of the traits perspective that one of its results can be too much trust in individual leaders to make everything right in the world – in other words, people stop asking tough questions of organisations and themselves, as will become apparent in the next section.

5 Leadership traits and Camila: a critique

Some of these issues with leadership were certainly highlighted by Camila Batmanghelidjh during the 2015 problems with Kids Company. In a revealing and compelling BBC documentary, directed and produced by Lynn Alleway (*Camila's Kids Company,* 2016), Batmanghelidjh casts her problems as partially concerned with racist and sexist sentiment. 'I'm going to be entirely Persian about it [attempts to remove her as the Kids Company chief executive]. I'm going to smile and accept my place as a woman on the sides, not knowing how to run a business', Batmanghelidjh says mischievously towards the beginning of the troubles.

Figure 4 Weighing the gender balance

Indeed, to the casual British viewer Batmanghelidjh might well cast something of a counter-cultural leader-figure. For one, she is open in displaying her affection to staff and clients. She expresses her 'love' of certain clients and in fact love was taken as being a core value of Kids Company. As Batmanghelidjh explained to *Glamour* magazine in 2015, when recruiting staff, she:

> [looks] for a capacity to love. I'm interested in their relationships with their parents, their loved ones, their friends. I also look for a quirky talent or gift – one of my best hires used to be the number one rollerblader in Italy. I look at individual presence and their humanity. I'm not interested in skills – you can teach those. In key workers, I'm interested in people with an ability to love.

> (Alexander, 2015)

In the Alleway documentary she openly expresses her love for her staff, greeting them with refrains of 'lovelies' and 'darlings'.

The inferences of the documentary and Batmanghelidjh are clear. Precisely the traits attributed to her in positive terms when people were keen to celebrate her organisation's successes were now portrayed as negative characteristics in times of failure.

Does Batmanghelidjh's view that she is a victim of sexism hold weight against evidence within the sector? The 2016 National Council for Voluntary Organisations *UK Civil Society Almanac* (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2016) demonstrates that there

continue to be more women employed in the voluntary sector than men (66 per cent against 34 per cent) but does not offer a view of how many women occupy senior roles compared to men. Evidence from 2012 indicated that women occupied 46 per cent of chief executive roles in voluntary organisations overall, whereas 'just 27% of chief executives of [major] charities with an annual turnover of £10m plus [were] women, and in the top 100 charities by income there [were] just 26 women chief executives in post' (Lewis, 2012, p. 4).

Comparatively, the voluntary sector tends to come close to the public sector in terms of gender balance but remains far ahead of the private sector: the sector certainly suffers from some problems of gender inequality but these seem less pronounced than other sectors. That said, problems clearly do exist in the sector. We might note that counting the numbers of women in senior positions is only one indicator of sexism and that it is harder to account for women's experiences of more everyday, casual sexism. Sexism remains a big problem for UK society as a whole and it should therefore not be a surprise that women in the sector face discrimination, as do women in all sectors of UK public and private life.

6 Thinking critically about your work

Do these significant problems with person-based views of leadership mean that thinking of leadership in person-related terms should be abandoned entirely? The course authors do think there is some value in thinking of leaders in symbolic terms and you will spend the rest of this week thinking in just these terms. Leaders can act as symbolic resources that allow you to critically analyse and think about the organisations in which you work. In other words, thinking critically about your leaders is one effective way of thinking critically about your organisation's practices.

Every organisation is distinctive in its own way – its practices, ways of talking, habits and routines. This collection of practices adds up to a picture of what an organisation seems to value and what it does not value. The argument made earlier is that people who personify these values and practices often end up in positions of leadership. When people in leadership positions do not embody dominant organisational characteristics, conflict and/ or significant uncertainty often ensues. These periods can ultimately, of course, be productive and necessary for organisations, as they adjust to new ways of working and thinking. Sometimes it can be impossible to see outside the dominant frames of thinking and speaking and outsiders are needed to shake things up.

Activity 3 Stories of leadership
Allow about 20 minutes

Pay attention to the kinds of stories people tell in your organisation about its leaders, past and present. The following questions may help as prompts when you write your thoughts up in your learning journal :

1. What type of leader does your organisation seem to favour?
2. What kind of people tend *not* to be favoured?
3. What kinds of behaviours and characteristics tend to be accentuated in these stories?
4. Are these people current leaders or leaders from the past?

Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 2 Activity 3.

Comment

The activity asked you to engage with leaders as symbols of organisational practice. You were also asked to think carefully about the kinds of people your organisation tends to portray in a negative light.

This activity should have helped you think more critically about the organisation in which you work. Prioritising certain types of behaviour and people (for example, very caring people who like to spend significant amounts of time talking to others about their feelings and opinions) means that you diminish the value of other kinds of behaviour and people (for example, more distant and coldly analytical people).

Interestingly, the people organisations tend to vilify can be equally informative. This is because every identity is as much composed by *what it is not* as by what it is. *We need negativity in order to establish our identities*. You can only know someone to be accessible, for example, because you know what inaccessible people are like to work with. The negative is therefore as much a part of us as the positive. You will now

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conclude the week by considering the key practice of critical engagement, which has been a recurring theme throughout.

7 Key practice: critical engagement

This week you have been engaging critically with leadership theory and with a case from the voluntary sector. Critical engagement is perhaps *the* important practice within leadership and it is something that we urge you to continue.

Figure 5 Thinking and speaking critically

Danger for organisations emerges when people are unable to speak out in critical ways, because it may be held against them. Leadership scholar David Collinson (2012) has referred to this phenomenon as 'prozac leadership' (Prozac is a type of anti-depressant medication). Overly positive thinking in leadership practice leads to a synthetic high, a false positivity that passes over real problems that really ought to be addressed through good, critical leadership and followership. In fact, most of us will have worked in organisations where really bad ideas come to fruition simply because people were too cautious to speak up.

A useful example of the 'positivity' of leadership contributing to disastrous consequences is provided by Smolović Jones et al. (2019) in their analysis of the language of the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in the build up to the military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s. The authors show how Blair's use of the word 'leadership' is positioned in a wholly positive way where any dissent or contrary opinions are cast in negative terms and are not regarded as 'leadership'. In turn, the category of leadership is reserved for 'decisive' and 'strong' acts from an individual (Blair, the then US President George Bush and other supportive figures) and within the logic of the language deployed, war seems like the only moral and, perversely, 'democratic', solution. Overly positive use of the language of leadership can therefore lead to restricted options and potentially catastrophic consequences.

Critical thinking does not need to be purely negative, although sometimes engaging in purely negative thinking can be useful – sometimes ideas just need to be very carefully analysed and thought through. This is really about constructive critique.

Critical engagement means that we are participants, full members of our organisations. We have skin in the game. This means that we can think critically but with a purpose – the purpose being to make leadership in our organisations better.

8 Summary of Week 2

This week you focused on the leadership as a person perspective, which is still the dominant way of approaching leadership in academic and popular culture. Specifically, you examined the leadership traits perspective. We offered a critique of this position as elitist and riddled with problems of reliability, generalisability and, most importantly, of prejudice. That said, we also introduced the idea of leaders as symbols of organisations and sectors: the notion that through thinking about, analysing and questioning who people choose (or reject) as leaders, you can more powerfully question your own practices and preferences. Finally, we underlined the key practice of critical engagement as something that should be threaded through all leadership practice. Next week, we move on to consider the most influential of leadership theories, that of transformational leadership, and consider some of the important power issues and their implications for the sector.

http://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/chinese/beginners-chinese/content-section-0?utm_source=openlearnutm_campaign=olutm_medium=ebook

Week 3: Transformational leadership and power

Introduction

This week you will analyse the most influential of contemporary leadership theories: transformational leadership. This is a very important account of leadership, one that has influenced organisations across sectors. Nevertheless, it is also a perspective on leadership which is fraught with problems. The focus this week will be on how to arm people and organisations against the creep of narcissistic, individual-focused versions of leadership. The week ends with a reflective exercise that seeks to reconfigure the 'leadership as person' perspective.

After completing this week, you will be able to:

- describe the main features, parameters, advantages and disadvantages of transformational leadership theory
- describe some of the main features of the 'sacred order' of leadership
- describe the main parameters of narcissism in leadership
- analyse instances of narcissism, synthesising insights concerning narcissism and leadership in relation to your experience of working within the voluntary sector
- construct alternative ideal leaders for the voluntary sector from the basis of critical engagement.

1 Transformational leadership: origins and main features

James MacGregor Burns coined the phrase 'transformational leadership' in his seminal (1978) book, simply titled *Leadership*. He differentiated between transactional leadership, which he saw as leadership focused on self-interest and exchange, and transformational leadership, which dealt with people's ethics and beliefs. Burns saw transformational leadership as an interplay, with leaders and followers engaged in leading one another to higher levels of ambition and moral development. If you have ever worked in an organisation where such leadership happens, you will know that these are energetic places, where colleagues challenge and support one another in equal measure and where there is a tremendous commitment to the goals and values of the organisation (rather than the leader).

Figure 1 Transformational leadership

The central core of transformational leadership was subsequently picked up and adapted by business school scholars from the United States. Starting in 1985 and continuing over several years, Bernard Bass and colleagues reworked transformational leadership so that, in the course authors' view, it became yet another traits and behavioural model of leadership. Bass and colleagues' version of the theory suggests that individual leaders could be regarded as on a continuum of the transformational to the transactional. They proposed that transformational leaders do certain things, namely: offer *intellectual stimulation* to followers; tailor their approach according to the feelings and preferences of particular followers (*individualised consideration*); offer *inspirational motivation* with their words and deeds; and, act as a role model for followers, known as *idealised influence*.

Worryingly, Burns' earlier emphasis on ethics was omitted (see Delaney and Spoelstra, 2015). In its place was an emphasis on a weak form of charisma. Leaders were supposed to work on the emotions and desires of followers, not just their material needs. Transformational leaders were to be the masters of their followers' feelings. We now move on to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of transformational leadership in relation to Kids Company.

1.1 Camila Batmanghelidjh and transformational leadership

Batmanghelidjh did display a kind of leadership that stretched above and beyond the transactional and rational within Kids Company. She said to BBC filmmaker Lynn Alleway in a 2016 *Panorama* documentary, 'Realism never got anyone anywhere, Lynn. Aspiration and imagination got people to transcend barriers. To the last minute I have got to hold on to aspiration and imagine a better situation and bring it about' (*Camila's Kids Company*, 2016). The language here is evocative of breaking conventional barriers – indeed of *transforming* how such an organisation should operate, as well as the lives of the children it serves.

Figure 2 Transformation from caterpillar to butterfly

The aspiration and imagination of Kids Company came packaged in a personalised approach to staff and clients. In Alleway's film, staff were routinely greeted in affectionate terms ('I love our staff very much'; 'lovelies'; 'darlings'; 'You're amazing'). It was clear that the staff (and clients) enjoyed significant intellectual stimulation. Batmanghelidjh was experimenting with and implementing a fresh and challenging approach to child protection and development. Batmanghelidjh was certainly a role model for her staff. Her long hours of work, optimism, faith in the organisational mission and care for her clients was palpable. Likewise, transformational leadership suggests that leading an organisation is not something that can be bracketed off as but one aspect of a leader's life because it relates to people's feeling and beliefs – transformational leadership requires the whole person to be present at all times.

This was a woman who exemplified the Kids Company ethos until the very end. In a striking monologue towards the end of the life of Kids Company, in response to a question from Alleway about whether she was to blame for any of the problems, Batmanghelidjh said:

> Are you doing it to me as well? What would you like me to say, Lynn? I am so sorry. But what am I sorry for? I am not sorry I gave the kids money. I am not sorry I bought the kids nice things. I am not sorry I fought for them. I am not sorry. The only thing I am sorry about is I didn't raise enough money. What would you like me to be sorry about, Lynn?

> (*Camila's Kids Company*, 2016).

Here we get a sense of the passionate Camila, of the 'inspirational motivation', to borrow a phrase from transformational leadership. She certainly inspired those who worked for her and her clients. During the BBC film, her staff are proactive in complimenting Batmanghelidjh and her approach to the camera. The documentary also shows an emotional address by Batmanghelidjh to staff, some tearful, as she is cheered on in the face of some clear organisational problems. Many of Batmanghelidjh's clients clearly

valued her a great deal. When Kids Company did close, emotional protestors gathered outside the charity's headquarters, calling out Batmanghelidjh's name repeatedly, through tears: 'Camila, Camila, Camila, Camila.' This was a scene of genuine mourning for a leader they came to think of in deeply personal ways, as the dimension in transformational leadership of individualised consideration demands.

Camila Batmanghelidjh, in short, appears to be an exemplar of transformational leadership – both in its original and its later forms. She certainly led others to up their aspirations as far as children's welfare was concerned but her brand of transformational leadership also makes apparent some of the underlying problems of Kids Company – specifically, perhaps, its over-reliance on a single leader's vision. The course therefore now moves on to consider some of the benefits and problems with transformational leadership in more depth.

1.2 Benefits and problems with transformational leadership

You will now consider the benefits and problems with transformational leadership using the Kids Company example.

Activity 1 Benefits of transformational leadership
Allow about 5 minutes

There are some apparent benefits to transformational leadership. Do you have any ideas about what some of these might be? Jot down your ideas using the Kids Company example to back them up.

> *Provide your answer...*

Comment
Transformational leadership, in looking beyond the transactional, does *aspire* to deliver a more personal and ethical working environment. Nobody really wants to work in a very impersonal organisation that is solely task-focused. This would be the perfect transactional organisation. Organisations where people connect and respond to one another's values feel like positive and energising places to work. Ethics cannot be captured in transactions but require something above and beyond these.

Activity 2 Problems with transformational leadership
Allow about 5 minutes

Write down some suggested potential problems with transformational leadership, again using the Kids Company example to help you.

> *Provide your answer...*

> Comment
>
> All of the main problems associated with transformational leadership concern the amount of power it grants and attributes to individual leaders. For example, in the case of Kids Company, the organisation simply was not sustainable because it was so closely tied to the personality of Batmanghelidjh. We will now move on to unpack some of these problems

Transformational leadership seeks a kind of holistic satisfaction of followers' needs beyond the material (Delaney and Spoelstra, 2015). It aims to address the emotions and values of employees. In so doing it also manoeuvres itself into a realm of the employee's life and world previously regarded as private and beyond the rights of organisations to touch (Tourish, 2013). The worker must now commit emotionally – even spiritually – to the job and the leader. In Week 2 you saw with Kids Company that the barrier between private life and work was blurred. In fact, investing emotionally in the client as family member was a cornerstone of the Kids Company ethos. Such workplaces can feel welcoming and homely but can also, if they go too far, intrude into private lives.

In its handling of charisma, transformational leadership credits leaders with great power and encourages followers to sacrifice their own discretion in favour of the leader's powers of example setting and inspirational motivation. Transformational leadership suggests that charisma is something that can be possessed. An alternative view sees charisma as something that is negotiated between people – leaders and followers. What counts as charismatic in one context will not in another: would Batmanghelidjh have been regarded as charismatic in a staid law firm, for example?

There is therefore a danger with transformational leadership that it transfers too much deference and power into the hands of single leaders and you will consider these issues in the next section.

2 Sacred leadership?

The core problem with leader-centred perspectives on leadership is that they feed an existing tendency within people and societies to defer to authority. People's attitudes to leadership seem to suggest that they prefer to detach themselves from responsibility for consequences, in organisations and in social life. Grint (2010) has made the case that leadership is approached by people as a sacred object: something most people think is beyond them. For Grint, sacredness is manifested through *silence*, which is valued by leaders because they hear less dissent concerning their ideas and approach to leading.

The other manifestation is *sacrifice*, which is a twofold phenomenon. Followers sacrifice involvement and voice in leadership. But on the other hand, such a sacrifice allows followers to abdicate themselves of responsibility when things go wrong: instead, they sacrifice the leader. Scapegoating leaders is a common practice in contemporary society.

Figure 3 In transformational leadership it is common for followers to scapegoat the leader

when things go wrong

A good example of scapegoating can be found in the Batmanghelidjh case. Celebrated as a heroic leader in the 'good times', one could argue that Batmanghelidjh was equally vilified in the 'bad times'. 'They made me the Angel of Peckham and now they're going to make me the Demon of Peckham', Batmanghelidjh told BBC documentary maker Lynn Alleway (*Camila's Kids Company*, 2016). What had changed appeared to be the attitude of her followers in the media, but her trustees and the politicians were also less willing to trust her.

A sacred attitude to leadership can also permeate societies more generally. We can return to the example of Tony Blair in relation to his use of the word 'leadership' to justify major military solutions to terrorist attacks (Smolović Jones et al., 2019) to illustrate this point. In retrospect it does not seem credible to suggest that there were no alternatives to the Iraq or Afghanistan military interventions, but leaders – particularly in times of perceived crisis – seem to gain extraordinary traction, permission and encouragement from people when they say that a country (or organisation) needs 'strong' or 'decisive' leadership. But does the responsibility for the concentration of power in the hands of individual leaders reside solely with the leaders themselves or should everybody take a little more responsibility to engage critically with calls for 'leadership' from individual leaders?

Activity 3 Removing leaders?
Allow about 5 minutes

Would removing Batmanghelidjh from Kids Company have solved the problem? Take a few minutes to think about this question.

> *Provide your answer...*

Comment

The trickiness of this question lies in the word 'problem', which remains contested. 'What was the problem?' might be a more appropriate question to ask under such circumstances.

The issue of child poverty in London and other inner cities is a hot and contested one, where people cannot even agree on the definition of the particular issues to be solved. If you thought that the problem was a lack of family support for these children, you could argue that removing Batmanghelidjh may have harmed the prospects of at least some of Kids Company's clients. But if you believed that the main issue was the amount of money available to tackle the problem and the allocation of this money, then you might argue that taking money away from Kids Company and dispersing it more widely amongst local government and other children's organisations would be helpful in the longer-term.

However, you could also take a step back yet further and claim that the problem was our very preoccupation with individual leaders. In this sense, a sensible step might have been to have pursued a less individual-dominated Kids Company, with an alternative figure, or figures, in charge. Having considered transformational leadership, the course now moves on to consider some of the ways in which you can avoid some of the problems that have been surfaced.

2.1 Keeping your organisation real

Voluntary organisations often spring up and experience much success because of the brilliance, vision, drive and energy of particular individuals. We should not underestimate the power of such people to get things moving, particularly early on in an organisation's life. That said, the problems we have highlighted with person-based leadership and transformational leadership should indicate that there are things we can do in order to ensure that this kind of leadership does not get out of hand. In particular, as organisations develop and grow, the person-based view of leadership becomes increasingly difficult to sustain or justify.

It is worth thinking about some practices that might encourage more critical engagement, rather than silence and sacrifice.

Activity 4 Speaking up in your organisation
Allow about 15 minutes

Can you think of any techniques or ideas within your workplace that would encourage people to speak up in contravention to the official organisational line? An example might be encouraging people to question a boss' idea or speaking up in a meeting in a critical way. What might some of the benefits and risks be of such an approach? Make brief notes about this in your learning journal .

Comment

Speaking up in organisations can be intimidating, especially when it means disagreeing with powerful people. Powerful people often do not like to be contradicted. Of course, not all people in charge are like this – most are not, in all likelihood. That said, there could be some unique ways in which you could develop more of a culture of constructive criticism within your organisation. Such practices will surely appear differently depending on the context, as each organisation possesses varying degrees of formality and deference to authority. For some organisations, this might involve a quiet word with the boss in private, for others a culture of critique in meetings.

However, despite people's best efforts, critical engagement with person-centred leadership can be ineffective. This can occur if the leader of the organisation has narcissistic tendencies. In the next section you will look at narcissism, and consider its significance in person-based leadership. You will once again examine this in the context of Kids Company.

Week 3: Transformational leadership and power
3 Narcissism: the root of the leader-centred problem?

The Open University

3 Narcissism: the root of the leader-centred problem?

Narcissism is a word and concept gleaned from psychoanalysis that is important for understanding and working with organisational leadership. In a nutshell, narcissism stands for extreme self-love. All people are narcissistic to a certain extent but most manage a balance between directing affections and drives out towards others and inwards. When the balance tips too far towards self-love, narcissism can create significant problems for organisations.

Narcissism is a seductive but ultimately corrosive phenomenon that can breed a toxic environment within organisations. Organisations can become more focused on the ideas, feelings and whims of its narcissistic leader(s) than on what is really in that organisation's best interests. Differences between the organisation and the personality of its leader start to dissolve and it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish one from the other.

Watch the following video, where OU academic Caroline Clarke addresses the issue of narcissism in relation to leadership.

Video content is not available in this format.

Caroline makes the point that leadership is often connected to notions of the heroic, which is something that is re-enforced through popular culture and fiction. Some people desperately want to be the hero – and we could say that this kind of desire is linked to narcissistic tendencies. Equally, many people want to be 'saved' by leaders because being saved means that they can take less responsibility for an organisation's problems. Narcissism, as Caroline states, can become hugely problematic for organisations, leading to coercive behaviours and bullying. Most importantly, however, narcissism diverts attention away from the needs of an organisation, instead resulting in attention being paid to the egos of leaders.

But how does narcissism begin to take hold in an organisation? Narcissists can appear bewitching to followers, who are moved by the leader's self-confidence and inspirational message. Narcissistic leaders appeal as figures of freedom, dancing their way through life and work without the same worries or burdens as others (Stavrakakis, 2008). There is also a practical dimension to the rise and survival of narcissists. While people may be attracted to narcissists partly because they are somewhat narcissistic themselves, humans are also fragile and insecure, naturally worried for their jobs. It may seem like too much of a risk to cross the narcissistic boss.

When an organisation is really caught in the grip of a narcissistic leader, budgets may run out of control, and vanity projects may be funded. Allies of the narcissist may be rewarded at the expense of other, more deserving people. People can be psychically harmed, marginalised and bullied if they do not comply with the leader's wishes. This happens

because narcissists primarily care about their own egos and so all other considerations become secondary.

Did Kids Company fall victim to narcissistic practice? Certainly, aspects of its work did seem to creep fairly close to what could be deemed self-centred leadership. Indeed, in the Alleway BBC documentary (*Camila's Kids Company*, 2016), Camila Batmanghelidjh's personality is portrayed as inseparable from that of the ethos of Kids Company. She refers to '*my* extraordinary children' (emphasis added), for example, in relation to clients. Kids Company's problems were certainly framed by Batmanghelidjh in very personal terms. Negative publicity and moves against the organisation were referred to as 'revenge', as she was 'supposed to be killed off'. When discussing the installation of a new chief operating officer, Batmanghelidjh's response is to interpret this as an 'amazing' 'disrespect' to her. When asked about her removal being part of the agreement to maintain government funding for the organisation, Batmanghelidjh comments that she plans on 'Tipp-exing' (editing out) that part of the agreement.

The next section looks at how to survive working in an organisation run by a narcissistic leader.

3.1 Surviving narcissism

Gabriel (1999, pp. 145–6) proposes four indicators that can help us spot narcissists at work and we commend them to you as a useful way of identifying trouble ahead.

1. **Real work vs impression management**. Narcissistic leaders are more concerned with 'creating the right appearances', using the 'right words'. We know we are working for a narcissist when 'we commit an inordinate amount of time to sustaining the leader's image of how the organisation should be working as opposed to actually working'.

2. **What types of activity are rewarded?** If people and projects are rewarded on the basis of good evidence and merit, we are in a healthy organisation. If projects and people are rewarded according to 'personal ties', we are working under narcissism.

3. **Who protects whom?** We usually think of leadership in terms of the leader protecting followers, allowing them space to grow and take some risks, within certain boundaries. Narcissists, however, usually look for scapegoats amongst followers when things go wrong. They rarely accept responsibility for failure, preferring to apportion blame elsewhere. Yet such leaders are often quick to claim credit for others' work, as they feel a constant sense of threat from talented subordinates.

4. **Group connection**. Simply stated, if the work group is connected by virtue of organisational aims and an organisational mission, this seems healthy. If a group is connected due to affection or loyalty to a leader, then this is likely a narcissistic trap. Such groups can be united because all subordinates have one thing in common: they all love the leader but do not fully possess the leader's affections (Cluley, 2006).

Finally, we also need to consider what we regard as the irony of narcissism: narcissists tend to favour authoritarian leadership but struggle to cope when they find their own narcissism compromised by another powerful leader (Gabriel, 1999). This is a contra-diction but a fascinating one. Its implications should be directed back towards ourselves. If you ever find yourself yearning for some decisive, strong leadership, it might be worth considering that this is your own narcissism speaking. Such narcissism can distract us from the hard questions.
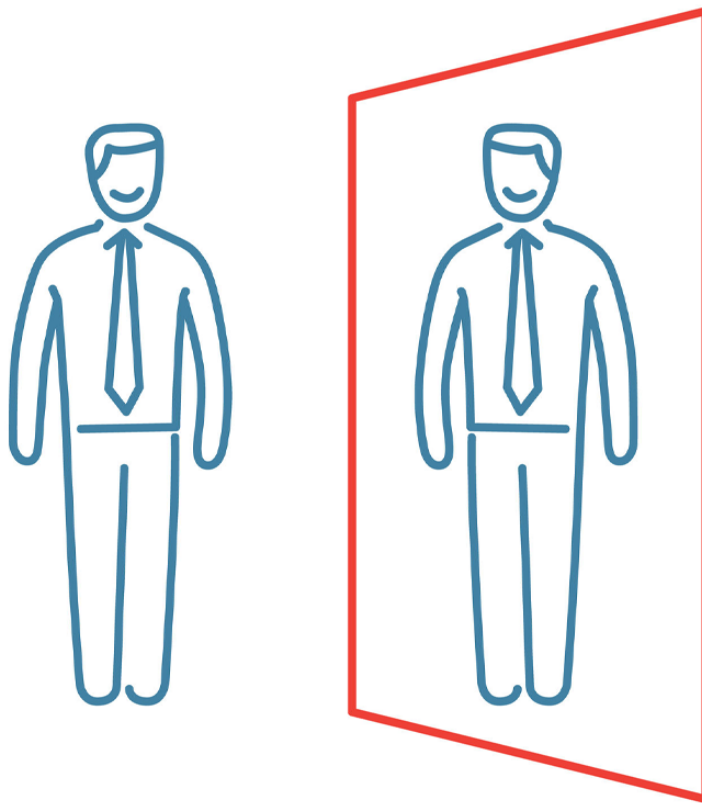
Figure 4 A reflection of myself

Now that you have considered some of the characteristics of narcissistic leaders and some basic indicators of narcissism at work, you will next consider the issue of narcissism in relation to your own experiences.

Activity 5 Living with narcissistic leaders
Allow about 10 minutes

Have you ever worked for or with someone you would characterise as narcissistic? Without naming names, what were some of the things this person did and said that led you to the belief that they were/are narcissistic? What kind of strategies did you adopt to deal with their behaviour?

Make brief notes in response to these questions in your learning journal . Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 3 Activity 5.

Comment

Here are three basic strategies for dealing with narcissists at work:

1. **Avoid**: where possible, work around the person. This may be difficult if the narcissist in question is your direct line manager, but even then you might make a judgment about how long you think this person will last in the organisation. Where the narcissist does not hold direct line management over you, shares it, or is a peer, a tactic of 'safe distance' might be advised.

2. **Confront**: confronting narcissistic behaviour might be the most ethical course of action but also a risky one, depending on where you sit within the organisational hierarchy. If you hold line management responsibility over the narcissist, you might seek a conversation with this individual in an attempt to performance manage away the problem. Even if you do not hold line management responsibility for the narcissist you work with, you may wish to confront this person. Doing so in private would appear more sensible than doing so in public, as narcissists are more sensitive to perceived personal embarrassment than other people. You might also want to choose your words carefully – you do not have to label someone a narcissist directly. Instead, they might be somewhat 'over sensitive' and things 'might not always be about them'. Finally, remember here that most people possess narcissistic characteristics to one degree or another. Most of us are self-aware enough that we are able to work on the negative aspects of our characters.

3. **Feed**: sadly, but perhaps understandably, feeding narcissism is common indeed. Feeding narcissism means that you go along with it, pander to the narcissist, feed the narcissism, whatever it takes to keep your job and stay ahead within the organisation. This seems like an unethical position to adopt but people are rightly worried for their jobs, which pay for their accommodation and sustenance. Adopting a strategy of feeding is certainly unethical and may also be a short-term strategy. *Extreme* narcissists may be successful in attaining senior positions but rarely turn out well for organisations, simply because they are not organisation-focused; they are self-focused. Being tainted by association remains a risk when things start to go awry for the narcissistic leader.

Now that you have considered the benefits and problems of person-based and transformational leadership, you will nextthink of ways in which you can turn these approaches on their heads and engage differently with the idea of leaders in the sector.

4 Re-imagining our leaders

To conclude this week of learning we are going to turn the tables on the leadership as person approach, reinterpreting its main features and arguments in a critical and reflective way. The purpose of this exercise is to see whether we might be able to construct and debate the kinds of things a great leader in the voluntary sector might stand for, say and do.

Activity 6 Reimagining your leaders
Allow about 20 minutes

Visit the discussion forum and find the thread for this activity. Reply to the thread by finish the following sentence:

'My ideal leader in the voluntary sector would … '

Justify your answer and provide some concrete examples of the kinds of things your symbolic leader would do: how would these characteristics manifest? You can even give your ideal leader a fictionalised name if you like.

After reflecting on your answer, post a response to at least two of your fellow learners and ask them some questions about their leaders. How would their symbolic leader handle a particular kind of meeting, or tricky conversation with a funder, for example?

The week concludes by reflecting on the key practice for the week, that of constructing.

5 Key practice: constructing

For most of this week you have been considering different accounts of leadership and their problems. Further, you have been considering the role of people in the sector in terms of re-imagining the kinds of leaders you would like. Playing with what is acceptable and desirable in terms of leadership we label as a practice of constructing. Getting these thoughts out in the open is an important first step in changing the kinds of leadership experienced in an organisation.

We could equally have referred to this practice as crafting instead of 'constructing'. In a face-to-face leadership development programme, at this point we would in all likelihood have brought out reams of paper, colouring pencils and pens, or even modelling clay. We would probably have asked you to draw your symbolic leader in the form of a poster and given you a few minutes each to explain this symbolic leader to your colleagues. If you are studying this course with colleagues or in a group, we suggest you try this activity together. Crafting and constructing are ways of making visible dominant organisational norms and, indeed, challenging such norms.

Asking people to construct things – images, models, short stories – can be a way of freeing the imagination from some of the constraints we routinely experience within organisations, usually caused by a dominance of task-focused activity.

The key point here is that we can be more deliberate about the kinds of leaders and leadership we pursue – we need not be the passive victims of larger cultural and political forces.

6 Summary of Week 3

This week you have seen that transformational leadership has its flaws, despite being perhaps the most popular of leadership theories. You read a critique of the fall of Kids Company that highlighted one of the main problems – that ceding too much power and credit to individuals in charge has its dangers.

From here you moved on to consider people's tendency to succumb to authority in their practice, drawing on the work of Grint (2010) on separation, silence and sacrifice. Underlying some of this 'sacred' pattern of leadership is the influence of narcissism – excess self-love – on the part of leaders and followers, and you learned about a number of ways to identify and combat narcissism at work.

You moved on to engage with an activity designed for re-imagining alternative leaders for the voluntary sector, as symbolic of how leadership might be pursued in the future. Finally, we drew attention to a key practice that you have been pursuing all week (perhaps without even realising that you had been), that of constructing.

As was apparent this week, leadership can throw up all kinds of tough ethical problems, mostly connected with power. Next week, you will consider ethics in leadership explicitly, reflecting on how the ethics of an organisation can do the work of leadership.

Week 4: Leadership as ethics

Introduction

To introduce the subject of this week, watch the following video, an interview with Nik Winchester, an expert on ethics.

Video content is not available in this format.

Nik discusses in this clip how the ethics of an organisation can do real leadership work – that ethics can guide people's behaviour and decisions. He also emphasises how applying ethics to the workplace is not about coming up with a single correct answer – instead, it is a way of feeling a way through the opportunities and pitfalls of organisational life. These are all dimensions you will consider throughout this week.

This week you will learn about two practices that can help voluntary organisations be led by their ethics. These are leadership through **purpose** and leadership through **dilemmas**.

After completing this week you will be able to:

- distinguish between ethics and morality
- define and describe an organisational ethical purpose
- critically analyse your and others' organisational purpose
- interpret an ethical dilemma drawing on ethics theory
- critically reflect on the aftermath of decisions with ethical implications.

1 What does ethics mean?

Before considering ethics in practice, let's first reflect on what is meant by 'ethics'.

Activity 1 Your definition of ethics

Allow about 5 minutes

Make brief notes in the box below on what you understand 'ethics' to mean. Try to write your own definition.

Provide your answer...

Comment

There is no single definition of ethics. Moreover, another word, morality, is often used by writers to mean something similar. In this course, however, we use ethics to mean **judgments about what is right and wrong** and it is almost certain that your definition would have been close to this definition. Ethics can therefore cover anything that involves judgments about right and wrong – in both private reflection and relational work between people. A sense of right and wrong can be shaped between people in their everyday work and also in a more distanced, reflective sense by people thinking very carefully about situations.

When we use the word 'morality' we will mean **an underlying system of belief that informs ethical choices**. For example, a person can be a committed Christian, socialist, capitalist, aesthete (or a mixture of many of these and others). These moral commitments inform how one approaches ethical judgments about what is right and wrong. The course now moves on to consider how voluntary organisations can be led by their ethical purposes.

2 Leadership as purpose

For the homeless charity Crisis, eradicating homelessness is a clear purpose underlying all of its work:

> Homelessness is devastating, leaving people vulnerable and isolated. We believe everyone deserves a place to call home and the chance to live a fulfilled and active life.

> (Crisis, 2015)

Note the strength of the language used here by Crisis: 'devastation'; 'vulnerability'; 'isolation'. Through these words, a picture emerges of shattered lives. Furthermore, Crisis believes that 'everyone *deserves*' a home. 'Deserves' signals the sense of a home as a fundamental right. There is a strong sense of ethics at play here. Having a home is a fundamental right and not to have one is a wrong – this is about ethics. Furthermore, this is about a sense of ethics *leading* the organisation.

Figure 1 The charity Crisis is driven by a clear sense of purpose

In the UK, charities are legally obliged to state their purpose. Registering the purpose of a charity is to ensure it is working for public benefit as it will receive the tax and other benefits that come with charitable status. However, the focus of this course is not on the legalities of purpose but on how a voluntary organisation's purpose can do leadership work.

In a leadership sense, an organisation's purpose sits somewhere between its morality and its ethics, in other words, between the underlying system of values of an organisation and its judgments about right and wrong. That is what makes thinking about purpose so intriguing.

But a purpose does not result in an automatic set of ethical prescriptions: X is right, Y is wrong. There is significant room for interpretation of a purpose and what it means in practice. Moreover, a purpose may not always be fit for purpose. Sometimes a purpose may lead an organisation in a direction that is consistent but still wrong.

Purposes can also lead people to pursue certain activities over others. Yet purposes are also contested (debated, argued over), which is what makes them such a lively and interesting point of focus for practice and research.

Activity 2 Your organisation's ethical purpose
Allow about 30 minutes

Take a photograph of something that you believe captures well the ethical purpose of your organisation. Post your photograph to the correct thread for this activity in the

discussion forum. After posting your picture, try to answer the following questions in no more than 20 minutes:

- Why does this photograph represent the ethical purpose of your organisation?
- What does this location/person/object (or all three) say about how you relate to your organisation's purpose?
- How does this picture make you feel? What does it make you want to do in or on behalf of your organisation?
- After posting and commenting on your photograph, please go and ask two other people a question about their photographs.

Note, photographs borrowed from elsewhere, i.e. Google images, will be deleted. We want you to take your own picture, either with your own camera or by borrowing a friend's camera or mobile phone. If you are studying this course in a group, share your photos with a short explanation of why this picture represents your organisation's ethical purpose.

Comment

Why did we ask you to take a photograph rather than simply describing the purpose of your organisation? For two reasons. The first is that it is good to exercise a different part of the brain, to think differently about your organisation. Thinking about ethics should mean that you engage differently; ethics is about more than instrumental thinking. The second is that we want you to pay attention to how you feel about an organisation's purpose. Purpose should engage the emotions as much, if not more than, logic. Being reminded of an organisation's purpose can be difficult as well as positive, especially if you feel that you or your organisation has strayed somewhat from its purpose.

The course now moves on to consider organisational purpose in more depth.

2.1 The forces driving purpose

Let's now reflect on leadership as purpose in a little more depth. Kempster et al. (2011) make the case that purpose is a greatly overlooked dimension of leadership studies, which, as you saw in Weeks 2 and 3, are usually preoccupied by the personality of people in leadership. The authors draw on the philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre, someone who reflected a great deal on the role of purpose in society. MacIntyre (1988 and 1997) makes the case that purpose is driven by two forces. First, it is driven by what he calls external goods. External goods are 'possessed by people'– things such as 'money, or gaining power' (Kempster et al., 2011, p. 321). So, for instance, one person might do good, charitable things with power and money but another might choose to do otherwise, buying a terrific new Lamborghini sports car instead of donating to a local homeless shelter.

Figure 2 What makes leadership eithical?

Second, purpose is shaped by internal goods, those things that are good in and of themselves. These internal goods are good beyond individuals and can be interpreted as 'a good for the whole community' (Kempster et al., 2011, p. 321). For example, preventing homelessness could be considered an effort that comprises several internal goods. The charity Crisis would argue that reducing homelessness improves people's health (mental

and physical), their education and skills, as well as the broader economy. For example, there may also be a less tangible internal good of generating community spirit – seeing vulnerable homeless people on the street can be distressing and improving people's lives may make everyone feel that little bit better about themselves and their communities.

Organisations tend to veer towards a preference for external goods (perhaps under-standably because organisations need to be able to survive in the short-term and doing so requires external goods, primarily money) and so a key aspect of leadership as ethics is keeping the organisation focused on and aware of its internal goods. For example, a volunteer might raise a question about why a charity chooses to fundraise in a particular way; or a board member might query an organisation's partnership with a business organisation. Having a strong purpose, however, does not mean that organisations are able to avoid tough ethical dilemmas and the next section moves on to explore leadership in relation to dilemmas.

3 Leadership and ethical dilemmas

At the beginning of this week we provided a definition of ethics as concerning judgments about right and wrong. The simplicity of this definition conceals a range of more complicated issues. In reality, ethics is mostly not about right and wrong but about 'wrong and more wrong' or 'almost-right and a-bit-wrong'. In other words, organisational ethics is often about dilemmas that:

- have to take into account complex contexts
- acknowledge that people very often operate from a basis of incomplete information
- acknowledge managers often operate from a basis of insufficient time
- look very different depending on the position from which they are viewed.

Ethical dilemmas are those problems for which there is no straightforward answer: the problem cannot be solved as such, merely acted upon in one way or another. Truly ethical problems do not disappear once a decision is made. However, it can help to have a range of approaches in order to do justice to the complexity of ethical dilemmas.

Figure 3 Voluntary action to help people in poverty (e.g. soup kitchen)

In the following section we will first rehearse some approaches that are commonly used in relation to ethical dilemmas. We will then make the case, in Section 5, that while reading and assessing ethical dilemmas is important, what may be even more important from a leadership perspective is how one comports oneself within and beyond the dilemma.

4 Three approaches to reading an ethical dilemma

In the following activity you will read a case study of a typical ethical dilemma and three separate ways of thinking about the case will be presented. Each of these approaches suggests a way that you and your leadership team might read and discuss an ethical dilemma.

Activity 3 Approaching an ethical dilemma
Allow about 15 minutes

Read the case study below.

Case study 1

You are the chief executive of a small charity dedicated to alleviating poverty within a multicultural inner city environment. Your approach is two-pronged. Your primary focus is on helping people be work-ready via the provision of training and peer support. Your secondary focus is the alleviation of short-term problems, such as a lack of food or transport: some stop-gap measures you can take yourself, but in other cases you are able to refer clients to other charitable organisations. You have spent a significant amount of time and energy cultivating positive relationships with other highly competent local organisations, as well as public sector organisations, such as the local council, the police force and health services.

You employ a staff of 19 people (excluding yourself), 16 of whom are hands-on case workers. You employ two administrators (one of whom also helps you with finance). One of your case workers dedicates a third of his time to helping you with human resource management.

Unfortunately, times have been lean. Around three years ago you made the decision to change the strategy of the charity to focus more on pursuing public money. However, a recent bid for a major council contract was lost, with a large national charity winning the bid. In the meantime you have also lost touch with many of your previous donors. The prospects for financing the charity once more via donations, at least in the short term, are slim to none. The local authority, however, has offered you a short-term bridging grant for 12 months. You note that accepting the grant is likely to involve some very difficult decisions, particularly in relation to the number of staff employed.

Scanning your organisation, you know that most of these staff members will manage quite well elsewhere. They are skilled and experienced practitioners who could pursue alternative careers either for a local authority or even delivering the newly won contract on behalf of the large national charity. You worry, however, about three of your staff in particular. While they are effective case workers, they used to be quite vulnerable clients themselves. They would be likely to struggle to find similar work elsewhere. Nevertheless, were you to cut the staff numbers demanded, these three case workers, on a purely rational basis, would have to be

made redundant, as you judge that they would not possess as many necessary skills as others in re-establishing the charity as a viable organisation.

On the other hand, the three case workers in question hold symbolic value, as former clients who have managed to achieve steady, well-paid work. They are often described as the 'heart and soul' of the organisation, as 'reminders of why we exist'. You fear that making them redundant could have a large impact on their wellbeing but also on the credibility and morale of the organisation.

How would you approach this problem? Jot down some notes in the box provided.

Provide your answer...

Comment

In reality, we hope that you would convene your team and discuss the options in a great deal of depth. You will now go on to read some ways of thinking about the problem that are also dominant approaches to organisational ethics.

Drawing on the most common approaches, there are a number of ways in which you could think through this problem.

1. **You could decide to prioritise the outcome of any decision as the most important consideration**. Drawing up a cost/benefit analysis would be a good start. This would help you come to a reasoned conclusion because whichever option resulted in the greatest number of people being helped out of poverty ought to be the one you follow. Of course this approach requires the gathering of significant amounts of reliable evidence. It also means that you have to be prepared to accept that your organisation might not be best positioned to help the largest number of people – perhaps the most ethical thing to do would be to wind down the charity.

   That said, this approach does overlook the matter of your three vulnerable members of staff. You might want to consider the possibility that no decision that causes harm to these people is worth it, as that would inevitably be using them as a means to an end. Would you be happy applying these ethical standards to any decision you made in the future? Would you be content yourself to be made unemployed in order to serve a greater good?

2. **You could reflect on your own moral judgment**. What is your guiding ideological stance and does it provide you with answers on a way through this situation? Your commitments as, for example, a socialist, liberal and so on should provide you with a basic compass to guide decision making. That said, nobody trusts a superficial and narrow ideologue – so your reflections would need to be sufficiently self-critical.

3. Finally, **you could trust your own judgment as a mature and well developed ethical practitioner – or at least trust the judgment of others**. You might take the view that regardless of the demands of various perspectives, you (or someone else) has the correct balance of experience and ethical sense to make a wise judgment call.

   In practice of course, sophisticated ethical practitioners would not pursue one of these approaches in isolation but would consider a problem from many different

angles. There are no completely satisfactory final answers to ethical dilemmas – this is their nature. Bearing this in mind, you will now consider the role of engaged leadership in working within ethical dilemmas, as opposed to leadership in order to *solve* ethical dilemmas.

5 Engaged leadership 'within' ethical dilemmas

As you have seen, experiencing ethical dilemmas is an important part of leadership. However, in this section you will reflect on leadership *within* ethical dilemmas. Note the word 'within' is deliberately selected. It is our belief that in leadership you cannot escape ethical dilemmas as such. Leadership is therefore as much to do with the quality of how you engage one another within the dilemmas (the processes of interaction) as it is about the final decision made. To flee in the face of a difficult choice and its aftermath does not count as leadership, as you would not really be leading anyone – other than yourself, in the opposite direction of the tough choices.

Figure 4 Supporting people is not without its ethical dilemmas and choices

Activity 4 Tough choices
Allow about 10 minutes

Read the case study below and make a note of the main options that you have, and the pros and cons of pursuing these options.

What would you do? What might some of the risks and benefits be of either selling or keeping the properties mentioned in the case study?

Case study 2

You work for a charity whose focus is helping people pull themselves out of poverty and alleviating the lives of people in poverty. Your organisation is interested in one-off and short-term assistance for people in need. For example:

- you will offer someone transport to a job interview and for a short period of time after securing employment
- you will provide people with the learning materials necessary for passing an exam
- you can arrange one-off home alterations for people who have become disabled
- you might even provide kitchen facilities and white goods when the absence of these appears to be causing people distress or ill health.

The problem is that, increasingly, your charity is being forced to turn people away because the funds are not available to finance as many grants as you would like.

You attend many meetings where people speak about the situation in language you believe to be quite fatalistic: 'What can we do? These are difficult times.'

You have been aware for some time, however, that the charity has much of its capital invested in a number of properties, rent from which helps to finance your core operations. The properties are occupied by people in need, who are able to take advantage of guaranteed lower rents. However, the properties, which were situated in an area of relative poverty initially, are now amidst a 'gentrified' neighbourhood, where property prices have increased exponentially. You know that if the charity were to sell these properties it could secure its future for many years to come and could afford to provide more grants to people in need. You weigh up whether or not to raise this issue with the rest of the charity's staff.

Comment

The core purpose of this charity is to encourage longer-term self-sufficiency, or helping people 'help themselves' to get out of poverty. The charity was never established as a housing charity. Therefore, purpose (and logic) dictates that these properties should be sold in order to maximise the core purpose of the organisation. But what about the people who live in these properties? Might they suffer and be forced into poverty if the new owners decide to evict them or raise rents?

Assuming all alternative fundraising options have been exhausted, the dilemma appears to be: continue as an organisation with a different purpose (a short-term assistance *and* housing charity), or maintain the purpose and sell the homes, with possibly negative effects for current tenants. There is no easy answer.

The situation outlined in the case study is a fictionalised version of something similar that faced the charity Glasspool and a decision it took to sell 63 properties that it owned in the Walthamstow area of east London. Tenants were reported to have discovered that the properties they were renting had been sold when they received eviction notices from the new owners. The case was highlighted by the local MP, Stella Creasy, who referred to the situation as 'a new low for gentrification' (Creasy, 2016).

Nevertheless, was the charity not in a difficult position? Its press release of 9 February 2016 says as much:

We are very saddened to hear that tenants have been or are in the process of being evicted. As trustees of the Glasspool Charity Trust we sought assurances regarding our tenants, their rights and protection from our selling agents at the time of the negotiations. We were assured that they would be protected within the law. We have no power to prevent a new owner from reviewing their position with the existing tenancies post-sale.

Our founder bequeathed his estate with the sole aim of helping people out of poverty. That charitable aim has continued with the use of investment income to provide grants directly to individuals and families in need. In order to be able to provide these grants the trustees realised that they had to sell the charity's directly held properties to maximise the amount of money the charity could give away. It was a difficult decision to take but the Trust was not established as a social housing provider. The sale of the remaining 63 units in Butterfields were the last directly owned properties of the Trust.

However, the sale of the properties has meant that in the last 15 years the Trust has been able to increase the amount of money it gives away from around £200,000 a year to nearly £1.5 million a year, a 750 per cent increase. In 2014/5 this resulted in 5,300 grants, supporting more than 11,000 individuals and families in hardship at a time when government and local authority are cutting back.

As trustees, we take our responsibility to our staff and to the communities we serve very seriously.

(Glasspool, 2016)

The defence of the charity to a charge of an ethical lapse appears to be an assertion of ethics, which is what makes the case so interesting. The charity's case is that it acted ethically by sticking to its ethical purpose. Its critics maintain that it suffered an ethical lapse for not thinking enough about the people affected by such an ethical stance. What the case highlights effectively is that leadership involves working through such ethical dilemmas very carefully. An important part of working through and within ethical dilemmas, we argue, is sticking around to lead through the fall-out of any decisions made. This is an overlooked part of leadership but a critical one, nevertheless. The next section considers this aspect of leadership as 'leading through tragedy'.

6 Leading through tragedy

Now that you have thought a little about the process of making decisions related to ethical dilemmas, it is time to think about the aftermath of these decisions. This is a dimension of leadership rarely considered, but we argue that this aspect is just as important as the decision itself. The ethical dilemma, as most experienced practitioners will tell you, never fully disappears – its effects linger.

Figure 5 The dominoes fall

The case study you reflected on in the previous section is in fact an adaptation of a dilemma posed by the philosopher Bernard Williams (1973). In Williams' dilemma you would be faced by the prospect of being asked to shoot dead a single innocent person in order to save the remaining 19, with no option of simply walking away. This is clearly a far more extreme dilemma, but people in leadership positions across sectors do frequently encounter decisions that hold serious consequences for individuals and society as a whole.

Williams (1973 and 2008) refers to these situations as 'tragic' because there is no single, correct answer. In these situations you *feel* the discomfort, the distress and remorse associated with the decisions made. Feeling and emotion are good signs that you are capable of functioning as a mature ethical practitioner – if you did not feel it, then you should start to truly worry. Looking at situations from this perspective, it is important that you and the organisation survives with its sense of ethics intact.

Adopting this perspective tells us that we need to 'stick with' (Ladkin, 2011) and stick around to participate in the leadership that follows any difficult decision. This is about thinking how you can contribute to rebuilding and re-energising the organisation in the face of a very difficult decision. Thinking of the tragic *suggests an element of sacrifice* on the part of those who would act as organisational leaders. You have to absorb some of the pain and act as a kind of lightning rod for the emotions of those who work in the organisation, if that is what the organisation needs.

Sticking with a tragedy can of course become self-indulgent. Again, though, there is no formula that tells you when it is time to start moving on and putting a decision to one side: it is a matter of feeling your way through. You will know better than most what your organisation can tolerate and when.

You therefore conclude this week by reflecting on your experiences in leadership ethics and thinking in more depth about some of the things you can do in leadership to get through a tragic situation.

Activity 5 Ethical leadership decisions
Allow about 30 minutes

Recall a time when either you or one of your colleagues had to make a difficult ethical decision. Reflect on the following questions in your learning journal .

- How was that situation handled in the aftermath of the decision?
- What kind of things did the people making the decision do after the decision to strengthen the ethical integrity of the organisation?
- Or, to adopt a less optimistic stance, what did people *not* do to strengthen the ethical integrity of the organisation?
- Do you remember how your actions or the actions of others made you feel? Describe those feelings and explore what they meant to you.
- If you could rewrite the past, what would you have done differently, or wished others had done differently?

Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 4 Activity 5.

Comment

The point of this activity was not to explore a correct way of approaching the aftermath of a decision. Rather, it was to prompt you to start paying attention to the physical and emotional aspects of organisations that follow on from difficult ethical decisions. How you find yourself responding to others and the spaces you inhabit can provide you with important clues about what is important to respond to, to talk about and to address with others.

Reflecting on how you feel and what you notice in yourself and others can form the basis of important conversations with colleagues about the sense of ethics you share and value. Having considered the ways in which ethics can lead an organisation and how you can work within ethical dilemmas, you conclude the week by drawing out a key practice, one you have done a lot of already.

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7 Key practice: ethical reflection

You have already engaged in lots of ethical reflection this week and we now want to underline it as an important practice for leadership. You have reflected ethically by:

- reflecting on organisational purpose as something powerful yet also as something that can be contested and that can and ought to adapt
- considering the complexity and multiple dimensions of ethical dilemmas
- engaging with how you can, in a present and embodied way, stick around after a decision has been made to help your colleagues through the consequences.

In summary, ethical reflection is important because it deals with dilemmas and problems for which there is no straightforward or satisfactory answer.

Ethical reflection allows you to approach a problem from a number of different perspectives. It also invites you to think about problems from the perspective of a number of different people. The idea of ethical reflection is to make a problem more complex and difficult, to see more sides of the puzzle, rather than solving the puzzle itself. Ethical reflection is also very much an emotional and embodied task. It asks you to pay attention to how certain options, issues and people make you feel.

8 Summary of Week 4

This week you started with the proposition that the ethics of an organisation can do leadership work – that ethics can lead. You explored how the purpose of an organisation can provide significant ethical leadership if it is able to remain open to change and adaptation.

You then switched focus to decision-making within organisations, introducing the idea of an unresolvable ethical dilemma. The week's learning concluded by putting decision making to one side and reflecting instead on the aftermath of a decision, something we stated is as important as the decision itself. The week ended by you thinking back on the key practice of the week, that of ethical reflection.

Next week we end the course by offering a way of thinking about and practicing leadership that captures its rich relational dynamics: that of leadership as practice.

http://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/chinese/beginners-chinese/content-section-0?utm_source=openlearnutm_campaign=olutm_medium=ebook

Week 5: Leadership as practice

Introduction

This week's learning will focus on three elements of leadership practice – processes, spaces and technologies of leadership. You will consider how the processes, spaces and technologies of leadership all come together to enable certain practices and restrict others. We will say that these practices of leadership can be thought of as aesthetic and therefore require a different approach and mindset than more conventional approaches to organisation.

After completing this week you will be able to:

- describe the main features of practices and distinguish between the main dimensions of practice – processes, spaces and technologies
- critically analyse how your organisation practises leadership, drawing on a visual interpretation of your workplace to do so
- reflect back on the course and pinpoint in writing one significant thing you do differently as a result of participation.

1 Defining leadership practice

A leadership practice can be defined as any practice that offers direction to a group or organisation (Crevani, 2015; Crevani and Endrissat, 2016). We draw particular attention to three dimensions of practice of value to your development and learning: processes, spaces and technologies. Each will be explored in turn this week and each are things that make leadership happen in practice (Carroll, 2016; Carroll et al., 2008).
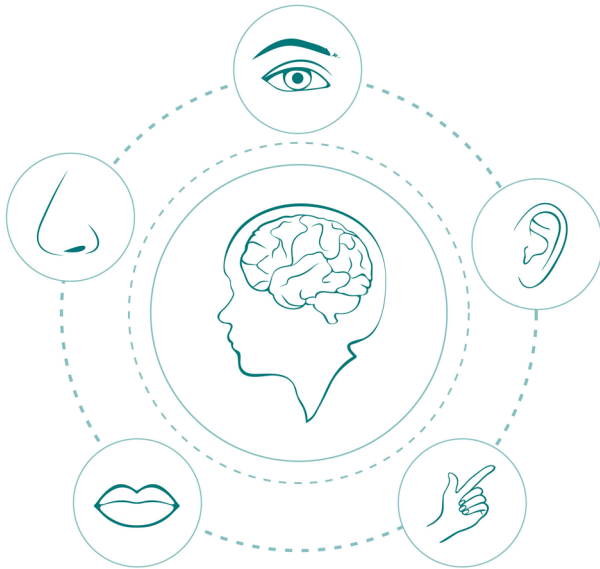
Figure 1 Appreciating the world through senses

In distinction to ordinary practices within organisations we can say that leadership practices are particularly, or even intrinsically aesthetic ones (Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2018). This is because they reach beyond the more mundane and routine aspects of organising. Aesthetics concerns how we interpret and appreciate the beautiful in life, through our senses. Note there are two parts to this definition. The first concerns the object – the poem, the flower, the lake, the cinematography of a film. Aesthetics assumes that we appreciate these things as beautiful (or not). The second part of the definition concerns us, as spectators, readers, appreciators, critics or simply consumers of aesthetic things.

To take this further, aesthetics assumes that when we interpret and engage with aesthetic objects, that we do so through our senses. We go beyond the purely rational, in other words, and start to interpret and engage with the world around us through touch, smell, sight, taste and sound: we feel the world around us rather than calculate it. Calculation implies rationality, of weighing the benefits and drawbacks of a decision or engagement based on the gathering and analysis of evidence. The aesthetic is more about how our senses are moved by an object or engagement:

> The practice of leadership aesthetics is therefore about how people generate a direction through engaging in ways that stimulate the senses.

The distinction between viewing leadership as practice and viewing leadership as a person who generates a practice is subtle but important. Leadership as practice does not ask what kind of person you need to be in order to be a leader; rather, it asks *about the things we need to do* in order to feed and feel a practice of leadership.

Having outlined what is meant by practice and the aesthetics of practice, you will now go on to consider the first dimension of practice of relevance to leadership, that of processes of leadership. Focusing on processes of leadership is important because it means that you pay attention to what actually happens between people.

2 Performances of leadership

Performances of leadership in this week's learning stand for all of those verbal, interpersonal and relational practices followed at work. This week you will learn about some common processes through which leadership is practised. The word performance is used deliberately to evoke the aesthetic dimensions of enacting leadership – of exciting the feelings and senses of those involved.

Activity 2 Performances of leadership in your workplace
Allow about 10 minutes

Let's analyse and break down the performances of leadership in your workplace.

Think about a typical day at work. How do people tend to interact? Is it face-to-face, formally in meetings or informally and in a more ad hoc manner? In these forums, *how* do people communicate? Do they tell stories, make mini speeches, emphasise exploration through asking questions or prefer a more confrontational attitude towards one another?

Comment

Performance is a provocative way of thinking about how leadership is enacted at work. It implies actors, artists and an audience willing to express their feelings in return. All organisations perform leadership differently, depending on a coming together of all kinds of things – people, traditions, spaces and technologies. Ideally, the performances through which an organisation conducts its business are aligned with its professed values and goals. For example, if an organisation is committed to listening to and involving its volunteers, it performs in such a way as to do just this. Performance can feel wooden and be poorly received if it is not believable, convincing or moving in the moment – think of a badly acted stage play, for example. Likewise, at work if leaders say that they are committed to inclusion but act differently in practice, we can say that this is an example of a poorly executed performance.

In the following sections you will learn about some examples of performances that we believe are important for leadership. These represent some important ways of practising leadership for decision making, galvanising support and taking action. These are:

- Critical reflection
- Constructive debate
- Asking awkward questions
- Telling powerful stories.

Note, these processes, amongst others, will be expanded upon in much greater detail in the successor course, Collaborative leadership in voluntary organisations.

2.1 Critical reflection

An important part of collaborative leadership is opening oneself up to others' views of the world. This is not about tolerating others. In fact the language of tolerance is unhelpful

when discussing how leadership with other people is enacted, as it evokes merely putting up with someone, rather than creating something with someone.

Being open to others in leadership involves first interrogating one's own views and practices as a practitioner and perhaps also as a person more broadly. This means taking a critical approach to exploring the limitations of one's worldview, preferences and expertise. How you see and experience the world is shaped by upbringing and social, political, economic and cultural influences.

Figure 2 Challenging one another's thinking

A great deal of people's actions and thoughts are in fact quite habitual. In addition, professions can be influential in shaping identities. A finance manager is expected to behave and think in a certain way, and so is a critical academic. Likewise, organisations shape personalities and thinking: a local government officer is likely to view social care challenges differently to a charity worker or a central government civil servant.

Being self-critical means developing an appreciation for the ambiguities and blind spots in your own perceptions, while also learning more about how others might view or approach a problem. This is what is known as bicameral practice (Connolly, 2005). A bicameral approach advocates keeping an ever-present openness to alternative ways of being in the world and of seeing the world. In practice, a bicameral approach usually means trying to be generous and hospitable to others, making the assumption that they have a valid perspective or concern – even if such a concern comes wrapped in initially unhelpful behaviours and/or language.

We can think of this approach as distinctively aesthetic. When we engage with a piece of art we place ourselves open to being disrupted by it, to being carried away and beyond our everyday and mundane concerns. Likewise, in critically reflective leadership practice we make ourselves and our bodies open for 'disruption' by recognising that we only have a 'partial' view of the world (Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2018). We allow others to affect us and to help us gain fresh appreciation of an issue or context.

Critical reflection also involves sometimes giving oneself a mental break. Many of the pressures and anxieties experienced at work really are nobody's fault and no one person can hope to solve the underlying issue. A single individual cannot solve societal poverty and ill-health, for example. More mundanely, organisations can be expert at shifting responsibility for big issues onto the shoulders of individuals, quite unfairly. Critical reflection on what you can realistically achieve within an organisation is a duty, as is openly raising these restrictions with others. Now that you have explored a process that individuals can follow, you can move on to some more collective processes.

2.2 Constructive debate

It is a cultural cliché to claim that the British are terribly polite and conflict-shy but there is some truth in this. This is a shame, as good, strong collaborative leadership needs, and in fact thrives, on constructive debate. Without conflict, important issues and concerns are not addressed and poorly conceptualised ideas and policies are allowed to continue.

Prominent Harvard academic Ronald Heifetz talks of good leadership generating 'heat' (Heifetz, 1994). By 'heat' he means turning the responsibility for a problem back on to the people who should be in a position to offer insight. People in formal positions of authority cannot possibly hold all the answers. One of the course authors recalls a previous line manager who would, without fail, towards the middle of a meeting, ask directly whoever had been silent for their opinions. This move had two consequences. The first is that everyone made sure they were paying attention. The second is that people felt valued. This particular manager was a caring person and had the trust of his employees and so had the authority and legitimacy to pursue such a tactic: this would be harder for a manager who did not enjoy such trust.
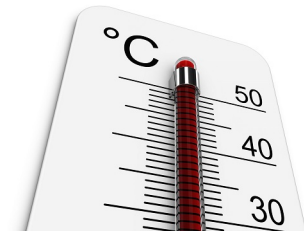
Figure 3 Good leadership generates 'heat'

However, some people are more sensitive than others and it is not always politically possible for people to challenge or disagree with others within organisations. With this in mind, you might like to explore how you can make constructive conflict more acceptable within your organisation. You might invite others explicitly to confront you more on your ideas or work. You could instigate a role-playing system where it becomes possible for people in a meeting to play a 'devil's advocate' role. Engaging in debate is of course important, but so is the more inquisitive process of asking questions, which will now be explored.

2.3 Asking awkward questions

Keith Grint (2005a) makes the case that asking questions is *the* key process of leadership. Asking difficult questions disrupts the flow of practice and forces others to re-adjust their thinking. We feel awkward questions in aesthetic terms, through our bodies – that feeling of being temporarily lost for words, of clammy hands, feeling at sea when we are thrown out of our comfort zone (Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2018). Grint advocates these kinds of questions, ones that challenge assumptions or help reveal deeper underlying problems. For example, if you were a medical consultant treating increasing numbers of people for diabetes, you could ask your hospital's senior management what was being done in a holistic sense to prevent the illness in the first place.

Figure 4 Asking questions is *the* key process of leadership

Now, it's not possible to ask such questions all the time – that would just be too disruptive. Routine is needed in order to be able to get things done and meet obligatory commitments. But Grint's argument is that people tend to avoid asking such questions too often, which results in a kind of comfort trap: people do what they know and avoid asking about all the complex, messy underlying stuff they don't know. You can find out more about this approach in our other leadership course, Collaborative leadership in voluntary organisations. You now move on to reflecting on how processes of leadership might more explicitly engage people's imaginations.

2.4 Telling powerful stories

Managers are usually very good at making a rational case for something. They are sometimes also quite good at drawing on evidence and offering a rational argument.

Managers are often less impressive when it comes to telling stories that engage with the emotional side of an organisation. This is strange in many ways, as Aristotle was writing about the arts of rhetoric nearly two and a half millennia ago in Ancient Greece (Aristotle, 322BC/1991), so it is not as if the power of a good story is a new technique. An effective story is a deeply aesthetic practice and can change the way people relate to, or think about an issue in powerful ways. We are not suggesting, however, that feelings should be valued over facts. We would agree with the criticism, often levelled at charities, that it is a mistake to dwell too much on tragic stories, with the aim of making people feel guilty or even responsible for others' suffering. Instead, it is worth considering how an organisation's purpose can be more compelling than balance sheets and quantitative measures.

Powerful stories used in leadership can be the stories of the people you have helped, or stories drawn from your own personal experience. Stories need not be hugely dramatic, but they do need to abide by some basic conventions. First, they need some kind of plot –

usually a scene-setting beginning, an interesting middle and an effective ending, for example, one that contains a purpose, a moral to the story. Such codas (the proper narrative term for an ending) should not feel overly preachy but should speak directly to the purpose of an organisation. Importantly, stories need to contain a real cast of characters – people. Without characters, a story is not a story.

Consider this story from one of the course authors on her involvement with a charity working to end slavery:

> Four years ago I had the opporty to visit Cambodia with a group of women. We ate in cafés staffed by women released from brothels where they had been held forcibly – the women were tiny, under-nourished, quiet. One café made beautifully iced cakes. Their cup-cakes were works of art, and their fabulous tiered creations are ordered by politicians and royalty. We were shown around the immaculate training suite where women learned new skills and achieved their qualifications. We were not allowed to speak with the women, but the contrast between the beauty of their creations and the squalor of their pasts was all too evident. That experience changed my understanding of what it means to be released from slavery.

This story could have been told with a range of facts, statistics and graphs on the impact of anti-slavery work. But telling the story about a real group of women doing ordinary things perhaps taken for granted (making cakes) is poignant.

Activity 3 Telling a leadership story
Allow about 10 minutes

How about trying some storytelling yourself? Next time you speak in a meeting or next time you want to persuade a colleague of something, try adopting a story format instead.

Record how effective you think your story was in your learning journal . What worked and what did not work so well? Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 5 Activity 3.

Comment
To paraphrase a famous beer advert, stories reach parts that other forms of language cannot. This does not mean that we need to be dominated by stories – facts and figures are important too, as are strongly held opinions. Yet used wisely, telling a compelling story can change the tone of an interaction. Stories should be viewed as one practice amongst others. Having considered some important processes of leadership, you will now be asked to think about the spaces in which leadership takes place. It is tempting to think of the spaces in which people work as fixed in advance but it is our argument that spaces can be worked with in creative ways to generate an environment more conducive to leadership.

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3 Aesthetic spaces of leadership

If you ever walk through the glass doors of the New Zealand Leadership Institute (NZLI) on the fourth floor of the University of Auckland Business School, you will be struck by the panoramic view of the city visible from anywhere in the open-plan space. In front of its expansive windows onto the city is an informal seating area where the team gathers to thrash out its thinking on leadership.

Figure 5 Logo of the New Zealand Leadership Institute (NZLI)

NZLI is a charitable trust affiliated with the University of Auckland. Its mission is to 'grow understanding of leadership and to use this understanding to build leadership capacity within New Zealand and beyond' (NZLI, 2016). This might strike you as an ambitious mission – and you would be correct in that assumption. In practical terms, NZLI has translated this mission into the design and delivery of leadership development programmes and cutting-edge research into leadership development.

NZLI is committed to a form of collaborative leadership as practice that emphasises discussion, critical scrutiny, debate and the surfacing of ideas. Practising what they preach, everyone at NZLI is expected to participate and to speak out. Returning to that informal seating area, it makes sense that it is in this space that the team raises and debates new ideas. When they engage with one another it is with views over a wide open space – a panoramic view across the city, in fact. The meeting space has over the years developed a personality of its own. People now have strong associations of previous meetings, conversations and even celebrations that have unfolded at that spot above the city of Auckland.

Here is a common question relating to spaces of leadership: Do these meeting spaces create the practices of leadership or do the practices necessitate particular spaces? However, perhaps this is the wrong question. Perhaps it is more valuable to think of spaces of leadership as locked in a give-and-take relationship with practices of leadership, where both shape one another over time – work spaces inform practices, and vice versa. Regardless, rather than simply referring to spaces of leadership, we should say that these are aesthetic spaces of leadership possibility. The aesthetics of a space can help open our engagement and imaginations (Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2018).

Two implications become apparent from this discussion. The first is that if you want to change your organisation's practices of leadership, then one way of approaching this may be to change the spaces where leadership is pursued, to adjust the aesthetic stimulus and ambience. New spaces can provoke new ways of relating to one another. For example, a senior leader at The Open University Business School told the course authors recently that he used to find himself becoming restless and unsatisfied when he was tied too much to the formalities of desk work: he knew there was more meaningful work and insight out there in the organisation, insights that could be gleaned if people were not tied to rigid and formal processes. He therefore consciously started to make use of all of the communal

spaces in the business school – the stairs, corridors, kitchen and canteen, anywhere he felt he could generate a qualitatively different kind of conversation with people. The second implication is that spaces can be subverted and reconfigured in interesting ways, as can artistic rules when painters or sculptors defy conventions. Even something as basic as modifying the seating arrangements in a room can generate a different kind of dynamic and conversation.

You will now move on to think about how leadership can be generated through the technologies people use every day at work.

4 Technologies of leadership

How we practise leadership can be shaped as much by the technologies around us as by our intentional actions as autonomous people – in other words, technologies can lead. This is not quite to argue that technologies can think and feel for themselves, at least not yet anyway. But it is to argue that most thinking on leadership, and indeed most thinking in practice, tends to assume that we are independent people who rely on rational thought alone. This is a flawed assumption that overlooks how interdependent we are in reality. In fact, we are hugely dependent on the technologies we use, as well as the spaces we inhabit.

Figure 6 What difference does the phone make to leadership?

Leadership depends so much on the interaction between material objects and people. The example used by Grint (2005b) is that of the D-Day landings in World War II, which relied on a vast and complex web of technologies and techniques – weather forecasting equipment, landing craft, covert mini submarines, falsified evidence of alternative invasion plans, the knowledge and judgment of certain leaders and the bravery and intelligence of those involved on the ground (and in the air). Technologies can shape the possibilities for leadership as much as leaders and followers. In fact it could be said that leaders should not be thought of as 'people' at all but as person–technological hybrids (Latour, 2007). People exist in a mutually dependent relationship with their technologies.

Technologies can be very simple and mundane or they can be complex and high-tech. Let's return momentarily to the expansive world of the New Zealand Leadership Institute (NZLI). Recall that staff hold their meetings overlooking the cityscape. They do so while sitting on a blue sofa and chairs. This seems like a mundane detail but the living room furniture has become an important actor in the work of NZLI, a character in the play of leadership.

What does a sofa overlooking the city offer? Sitting on a sofa or comfortable chair can be relaxing, evoking feelings of being at home, opening one up to more reflective thinking. Relaxing on a sofa can also evoke images of a therapist's couch: the experience of being asked uncomfortable questions that nevertheless push you into unexpectedly valuable thinking territory. Being simultaneously relaxed and open to critical questioning is of course just where an innovative leadership institute wants you to be. The sofa area has become so much a focus of practice that the sofa itself has started to develop a character of its own and can be spoken about as if it is a living thing with personality.

On the high-tech end of the spectrum, it is often argued that the internet, mobile technology and social media have transformed the way in which we relate to one another

and work. If you look around you in a public space, you will notice that many, if not most people are buried in their phones or tablets in a way we couldn't have imagined 20 years ago.. Social media in particular has changed the way in which people identify with and relate to commies. Commies are as likely to be stretched across continents now as to be situated in a localised area. Moreover, leadership can be thought of in terms of commies of people and technologies, comprised of a variety of roles and identities. Perhaps most importantly, due to technologies, volunteers are beginning to have a voice and degree of participation which was previously not possible.

Activity 4 Spaces and technologies in your organisation
Allow about 30 minutes

Spend 15 minutes thinking about the kinds of spaces and technologies that dominate where and how leadership is practised in your organisation. If you are able, take a photograph of this space and/or these technologies and post the photo in this activity's thread in the discussion forum. Spend a further 10 minutes telling your fellow learners a story that captures how leadership is enacted in this space and with these technologies – either via the forum or in your learning group or club.

What are the benefits and drawbacks of this space and these technologies of leadership? Could you do something to freshen up the space where leadership is practised?

Spend five minutes commenting on the photograph or story of two of your fellow learners.

Comment

Spaces where leadership is practised can be chosen deliberately, as can the technologies that are used in leadership. For example, in the UK Parliament's House of Commons and House of Lords, the government benches directly face the opposition benches, so that when a minister addresses either House, she or he faces political adversaries rather than colleagues. This is a design deliberately geared towards the generation of adversarial debate and scrutiny.

Sometimes, however, spaces and technologies and uses of them can become quite habitual and stale. People become accustomed to being a certain way in a particular meeting room, surrounded by certain objects. Over time, certain memories and practices are identified with certain spaces and technologies. There is a lot to be said for freshening up where and how you interact and where you enact leadership. By changing the spaces and technologies of leadership, you also change how people relate to one another and approach one another.

Hopefully this week you will have started to stretch your perceptions of leadership and what comprises leadership in practice. You will conclude this week by reflecting back on what the course authors think has been the key practice, that of sociomaterial awareness.

5 Key practice: aesthetic awareness

The word 'aesthetic' is usually reserved for the world of the arts – for paintings, sculptures, creative writing and performance. But so much of our everyday experience is influenced by aesthetic engagements – we find certain experiences, people and spaces pleasing in an embodied and sensory way. Such an aesthetic response is beyond the purely calculative and rational – it is the poetry of everyday life, and is what brings us pleasure.

As you have already learned, leadership can be thought of as an intrinsically aesthetic phenomenon (Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2018). This is so much the case that we can even think of our responses to individual leaders as an aesthetic practice. We find that certain leaders – their imagery and use of language – appeal to our senses and generate a form of excitement that we feel through our bodies. Of course, such aesthetic forms of communicating with us can be highly manipulative, with language and even pictures used in ways that are meant to heighten our feelings towards good or ill. Without people responding, positively or negatively, to the aesthetic presentations of leaders, they would be somewhat pointless, performances to an empty theatre. It is our responses that mean that these are in fact practices – we can choose whether to participate or not.

It is therefore worth reflecting on the extent our sense are being manipulated when we consume the words or imagery of leaders: how this leader has been positioned and set in a photograph to excite our feelings; how certain wordplay has been deployed to inspire or scare us; how the timing of a statement or picture of a leader has been introduced to appeal to our emotions.

We can think of practices of leadership in collective forms of leadership in aesthetic terms too. As we outlined earlier, seeing collective forms of leadership as aesthetic experiences felt between the bodies of participants can be an unsettling and uncertain process (Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2018), a more fluid one than we can be accustomed to amidst the more rational language of organisations. We can learn, however, much like artists, to hone two practices in particular.

The first is *composition* – recognising that we enact leadership in conjunction with our material environment (room layout, objects, etc.) and that these can be composed in ways that may accentuate or dampen energetic and creative forms of leadership. The second is being *present*, placing ourselves in the service and in the presence only of the moment as it unfolds. Being present means focusing on the intimate unfolding of a scene – the visual cues we receive from others, their tone of voice, the rhythm of their words and their body language. Our role in such situations is to help accentuate and support the overall performance of collective leadership rather than being preoccupied with making ourselves look good. An aesthetic approach to leadership therefore means being committed to a collective co-performance (Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2018).

6 Summary of Week 5

The main advantage of thinking and approaching leadership as a practice is that it enables you to focus on the work that gets done rather than to become preoccupied with the status and personality of individual leaders. It also opens us to the possibility of considering the aesthetic – rather than merely the rational and calculative – aspects of organising.

You saw that the performances, spaces and technologies of leadership can be separated out, and you looked at each in turn, although in reality these three aspects overlap when leadership is being performed through practice. You can't escape practice and its aesthetics – they are what generates what we come to think of as leadership, yet it is amazing how little attention is paid to practices compared to assumptions about the preferences and personalities of individuals. Leadership happens when technologies, spaces, performances – and the people embedded within them – interact in interesting ways and we provided some examples of how these dimensions can come together in interesting ways, as is the case with NZLI. When we considered this week's key practice, we did so by introducing the idea of aesthetic awareness, developing a sense of the kinds of things that are assembled together in order to make leadership work (or not).

Course reflection and conclusion

We hope you have enjoyed and gained value from this introduction to leadership in voluntary organisations. The course authors' intention has been to offer a balance of critical engagement and practice orientation, so that you can think about, appreciate and practise leadership in new and interesting ways.


Activity 5 Reflecting on your course learning
Allow about 20 minutes

Which one thing do you now do differently, or do you plan on doing differently, as a result of participating in this course? Spend 15 minutes on your answer. Post your views in the thread for this activity in our discussion forum. Take five minutes to comment on the posts of at least two other people.

Comment

We do hope, naturally, that you will be doing at least one thing a bit differently at work as a result of participating in this course, even if that one thing is developing more of a willingness to experiment in general with leadership at work.
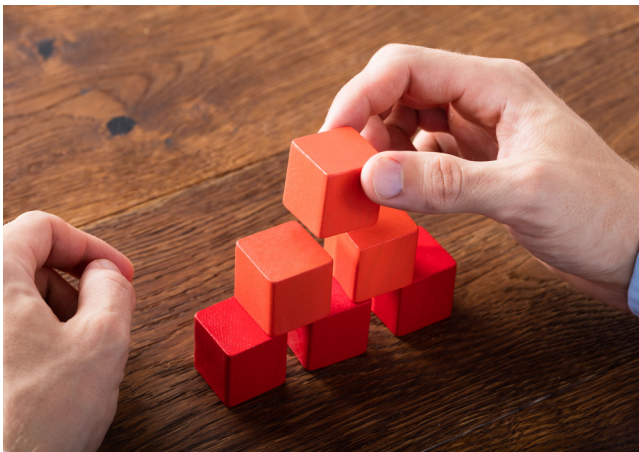
Figure 7 Developing something new

Moving forward, we hope that this course and our other course on collaborative leadership can act as a way of connecting people who are interested in leadership and in developing leadership in the sector more generally. We want this space to be a genuine commy space where we are all learners and developers simultaneously.

If you are interested in taking your leadership further, we encourage you to now enrol in and begin our companion course, Collaborative leadership in voluntary organisations. This course picks up and further develops many of the themes that have been introduced here but with more of a focus on practices and certainly more of a focus on how we can collaborate better with one another.

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