

# Developing and Sustaining Shared Leadership in Higher Education

# Stimulus Paper Series

The Leadership Foundation is pleased to present this latest series of 'Stimulus Papers' which are intended to inform thinking, choices and decisions at institutional and system levels in UK higher education. The themes addressed fall into different clusters including higher education leadership, business models for higher education, leading the student experience and leadership and equality of opportunity in higher education. We hope these papers will stimulate discussion and debate, as well as giving an insight into some of the new and emerging issues relevant to higher education today.

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Registered and operational address:  
Leadership Foundation for Higher Education  
Peer House  
8-14 Verulam Street  
London  
WC1X 8LZ

Tel: +44 (0) 20 3468 4810  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 3468 4811  
E-mail: [info@lfhe.ac.uk](mailto:info@lfhe.ac.uk)

[www.lfhe.ac.uk](http://www.lfhe.ac.uk)

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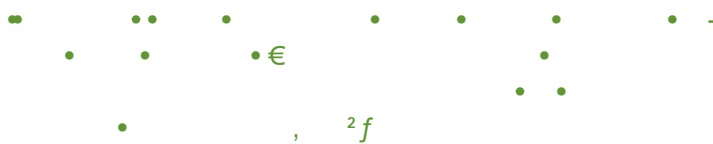
# Foreword

1. " – where leadership is regarded as relying less on positional power and more on placing trust in expertise
2. – in which leadership relies less on control and more on respect for experience and expertise
3. – where leadership is recognised as emanating from multiple levels and functions as a mix of top-down, bottom-up and middle-out contributions
4. – based on collaborations between individuals that together contribute to a collective identity.

And four associated criteria for a collective approach to shared leadership:

1. – the involvement of a broad range of experts contributing their knowledge
2. – that support individuals in sharing their expertise across traditional functions and structures
3. – provided to develop individual and collective skills, traits and behaviours
4. – provided to encourage collaboration, networks and partnerships."

This paper makes it explicit that to achieve shared leadership 'requires a conspicuous, planned and systematic investment in relational skills'. It argues for greater engagement of staff in layers of leadership activity as we transition our focus from 'leaders' to 'leadership'. There are no easy answers as to how to do this, and as the paper points out, the first step is:



At a time when the government's efficiency work moves towards looking more at academic processes, I hope this paper will indeed stimulate thinking and actions as senior leaders review and develop leadership and management capabilities in their institutions. While many of the examples in this paper relate to the leadership of teaching and learning, it would seem that many of the practical tools offered here can equally apply to other areas of the academic enterprise such as research, knowledge transfer and professional services. In the spirit of shared leadership I encourage you to experiment and adapt the ideas to the context in which you find yourself.



# Introduction

Over recent years, concepts of shared, distributed and collective leadership<sup>4</sup> have become increasingly popular and are now widely advocated across public, private and not-for-profit sectors in the UK, US, Australia and elsewhere. Within higher education, it has been suggested that such perspectives might offer an alternative to the discourse of 'managerialism' that has become increasingly prevalent within the sector and as a means of reconnecting academics with a sense of collegiality, citizenship and community<sup>5</sup>.

Since the industrial revolution, most developments in leadership and management practice have focused upon the centralisation of power and control into the hands of the few. Whilst this may have been successful in driving economic performance and growth in manufacturing and production, it is arguably less appropriate in today's highly networked, knowledge-intensive environments.

The idea that effective leadership requires the involvement of a far wider set of actors than senior organisational leaders alone is leading to broader conceptualisations of the 'work of leadership' in higher education<sup>6</sup> and draws attention to the underlying motivations, values, beliefs and influences that may help to harness the creative energies of all who work in this sector. The distribution of leadership beyond the senior leadership team requires, amongst other things, a shift in thinking about the allocation of responsibility, resources, power and influence that brings into question common assumptions about how groups and organisations function.

Given that much of the theory and practice of shared leadership come from the education sector, it is perhaps unsurprising that higher education has been at the forefront of recent developments in the field. In the last decade, work sponsored by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education in the UK and the Office for Learning and Teaching in Australia, amongst others, has made a significant contribution to our understanding of shared leadership. But higher education, like other sectors, is beset by change and uncertainty – reeling from the effects of the global financial crisis; social, environmental and demographic change; rapid developments in technology; and increasing national and international competition for students, staff and funding.

Drawing on recent developments in theory and practice, this stimulus paper explores the question of what universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) can do to develop and sustain cultures of shared leadership that prepare them for current and future challenges. It is informed by the collective insights of the authors who bring together a diversity of expertise and experiences of leadership research, development and practice in the UK, Australia and elsewhere.

## 4

Whilst there are some minor variations in meaning and origin, 'shared', 'distributed' and 'collective' leadership are all part of a family of concepts that regard leadership as a group process rather than as a set of individual traits, competencies or behaviours. For the purpose of simplicity 'shared leadership' will be used throughout this report as an umbrella term that encompasses all three concepts. For a detailed review see Bolden (2011).

## 5

Gosling et al (2009); Macfarlane (2012)

## 6

Davis and Jones (2014)





## Part 1: Context

Throughout this paper we highlight the importance of context in framing leadership and determining what does and does not work. In this section we begin by exploring the contested nature of leadership and management in academic settings, the potential for ambiguity and conflict between professional and managerial roles, and the consequences for engagement with leadership and followership in higher education. We then explore the potential for shared leadership to offer an alternative perspective on leading and following that may be more appropriate in today's academic and educational contexts than the simplistic 'leader/follower' dichotomy that typifies traditional accounts of leadership. This section concludes with an introduction to the notion of complexity in organisations and the implications for how we approach leadership and leadership development in higher education.

### Academic leadership and management

A recent study, commissioned by the Leadership Foundation, identified a tension between conceptions of leadership and management amongst academics in UK universities<sup>7</sup>. This study, which was conducted at a time of significant change in the sector, indicated that academics tend to be sceptical of explicit organisational leadership by those in formal positions of authority (such as vice-chancellor, dean and head of department) and frequently look elsewhere for the leadership of academic work; often to people with whom they have informal relationships within and beyond their own institution. The findings suggested that much of what is described in both scholarship and practice as 'academic leadership' is in fact regarded as 'academic management', i.e. associated with the practicalities of running a large, complex organisation such as a university.

Strong competition for market position, brand, reputation and associated funding, it was suggested, are driving a top-down, managerial approach that limits opportunities for more emergent, opportunistic and entrepreneurial forms of leadership. Academics in this study placed high value on their own sense of autonomy, mastery and purpose and reported feeling disengaged and demotivated by changes in the sector<sup>8</sup>.

In order to synthesise findings from a range of sources (survey, interviews and listening posts), the authors produced two diagrams. The first, described as the 'sailing ship' model, illustrated how research participants tended to distinguish between academic leadership, academic management and self-leadership (see Figure 1). This model suggests that all three aspects are essential components of a balanced higher education system that together contribute to the effective development and delivery of academic work.

7

Bolden et al (2012)

8

Disengagement is not just an issue in higher education. O'Boyle and Harter (2013:111–13) report that engagement levels across different industries around the world are as low as 17% in the UK, 24% in Australia and 30% in the USA. In a review of the evidence, Dan Pink (2009) suggests that autonomy, mastery and purpose are fundamental to motivation and wellbeing across many occupations (for a video summarising this argument visit:

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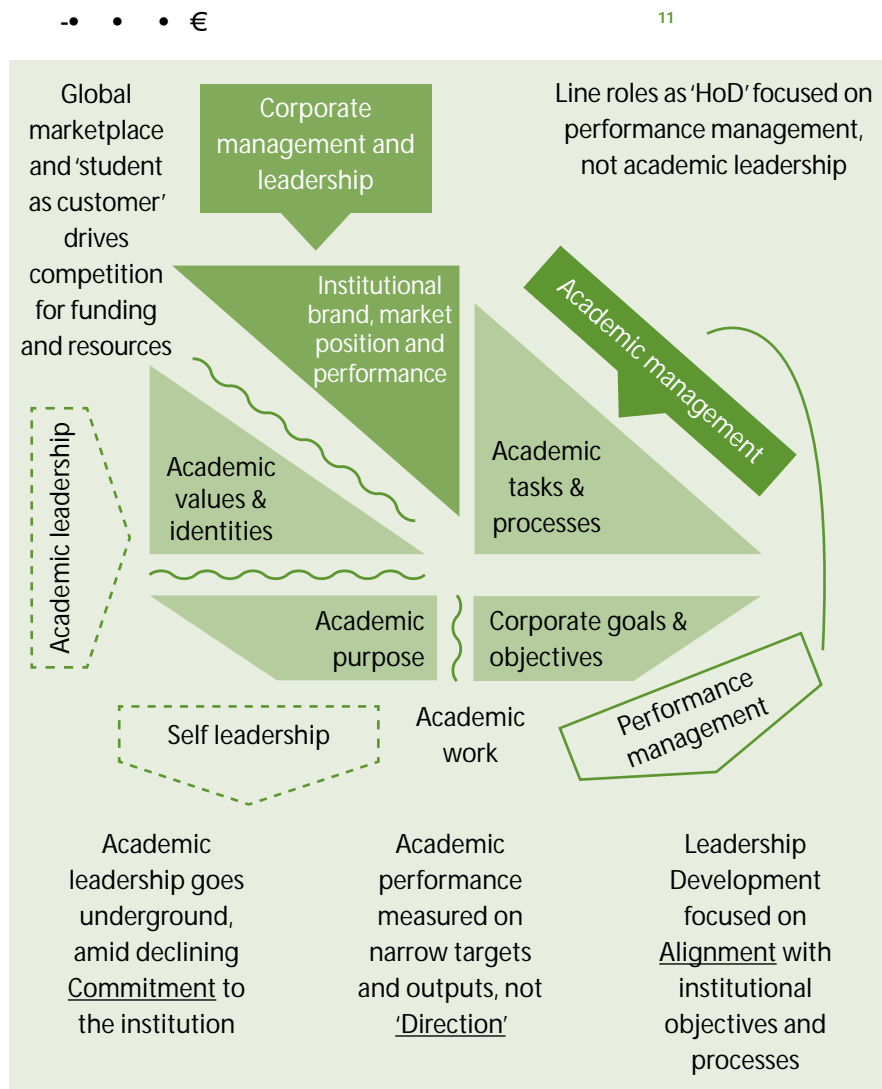


Figure 2 suggests that traditional accounts of academic leadership, academic management and self-leadership (as illustrated in Figure 1) are becoming disrupted by an increasingly prevalent discourse of corporate leadership and management that emphasises the need for market competition, institutional brand and financial performance. From the accounts of participants in this study, the move towards a more corporate approach is associated with an intensification of formal management processes (as indicated on the right of Figure 2) and the potential fragmentation and erosion of informal academic and self-leadership (as indicated on the left of Figure 2). The 'sinking ship' represents a possible reality that is likely to become increasingly pervasive if efforts are not made to actively engage current and emerging academics in processes that give rise to a coherent sense of academic values, identity and purpose that, in turn, are key to the production of high-quality academic work. Whilst the sense of disengagement expressed in the findings is likely to be associated with the changes to higher education funding that were occurring at the time (including a near-trebling of fees for domestic undergraduate students in England), the outcomes have resonated widely with academics and other professionals in knowledge-intensive industries well beyond the UK. It seems to capture some of the sense of conflict and ambiguity experienced by people whose sense of professional identity and purpose does not



Since the early 2000s, distributed and shared leadership theories have emerged as alternatives that begin with the premise that 'leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group'<sup>17</sup>. Such a perspective shifts the focus on leadership from person, position or results to leadership as a process<sup>18</sup>.

Spillane and Diamond<sup>19</sup> identify two key elements of a shared leadership approach: 'leader-plus' (recognising the collective contribution of all actors rather than just those in formally designated positions of authority) and 'practice' (a focus on the interactions between • and situation). A review of the literature, commissioned by the National College for School Leadership, highlighted three main assumptions that are associated with a distributed perspective on leadership<sup>20</sup>:

1. Leadership is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals.
2. There is openness to the boundaries of leadership/
3. Varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few.

Such principles make good sense in an educational setting where multiple stakeholders have a direct interest in, and impact on, student outcomes and have been supported by compelling evidence that 'school leadership has a greater influence on schools and pupils when it is widely distributed'<sup>21</sup>.

Within higher education, whilst it may be harder to gain agreement on key performance criteria, it is nonetheless relatively straightforward to see how a distributed or shared leadership perspective can reveal important dimensions of leadership practice that may otherwise be overlooked. For example, in relation to the development of a successful research grant, whilst a traditional leader-centric approach may focus almost solely on the skills, knowledge and competencies of the principal investigator, a shared leadership approach would also recognise the vital role played by colleagues and collaborators (within and outside the institution), administrators (in supporting the bidding process), institutional processes and reputation (that may influence how the bid is coordinated and received), and the network of internal and external reviewers (who assess the bid before and after submission). The design and delivery of learning environments that engage students in truly authentic learning activities (assisted by rapid advances in digital technology) is a further example of the need for a distributed or shared approach, including academics and professional experts, as well as students and other stakeholders.

22  
Gronn (2002)

23  
ibid p657

24  
eg, Pearce and Conger (2003);  
Bolden et al (2009); Collinson and  
Collinson (2009)

25  
Gronn (2009; 2011)

26  
Pearce (2004) p55

27  
Day et al (2009) p14

28  
Bolden, Petrov and Gosling (2008)

Peter Gronn<sup>22</sup>, one of the founders of distributed leadership theory, identified three discrete ways in which leadership might be distributed across two or more people:

• where groups of individuals with different skills, knowledge and/or capabilities come together to complete a particular task/project and then disband.

• where two or more individuals develop close working relations over time until 'leadership is manifest in the shared role space encompassed by their relationship'<sup>23</sup>.

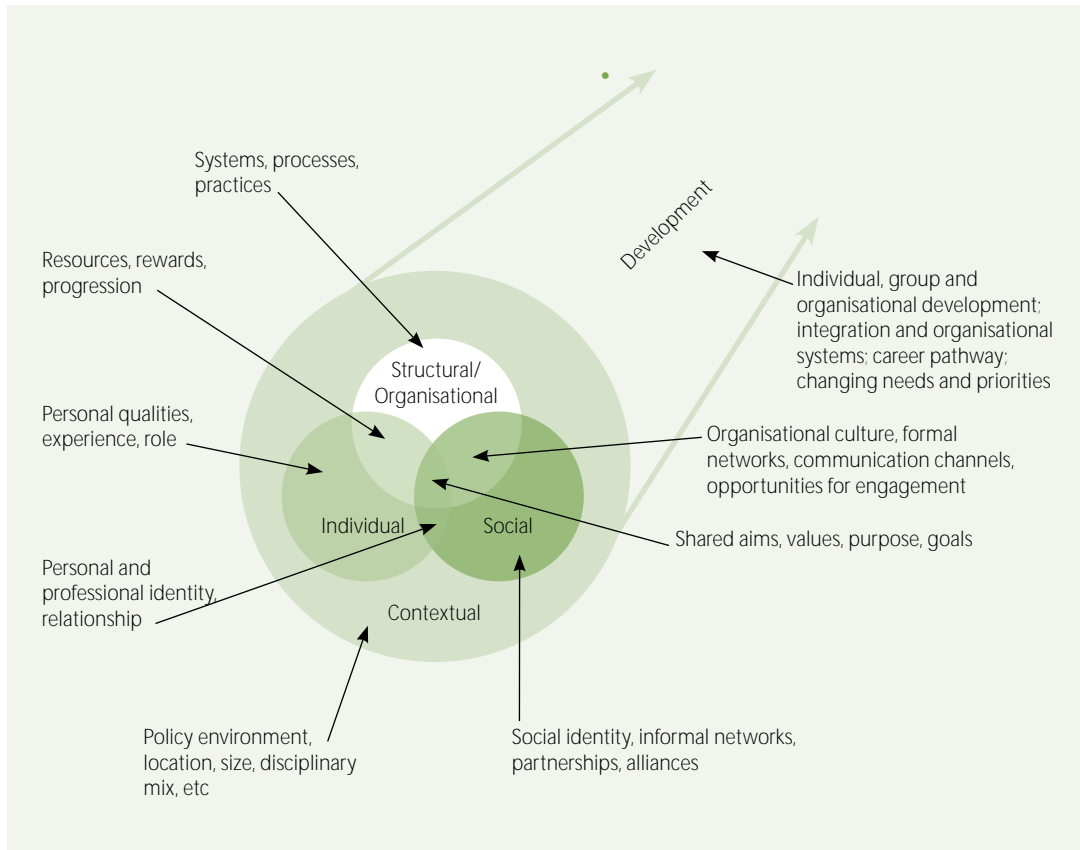
• where enduring organisational structures (e.g. committees and teams) are put in place to facilitate collaboration between individuals.

Other authors have made similar distinctions and highlighted the ways in which shared leadership forms co-exist alongside hierarchical and individual leadership<sup>24</sup>. In response to calls for a wider distribution of leadership within schools, universities and other organisations, Gronn<sup>25</sup> has encouraged a contextual approach that considers the 'hybrid configurations' of leadership practice that co-exist within a given environment. As Pearce suggests:



Organisational context, therefore, is an essential consideration when determining which configuration of leadership forms is likely to be most effective and/or desirable. Research in the school sector, for example, suggests that intentional efforts to distribute leadership often arises from pressure to address challenges such as poor performance and changes in policy and practice and that 'greater "distribution of leadership" outside of those in formally established roles usually depends on quite intentional intervention on the part of those in formal leadership roles'<sup>27</sup>.

Whilst there are clearly some significant differences between the higher education and school sectors, a shared leadership perspective has proven helpful in illuminating key features of the leadership landscape that may otherwise be neglected. In a study incorporating the views of academic and professional service leaders in 12 UK universities, Bolden, Petrov and Gosling<sup>28</sup>, for example, identified the significance of a range of factors that include, but go far beyond, the individual characteristics of people in formal leadership roles (see Figure 3).



Whilst most attempts to enhance leadership in higher education, as elsewhere, tend to be targeted at individuals (through recruitment or development) or by reconfiguring organisational structures, systems or practices, Figure 3 highlights the importance of social, contextual and temporal factors in shaping and determining shared aims, values, purpose and goals and their accomplishment within higher education. Such a perspective helps identify factors that both enable and constrain effective engagement with leadership and management and highlights the need for a more systemic perspective that acknowledges the complexities and interdependencies of organisational life if we are to appreciate how leadership is accomplished in practice.

- 30**  
Flinn and Mowles (2014) p4
- 31**  
ibid (2014) p2
- 30**  
Stacey (2001)
- 31**  
ibid (2014) p2
- 32**  
Stacey (2001)
- 33**  
For an entertaining illustration of this in action, watch Derek Sivers' famous TED talk 'Leadership Lessons from Dancing Guy' ([https://www.ted.com/talks/derek\\_sivers\\_leadership\\_lessons\\_from\\_dancing\\_guy](#)).
- 34**  
A common metaphor for this is the so-called 'Butterfly Effect', developed from Edward Lorenz's work on chaos theory and his famous address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1972, entitled 'Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?'
- 35**  
Wheatley (1994); Snowden and Stanbridge (2004); Western (2008)
- 36**  
Flinn and Mowles (2014) p5
- 37**  
ibid (2014) p19

## Leadership and complexity

A recent Leadership Foundation stimulus paper by Flinn and Mowles offers an alternative to the 'dominant discourse on leadership and organisation... which views management as science, organisation as system, and leadership as a set of identifiable skills and competencies which can be developed and applied instrumentally irrespective of context'<sup>30</sup>. Drawing on the work of Ralph Stacey and colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire, Flinn and Mowles argue that a 'complexity approach' has much to offer our understanding of leadership and leadership development in higher education. Rather than viewing organisations as rational, bounded systems that can be managed in predictable and controlled ways, they offer a view of organisations as patterns of human interaction constantly emerging in both predictable and unpredictable ways in the living present, mostly through conversational activity<sup>31</sup>. Stacey's<sup>32</sup> notion of 'complex responsive processes of relating' offers a fluid and dynamic perspective on leadership that extends beyond traditional roles and boundaries and challenges the simple dichotomy between 'leaders' and 'followers'<sup>33</sup>.

A 'complex adaptive system' cannot be understood through examination of its constituent elements in isolation. Changes in any one part of the system will have knock-on effects elsewhere, and patterns of activity combine to produce system-level effects that could not be anticipated in advance, and which could not be dictated through command and control<sup>34</sup>. From this perspective, organisations may be best understood as complex social ecosystems<sup>35</sup>.

An important insight from a complexity perspective is that 'there is nowhere outside of the complex (responsive) processes of organisational life for a leader or manager to stand; they too are caught up in the flux of stability and change as much as everyone else'<sup>36</sup>. The developmental implications of such a position are outlined below.





Such an approach, whilst challenging and potentially threatening to those in positions of authority, is well suited to contexts of uncertainty and ambiguity

## Part 2: Practice

Part 1 of this paper highlights that, for well over a decade, interest in leadership studies has turned to post-heroic approaches, where shared and distributed leadership theories (amongst others) have emerged as alternatives to leader-centric leadership. It also suggested that the principles that underpin shared leadership make good sense in a higher education setting, given the multiple stakeholders involved. Why then has shared leadership been so slow to be universally adopted in higher education? The answer to this question lies in a combination of resistance to change and the need to design new approaches to underpin shared leadership development and practice. In this part we explore these issues and present a range of tools, frameworks and examples to facilitate the development of shared leadership practices.

### Beginning the journey to shared leadership

Resistance to the adoption of shared leadership approaches often arises from misunderstandings of both its purpose and outcomes. On the one hand, formal leaders may fear it will undermine decision-making and result in a reduction of their power and authority. On the other hand, employees may fear it is the latest in a long history of management tools that has the appearance of democratisation but in reality provides them with little voice<sup>41</sup>. The middle ground, occupied by claims that shared leadership can change the nature of the relationship between employees and organisations and has the potential to democratise the workplace, has had less impact despite being in keeping with the concept of academic independence and the heterarchical<sup>42</sup> division of labour, rights and authority that characterises higher education<sup>43</sup>.

This ambivalence is evidenced in recent Australian research into the experience of academic volunteers in projects designed to use a distributed leadership approach to improve learning and teaching<sup>44</sup>. While participants were confident they had the expertise needed, they did not regard themselves as leaders. However, following their experience in the project, they began to self-identify as leaders and, in some cases, went on to be appointed to formal leadership roles. Resistance is a natural response to change and requires genuine commitment and understanding if organisational leaders wish to build the necessary levels of trust, engagement and responsibility for effective shared leadership. The need to design new approaches stems from the fact that whilst shared leadership is not in itself more complicated than traditional leader theory, it does require more creative thought, planning, design and assessment. There is greater need to focus on how to support and develop collaboration, relationships and networks rather than simply develop the skills, traits and behaviours of individuals in formal leadership roles and structures. **Ti5**

This section of the stimulus paper explores what shared leadership looks like in practice. It presents a systematic design process for planning, actioning, observing and reflecting on shared leadership practice. This aim is to stimulate thinking and inform choices for action. Further, it is underpinned by a participative action research (PAR) approach that enables practitioners to introduce a change and at the same time be 'inside researchers', assessing the impact of the change through continuous loops of plan–act–observe–reflect<sup>45</sup>. The PAR approach was chosen as it parallels the conceptual basis of shared leadership in that it engages relevant parties, provides the flexibility to accommodate the dynamic nature of shared leadership, and enables adaptation over time.

Figure 4 illustrates the four components of the systematic design process, together with the resources to support action for each component<sup>46</sup>. Examples that illustrate the use of these resources are then provided. While the components are best approached in the order presented, they are flexible enough to underpin variations.

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45

Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014)

46

This approach is based on empirical research into distributed leadership in the Australian higher education sector that has been funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. Resources to assist are available from 6( c )10( ) ( 116 (





4.  $\infty$  – a plethora of activities to raise awareness and scaffold learning through professional

## Examples

In the UK, where universities conceive of strategic change initiatives in learning and teaching as opportunities to build shared approaches to

## Actioning shared leadership practice

The second component of the systematic framework for shared leadership (Figure 4, p15) is aimed at building leadership capability in all its complexity rather than suggesting it is simply a linear cause–effect process. Practising shared leadership requires both an understanding of the conceptual model that underpins it and detailed identification of the actions required to encourage and support its implementation.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted to explore a range of factors that impact upon leadership perceptions and practice, as argued in part 1 of this paper. This has led to the identification of a particular set of dimensions and values synthesised from a literature research into distributed leadership in the UK and supported by empirical research of the practice of distributed leadership in Australia<sup>63</sup>. These were identified through research into the synergies in the empirical experience of projects des ofvcpship i B i deans of thlundsa

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These 16 action items in Figure 5 (below) add detail to the environment (contextual dimension) shown in Figure 3, p11, with the four criteria adding detail to the three intersecting dimensions of structural/organisational, individual and social. The ASER in Figure 5 provides a systematic perspective on the range of factors that impact upon leadership perceptions and practice as identified in the first part of this paper. The ASER is designed at the intersection of four dimensions of shared leadership, each with an associated value descriptor and four criteria for shared leadership.

64 Sharma, Rifkin, Johnson, Tzioumis and Hill (2014)

65 Adapted from © Jones, Harvey, Lefoe and Ryland (2011)

## Examples

In Australia the ASER has been used to analyse, synthesise and interpret the experience of a project designed to develop 100 leaders of change in university teaching of science and mathematics across Australia and establish a self-sustaining national network of science and mathematics university educators supported through distributed leadership<sup>64</sup>.

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•	•	•	Itise of	In
Expertise of individuals is used to inform decisions.	Individuals participate	Individuals participate	Individuals participate	Individuals participate

66

Woodhouse (2000) cited in Stella and Woodhouse (2007)

67

Jones, Hadgraft, Harvey, Lefoe and Ryland (2014)

68

For details see

CE

69

Adapted from © Jones, Harvey, Lefoe and Ryland (2014)

## Observing shared leadership practice

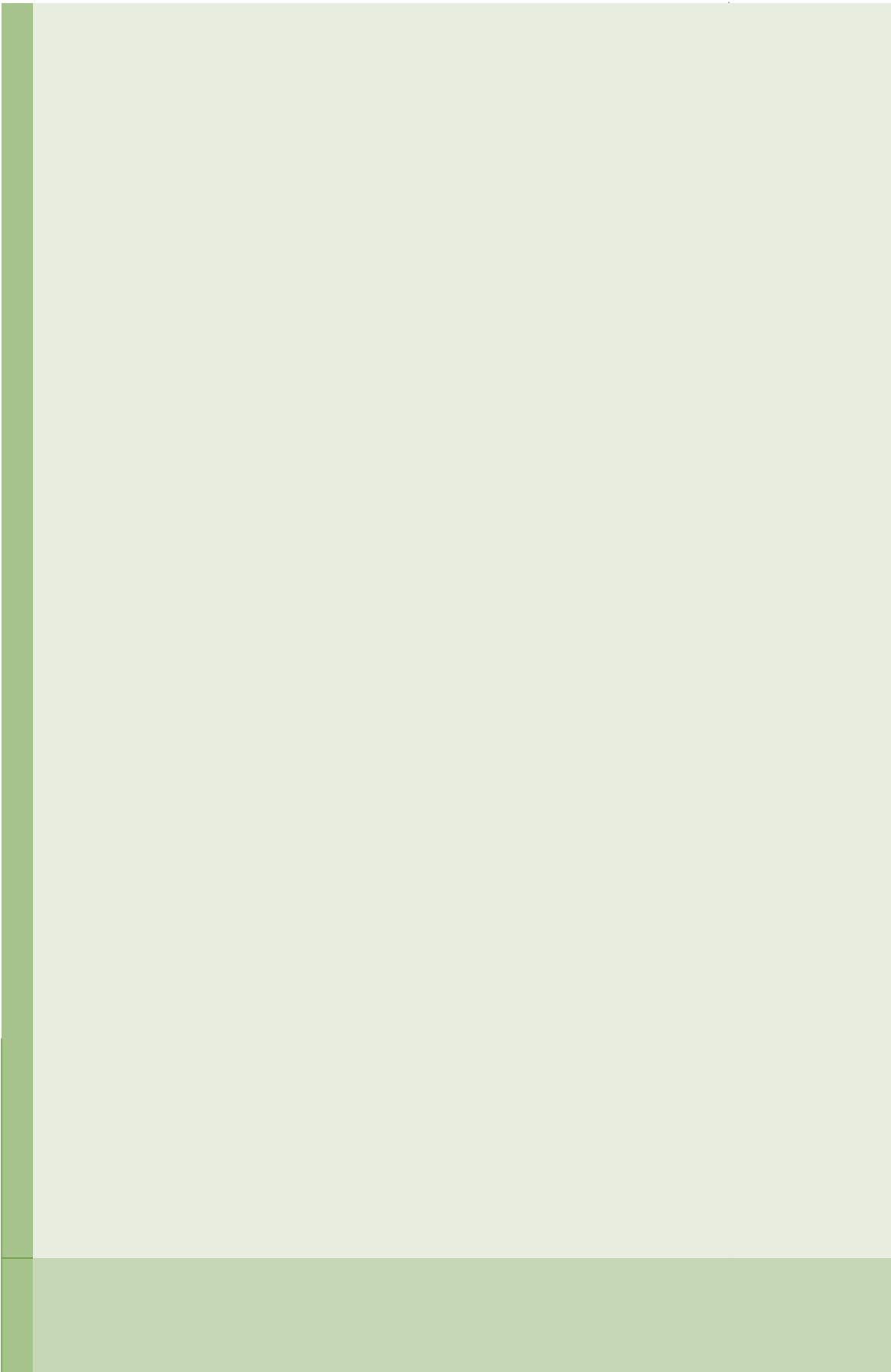
The third component of the systematic approach to shared leadership (Figure 4, p15) provides the opportunity to self-assess action taken to encourage shared leadership through benchmarking against good practice reference points. This is based on the concept of best practice benchmarking, which is recognised as appropriate for shared leadership given the iterative, formative process that is encouraged<sup>66</sup>.

These good practice examples have been adapted from those developed from a national survey that engaged 47 Australian HEIs that aimed to identify distributed leadership related systems and frameworks currently employed to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching across Australia's higher education sector (N=110)<sup>67</sup>. This national survey resulted in the development of a benchmarking framework, consisting of five domains – • • • • • , each with an identified scope, elements and good practice descriptors.

A summary table of the benchmarks is presented in Figure 6 (overleaf), with the detailed benchmark resource available from [www.distributedleadership.com.au](http://www.distributedleadership.com.au)

### Examples

In Australia, the benchmarks for distributed leadership were used to develop 11 case studies of distributed leadership implementation in curriculum design; student-staff learning; student engagement in first year in higher education; professional development; peer-assisted teaching teams; cross-discipline networks; sessional staff; and whole-of-institute leadership – in universities from five states and Papua New Guinea, plus a new approach to university-industry partnership (health sector in South Australia). The case studies were presented at a national summit on distributed leadership in Melbourne in 2014<sup>68</sup>.



70  
Hinton (2014)

## Reflecting on shared leadership practice

The fourth component of the systematic approach to shared leadership (Figure 4, p15) acknowledges that shared leadership involves a continuous flow of activity rather than residing in a static position or structure. It enables reflection on the lessons learnt from the practice of shared leadership in terms of impact at five levels – immediate (team), unit (department/school), part-of-institution, whole-of-institution and beyond institution.

A reflection resource, shown in Figure 7 (overleaf), was adapted from the Impact Planning Management and Evaluation Ladder (IMPEL) model used by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching<sup>70</sup>, with a series of reflective prompts provided to match each of these levels.

### Examples

In Australia, the IMPEL reflection resource was used by participants in a national summit on distributed leadership to reflect on the potential of the benchmarks for distributed leadership to contribute to the identification of impact of projects. The reflection activity identified where further assistance was needed, with an overwhelming identification of the need for more active endorsement of a distributed leadership approach by senior leaders.

→ • œ	•—œ Ž•«
→) ^—• • >	What impact has this had on developing a shared leadership approach amongst the participants directly engaged in the activities, for example building leadership capacity, increasing collaboration, advancing careers?
—“(•—•••—Ž“ •“—•	What impact has this had on developing a shared leadership approach in the institutional unit to which the participants belong, for example in spreading beyond the initial scope?
• Ž —“(•—•••—Ž“ ““ ŽŽ, Ž Ž ••“—(•—	What impact has this had on developing a shared leadership approach in a separate institutional unit based on a similar opportunity (or challenge) to that identified in the initial scope, for example in spreading to another department or function?
• Ž —“(•—•••—Ž“ ““ ŽŽ, {Ÿ(• )—	What impact has this had on developing a systematic approach to designing a shared leadership approach across distributed units of the institution, for example the design of a policy change to support the spread of shared leadership across departments or functions?
Ž(•—“(•—•••—Ž“ š Ž ^ Ž Ž ••“—(•—	What impact has this had on developing a shared leadership approach as a whole-of-institution model based on a similar opportunity (or challenge) to that identified in the initial scope, for example in being supported by incentives?
Ž(•—“(•—•••—Ž“ š Ž ^ {Ÿ(• )—	What impact has this had on developing a systemic approach to design a shared leadership approach as a whole of institution policy change? For example the design of a policy change to support the spread of shared leadership across the university?

## A systemic approach to shared leadership

In summary, shared leadership requires a systematic design process to support the work of shared leadership as it is practised, especially to recognise formally the commitment necessary at all levels to develop networks and relationships between people. This requires recognition of and commitment to leadership practice as a flexible and changing concept in which people dynamically engage in processes of leadership. To illustrate what these systematic design processes might look like, this section of the paper shared one such design which has four components:

1. A planning component – with a resource in the form of a conceptual framework
2. An action component – with a self-enabling action resource to assist the identification of action needed to support shared leadership
3. An observing component – with a resource to assist self-assessment through good practice benchmarks to evaluate shared leadership
4. A reflecting component – with a resource to enable lessons learnt from past practice to identify change to increase future impact.

The next section turns to enabling fuller engagement in shared leadership practice through leadership development for leaders and all who work in higher education.

*%o f*

1. What, if anything, are the main barriers to implementing a shared leadership approach in your context? How could these be addressed or reduced?
2. To what extent is a PAR process (planning, acting, observing and reflecting) embedded within your ways of working? Are any stages absent or under-represented, and what could be done raise their significance?
3. What examples can you identify in your workplace for each of the six components of the conceptual framework for shared leadership (engage, enable, enact, encourage, assess and emergent)? What mechanisms do you have in place for sharing good practice across your institution?
4. Use the ASER framework in Figure 5, p22 to map the extent to which a shared leadership approach is present in your organisation. Where are the key priorities for action and what can you do promote them? (Use the reflective prompts in Figure 7, p26 to help identify actions.)
5. Compare and contrast the benchmarks for shared leadership in Figure 6, p24 with performance and appraisal criteria and working practices within your own organisation. Do you notice any areas of conflict or inconsistency? What could be done to address this?
6. How could the tools and frameworks presented in this section be used to facilitate a process of reflection, debate and action around shared leadership in your organisation?

## Part 3: Engagement

An outline of the contexts for developing and sustaining shared leadership approaches and a glimpse of the practices already evident in higher education have been given in parts 1 and 2 of this paper. This section turns attention to promoting engagement with shared leadership through leadership development, individual and cultural change, and community building.

Encouraging people to develop a shared leadership repertoire, for themselves and others, is supported by emerging theory and practice on 'post-heroic' leadership. Here, the notion of shared leadership is underpinned by concepts such as relational leadership<sup>72</sup>, complexity leadership<sup>73</sup> and distributed leadership (as outlined in part 1), and acknowledges that the work of leadership in knowledge-intensive enterprises requires the deployment of the energies of all. In essence, these understandings share a view that 'leaders are in the business of energy management'<sup>74</sup> and that we are all responsible for the work of leadership, whether it is leading the self, coaching and mentoring others and/or through taking on a formal leadership position<sup>75</sup>.

For all the discussion so far to stimulate thinking about sharing, distributing and collectively taking responsibility for leadership, embedding this practice nevertheless relies on the motivation and commitment of individuals and teams. Willing investments of time and energy to intentionally develop broader and more critical perspectives of the self, as well as deeper understandings about roles and responsibilities for shared leadership in higher education, are crucial if engagement is to be anything more than rhetoric.

In order to promote and facilitate engagement with shared leadership, this section begins by considering the developmental focus at the level of 'mindsets' and what this means for individuals in order to engage in, build and sustain resilient leadership communities. It is argued that 'leadership and management development (LMD) activities are often commissioned with little consideration of the underlying theories and assumptions upon which they are based'<sup>76</sup>. Knowing more about these underlying influences promotes critical thinking capabilities that in turn tap into the necessary creativity and innovation required for knowledge work.

72

Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011); Uhl-Bien (2006)

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## Developing shared leadership mindsets

An understanding of individual, organisational and professional mindsets relating to leadership, culture, power and work are worthy sites of inquiry for shared leadership development in higher education. A mindset provides a particular lens through which to understand the world – something that we do all the time (both consciously and unconsciously) and that has a significant impact on knowledge and behaviour, as Krugman argues:



The aim of this section is to stimulate discussion about what kinds of leadership mindsets are needed for leadership in 21<sup>st</sup>-century higher education, where resources are scant and knowledge work is challenging. One way of describing these contexts is as VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous), an acronym first coined by the US military in the 1990s and now applied to leadership and management more generally<sup>78</sup>.

For leadership development, this suggests that building and supporting a capacity for shared leadership requires a conspicuous, planned and systematic investment in shared leadership development.

78. Krugman, P. (2008) 'The Power of Mindsets', *Journal of Management Education*, 32(1), pp. 1-10.



Mindsets that privilege creativity have been chosen for this part of the discussion, given that creativity and innovation are necessary elements for knowledge-intensive work. Defined as the production of new and useful ideas concerning products, services, processes and procedures<sup>80</sup>, creativity has become something of a catchword for thinking differently about leadership and work where knowledge is the means of production and the tools of the trade are inside our heads. It is as good a concept as any to turn leadership attention to 'soft' and relational skills that support creativity, such as the harnessing of ideas, innovation, critical thinking and cognitive flexibility. Yet, depending on our underlying values and mindsets, soft skills that support creativity may be viewed as either crucial (in mindsets amenable to knowledge work) or frivolous (in mindsets more amenable to order, control, efficiency and certainty, that underpinned the industrial era).

In terms of shared leadership development, the quality of thinking and action is not only the domain of the leader: engagement is to be encouraged at all levels. Max DePree captures this shift when advocating that leadership performance should be measured not only by 'the quality of the head, but the tone of the body. The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers'<sup>81</sup>.

## Engaging in knowledge-era leadership mindsets for leadership development

Attention now turns to leadership development that focuses on the individual's interest and responsibility for leading the self and a commitment to developing a 'shared and mutual sense of leadership identity'<sup>82</sup>. There are no easy answers as





92  
McLagan and Nel, 1995, p.48

93  
Sinclair, 2007

94  
Uhl-Bien, 2006, 2011

95  
Fletcher (2004) p.649

96  
Schein (2013) p.9

## Social interactions

Following on from the last point, that conversations are very much entwined with knowledge work, the quality of that work is largely dependent on participation, social interactions and relationships. McLagan and Nel, for example, argue that:



The challenge is, as always, how to invest in the development of soft skills, which are the foundation for good-quality conversations and relationships when budgets in higher education are largely determined by a focus on efficiency rather than effectiveness, engagement or emancipation<sup>93</sup>.

Nevertheless, there are signs that these sites for leadership development are occurring in the sector and elsewhere. Specific concepts that support this work include 'relational leadership'<sup>94</sup> and Fletcher's leadership typology organised around the principles of leadership as practice (shared and distributed); leadership as social process (interactions); and leadership as learning (outcomes):



Schein's more recent work, concerned with 'building positive relationships and better organisations' through an emphasis on asking rather than telling, is also a useful reference for this work. He argues that in order to build trusting relationships, conversations are 'an interactive process in which each party invests and gets something of value in return'<sup>96</sup>.

## Examples

102



103

Jones and Harvey (2016  
forthcoming)

104

Day (2000)

105

Kim and Mauborgne (2014) p2

106

Indeed, they were key aspects of the Human Relations Movement in the early 20th century (see for example, Barnard, 1938; Follett, 1924; 1928; Mayo, 1919).

## Examples

Participants in the Leadership Foundation's key senior programmes are able to apply for Fellowship of the Leadership Foundation<sup>102</sup>, which has been awarded to participants from some 50 universities in the UK. Applicants need to demonstrate that they have met criteria which include demonstrating impact of their own leadership development on their institution and, critically, providing evidence that they have taken responsibility for and contributed to the development of others. Fellowships are valued by senior leaders, including the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex, who supported the creation of an in-house Fellowship at the university, and provided evidence of his own leadership, which led to his being awarded Fellowship in 2014.

In Australia, a project funded by the national government agency to improve the quality of learning and teaching across the Australian higher education sector found that communities of practice (CoPs) were overtly acknowledged as an important means by which collaboration is achieved. The CoPs established as part of four projects funded between 2006 and 2009 were characterised as bringing together a community of people to share their practice in a specific aspect of learning and teaching (assessment practice, online teaching, improving the student experience and developing scholarly leadership). Reflection by the participants identified a range of behaviours needed for people to engage in shared approaches to leadership, including being adaptable and resilient, sharing goals, being willing to listen and having the ability to work outside comfort zones. The development of these behaviours was assisted by facilitators and mentors who supported the development of appreciative inquiry, reflective practice and reflective journaling<sup>103</sup>.

## Building sustainable and resilient leadership communities

In this part of the paper, we have demonstrated how leader development that focuses on developing individual 'human capital' can complement and facilitate broader leadership development, with its focus on the development of shared 'social capital'<sup>104</sup>. We have indicated some of the ways in which universities and other HEIs are promoting 'ingenuity, creativity and energy [which] are among the most essential ingredients to organisations' health, wellbeing and high performance today and in the future'<sup>105</sup>. These ideas are not new<sup>106</sup> but do not always receive the recognition and reward they deserve within traditional leadership mindsets.

The concept of shared leadership and the approaches described throughout this report can go a long way in promoting more flexible and inclusive leadership practices but ultimately, for durable and sustained engagement, these practices need to become embedded within the cultural fabric of the organisation. There can be huge differences in culture and practices within the same organisation and much that can be learnt from investigating how and why collective engagement is greater amongst some groups than others.

Barker describes leadership as 'a process of change where the ethics of individuals are integrated into the mores of a community'<sup>107</sup>. From this perspective, leadership development is an important forum for negotiating shared values and purpose and ultimately a process of community development. If, as indicated in part 1 of this paper, academics often struggle to engage with the concept of leadership and find themselves conflicted in their roles as leaders and managers, then there is a serious limit on how sustainable or resilient our academic communities can be.

Sharing frustrations and concerns about academic work and the changing nature of the sector can be cathartic, giving people the opportunity to realise that they are not alone in their dilemmas and helping them come to terms with the tensions they face<sup>108</sup>. It may not be something that can be easily addressed within institutional and professional development programmes though, and highlights the value of broader forums for networking and engagement with peers<sup>109</sup>.

The tendency for most leadership development interventions to focus on individual skills and behaviours neglects perhaps the most important question of all – ~ • • <sup>110</sup> Leading and following are choices and without a clear sense of connection to others and a shared endeavour, we are unlikely to do either. Within the sector, some of the greatest impacts of leadership development arise through 'identity work' where participants are given the opportunity to explore questions such as 'who am I?' and 'where am I going?'<sup>111</sup> and to work through tensions between multiple social and professional identities.

**107**

Barker (1997) p352

**108**

Bolden, Gosling and O'Brien (2014)

**109**

Such as the Leadership Foundation for higher Education, LH Martin Institute, Higher Education Academy and professional associations

**110**

Go ee and Jones (2006)

**111**

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003); Sinclair (2007)

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1. What are the dominant mindsets within your organisation, and how do these impact upon day-to-day leadership practice?
2. What are the main ways in which you have learnt and developed your own practices of self-in-relation, social interactions, dialogue through learning conversations and growth-in-connection with others?
3. To what extent do you actively facilitate the development of these 'knowledge-era' mindsets and capabilities amongst others?
4. Do you and those with whom you work see yourselves as part of a 'community', and to what extent do members of that community actively engage in governance and leadership?
5. What have been the most significant factors that have influenced your own approach to leadership? To what extent do these constrain and/or facilitate your engagement with shared leadership?
6. Drawing on the insights raised by this stimulus paper, what are the main development priorities for you, your organisation and the other communities to which you belong?



# Conclusion

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# Stimulus paper

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**ship**  
**Foundation**  
for Higher Education

Peer House  
8-14 Verulam Street  
London  
WC1X 8LZ

**T** +44 (0) 20 3468 4810  
**F** +44 (0) 20 3468 4811  
**E** [info@lfhe.ac.uk](mailto:info@lfhe.ac.uk)  
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