Rethinking Leadership in Public Organizations

Article · September 2009

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199226443.003.0020

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Jean-Louis Denis, CHSRF/CIHR Chair
Département d'administration de la santé,
Université de Montréal,
C.P. 6192 Succursale Centre-Ville,
Montréal, Canada H3C 3J7
Tel: (514)-343-6031; Fax: (514)-343-2448
jean-louis.denis@umontreal.ca

Ann Langley
HEC Montréal
3000, chemin de la Côte Sainte-Catherine
Montréal, Canada H3T 2A7
Tel: (514) 340-7748; Fax: (514) 340-5690
ann.langley@hec.ca

Linda Rouleau
HEC Montréal
3000, chemin de la Côte Sainte-Catherine
Montréal, Canada H3T 2A7
Tel: (514) 340-5669; Fax: (514) 340-5635
linda.rouleau@hec.ca

August 2004

(accepted for publication in the Oxford Handbook of Public Administration)

> *"By leadership, most people mean the capacity of someone to direct and energize the willingness of people in social units to take actions to achieve goals…Leadership in one sense can draw mainly on blunt power, but usually the term implies legitimate authority" (Rainey, 1991: 157).*

> *"The failure of revolutionary leaders to achieve their proclaimed claims – liberty, equality, prosperity – is also taken as evidence of the minor impact of leadership. Yet it is not that simple; after a revolution, its supporters often divide and fall out among themselves…and once they attain absolute power, many leaders are blinded by it and indulge in megalomaniac fantasies. Thus it is no surprise that revolutions often fail to achieve their pre-revolutionary aims. However, this does not mean leadership is insignificant, only that its impact is complex" (Goldstone, 2001: 157).*

The notion of leadership has a long history in the administrative sciences and in popular management writings. Leadership is at the heart of what seem to make things happen in groups, organizations or societies. In this article, we will first provide an overview of some of the dominant conceptions of leadership in the scholarly literature on organizational behaviour and management. We will then examine previous treatments of this topic in the public administration literature before offering three alternative conceptions that we suggest merit further development. These conceptions are grounded in a series of novel developments in sociology and organization theory that we shall argue can enrich thinking about leadership in public organizations because they recognize the pluralistic nature of the organizational context within which the leaders of public sector organizations operate as well as the dynamic and collective nature of leadership processes in these settings.

Conceptions of leadership in organization studies

We will first briefly review the conceptions of leadership that represent landmarks in scholarly works on management and organizations, taking a historical approach. In the 40s and 50s, researchers focused mainly on the identification of traits that ensure exceptional leadership capabilities (Leatt and Porter, 2003; Rainey, 1991; Bryman, 1996; Stogdill, 1948). According to this approach, leadership is intrinsic to a given individual – it is not the result of socialization or

learning. Although these studies identified a vast array of traits exhibited by exceptional leaders (House and Aditya, 1997), it is difficult to establish a consistent set of findings across leaders from this body of work (Stodgill, 1948; Bryman, 1996; Rainey, 1991). The "traits" approach reappeared in new guise in the 1980s in the form of "upper echelons" theory (Hambrick and Mason, 1984) leading to a series of studies that attempted, with varying degrees of success, to relate the demographic characteristics of top management team members to variables such as consensus and performance. One of the interesting aspects of this revival to which we shall return is that its unit of analysis is the top management team (i.e. leadership group) rather than the individual leader. Another feature of interest is the emphasis on leadership as the capacity to relate an organization to its environment (so-called "strategic leadership") rather than the more internally oriented focus associated with earlier work (Boal and Hooijberg, 2001).

The second stream in leadership studies emphasizes not the attributes of individuals but their behaviours in collective settings. These studies try to relate generic behaviours or leadership styles to levels of work-group performance or satisfaction (Leatt and Porter, 2003; Bryman, 1996; House and Aditya, 1997). These studies dating mainly from the 50s and 60s used questionnaires to inquire about the perceptions that followers have of the behaviours of their leader. They suggested that leaders with *"high levels of both consideration and initiating structure had the best leadership style"* (Bryman, 1996: 278). However, critics have questioned the rigor of the methods, the theoretical basis behind the research in this stream, and the lack of consideration for different contexts for the exercise of leadership (House and Aditya, 1997).

In order to better understand and explain variations in the impact of different leadership behaviours, some researchers therefore tried to take into account the influence of various situational or contextual factors using a contingency approach (Fiedler; 1967; Bryman, 1996).

For example, Fiedler (1967) empirically identified two leadership types: a relationship-oriented type and a task-oriented type. These two types were found to be potentially effective if they are adapted to some situational or contextual variables. The contingency approach led over time to the development of an increasingly complex set of leadership effectiveness models (e.g., path-goal theory, vertical-dyad linkage theory, cognitive resource theory, leader-member exchange theory) (House and Aditya, 1997). The burgeoning numbers of variables and contingent relationships incorporated into these models suggests that this approach to leadership research may have reached its limits.

According to Bryman (1996: 280) a new approach to leadership study emerged during the 1980s: *"…a conception of the leader as someone who defines organizational reality through the articulation of a vision which is a reflection of how he or she defines an organization's mission and the values which will support it. Thus, the New Leadership approach is underpinned by a depiction of leaders as managers of meaning rather than in terms of an influence process".* Such a conception of leadership recalls Weber's work on charisma. This conception is also reflected in the seminal work of Selznick (1957) on *"Leadership in administration,"* where leadership is described as a process of institutionalization of meaning *"to infuse with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand"* (1957: 17). This approach is well illustrated by the work of Burns (1978), Bass (1985) and Bennis and Nanus (1985) on transformational leadership. According to Bass (1996), transformational leadership is based on four main attributes: idealized influence or charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. In more concrete terms, a transformational leader is a model for others in the organization, provides a plausible and attractive vision of the organization's future, fosters a more reflexive approach to practices and current ways of organizing and is able to pay attention

to individuals' specificities. This type of leadership is opposed to transactional leadership based on contingent reward and management processes that pay attention to exceptions with a view to improving or adjusting the behaviours of subordinates. Again, according to Bass (1996), transformational leadership amplifies transactional leadership but does not replace it.

The work on transformational leadership devotes more attention to leadership and change than previous conceptions. However, the emphasis on "great leaders" typical of this approach has its own limits (Bryman, Gillingwater and McGuiness, 1996: 851). The transformational leadership perspective does not take into account the informal and complex dynamics that are at the basis of achieving influence and sustaining legitimacy. In his review of leadership theories, Bryman (1996) refers to emerging alternative conceptions of leadership. Amongst other ideas, he refers to the term "dispersed leadership" which may foster a more "processual" approach to leadership research (see also Pettigrew, 1992). Such a perspective pays more attention to how leadership emerges in concrete social or organizational settings and to interactions between organizational context and leaders capabilities. Leadership is considered less as the result of single individuals but more as a collective process where individuals negotiate their position with respect to others in more unpredictable ways than a rational view of organizations would suggest. This more collective and processual perspective on leadership has driven some of our own research (e.g., Denis, Lamothe and Langley, 2001) and will form the basis for discussion later in this paper.

Conceptions of leadership in public administration

The notion of leadership is generally associated with the image of a highly autonomous, powerful and influential manager who determines the destiny of his or her organization. This description is obviously too simplistic even for private sector organizations. It falls particularly wide of the mark in the public sector. As many authors have noted, public sector organizations

are different (Rainey, 1991; Nutt and Backoff, 1992). Leaders in public organizations rarely have undisputed sway over people or unlimited autonomy to determine strategic orientations. In fact, these organizations can often be described as inherently "pluralistic" in nature (Denis et al., 2001) as they are characterized by multiple objectives and diffuse power structures, often extending beyond organizational boundaries. Indeed, because of technological and environmental changes (Alter and Hage, 1991) and the evolving nature of social problems (Bryson and Crosby, 1992), public organizations are becoming more and more involved in complex networks. This situation of increased pluralism represents new problems for would-be leaders. As Cohen and March (1986: 195) indicated in their discussion of the dilemmas underlying the university president's role: *"When purpose is ambiguous, ordinary theories of decision making and intelligence become problematic. When power is ambiguous, ordinary theories of social order and control become problematic"*. In addition, public organizations in today's world operate through a complex and often contradictory web of rules, procedures and safeguards. This proliferation of rules and routines, often applied in a context of scarce resources, both constrains and enables (Feldman, 2000) the people who are charged with applying, developing, using and manoeuvring among them – and in particular the leaders of public organizations.

Given this complex organizational context of diffuse power, divergent objectives and burgeoning rules, the central dilemma of leadership in public organizations can be summarized by the following question: Can leaders intervene proactively or not in public organizations? Two contrasting views of leadership can be identified from current works on public sector organizations: an "entrepreneurial" view (Borins, 2002; Boyett, 1997; Lewis, 1980; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Osborne & Plastrik, 1997; Rainey, 1991; Schmid, 1992) and a "stewardship"

view (Redford, 1969; Davis, Schoorman and Donaldson, 1997; Saltman and Ferroussier-Davis, 2000; Terry, 1995; Cooper and Lewis, 1992; Fairholm, 1991; Riccucci, 1995 in Van Wart, 2003; Ackroyd, Hughes and Soothill, 1989). These two views hold different assumptions about the legitimacy of administrative discretion in public administration (Van Wart, 2003).

The "entrepreneurial view" focuses on the innovative behaviours of leaders in public sector organizations (Borins, 2002). It emphasized the increased attention by leaders/ executives to the demands of the environment and to the preferences of various stakeholder groups (Boyett, 1997). According to the "entrepreneurial model", the achievement of more effective public services depends on the creativity and dynamism of strong leaders who do not feel constrained by the weight of tradition or formal rules (Osborne & Plastrik, 1997; Ferlie et al., 1996; Pollitt, 1998; Friedberg, 1993; Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). To limit the risks of opportunistic behaviour among autonomous leaders, a very explicit and strong incentive scheme is proposed (Osborne & Plastrik, 1997) analogous to that found in the private sector.

The "entrepreneurial view" of public leaders is close to the model of "transformational leadership" described by Bass (1996) and Burns (1978) and to the "decentralized-external" pattern of executive management described by Schmid (1992) in discussing current developments in the management of human services organizations. The feasibility of this model of public leadership is highly contingent on the nature of the relationship between political leadership and people in charge of public bureaucracies or agencies. In order to acquire sufficient trust from political authority, public leaders have to value and strive for increased accountability regarding the performance of their own organizations (Borins, 2002). The mechanisms by which such accountability can be secured is a major issue in the evolution of public management practice. Some analyses of the "New Public Management" in the UK suggest that new

managerial dynamics may fosters a certain democratic deficit in the governance of public services (Ferlie et al., 1996). Managerial discretion may be achieved at the expense of the preservation of public service values (Terry, 1995; 1998).

The contrasting "stewardship view" takes a much more conservative stance on the role of public leaders. Public leaders are seen as the guardians of public goods and values (Redford, 1969; Saltman, and Ferroussier-Davis, 2000; Terry, 1995; Cooper and Lewis, 1992). The legitimacy of public leaders comes from their conformity to the wishes of democratically elected politicians. The elected parliament or legislature decides on policies and the overarching goals of public systems and services. Public leaders execute policies and orientations decided at a superior level. Conservatism is seen as a positive value that guarantees the continuity of public institutions and services. Conformity to bureaucratic rules is not an impediment to the delivery of effective public services, but the means by which public leaders ensure democratic accountability for their decisions and actions. In this view, innovation is appreciated only as long as it contributes to the maintenance of traditional values of service that legitimate public sector production.

In theory then, the stewardship model focuses less on innovation and adaptation than the entrepreneurial model. However with its focus on public service values, it does encourage a balance between accountability to political authority and sensitivity to citizen expectations (Mintzberg, 1996). Public leaders are necessarily involved in bargaining and transactions with various stakeholders groups (Schmid, 1992; Gortner, Mahler and Nicholson, 1986; Van Wart, 2003). However, undoubtedly, pressures to renew public services represent a challenge for the stewardship perspective.

The issue of effective leadership in public organizations thus easily gives rise to a philosophical debate. On the one hand, proponents of the entrepreneurial model insist that public leaders not only can but *should* be encouraged to intervene dynamically to transform their organizations using conceptions of strategic leadership derived from the private sector (a transformational model). On the other hand, proponents of the stewardship model remain preoccupied with issues of democratic accountability (remaining closer to a transactional model). A realistic picture of leadership in public organizations probably falls somewhere between these two poles. In public organizations, values and normative pressures play a critical role in the assessment of the legitimacy of decisions and actions, and intense political pressures and autonomous professional groups place leaders in a situation of constant negotiations. The alignment of these different sets of pressures and obligations with needs to improve the delivery of public services implies that the practice of leadership will be particularly complex. The "entrepreneurial" and "stewardship" models of public leadership do not tell us much about the processes that may contribute to achieving integrity and service effectiveness in such contexts.

A multifaceted perspective on leadership in public organizations

We argued above that traditional approaches to leadership have remained largely static. Although they incorporate a wide array of variables associated with leadership behaviours, contexts and outcomes, they rarely situate these phenomena dynamically or focus on the specific actions of leaders. In addition, the emphasis has usually been on isolated individuals in formal leadership positions. Because of the complexity and ambiguity of power in the public organization context, we argue that research on leadership in public administration needs to focus on processes and skills that may or may not always reside in formally designated leaders. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the complex emergent activity which is dispersed

throughout the whole political and administrative context and its effects over time. To this end, a perspective founded upon three new theoretical frameworks from the social sciences will be proposed. The three foundational frameworks have been chosen because they appear particularly relevant to contexts characterized by diffuse power, divergent values and complex systems of rules and routines: they are Actor Network Theory (Callon, 1986 & Latour, 1987), Conventionalist Theory (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991) and Social Practice Theories (Giddens, 1984; de Certeau, 1984). Together, these frameworks invite researchers and practitioners to pay greater attention to how strategic leadership is sustained through networks, how it is negotiated among people with competing values and how it is constituted through daily practices.

A network perspective

In the vast literature on leadership, networking is becoming more and more recognized as a key characteristic of leaders (Marion & Bacon, 1999; Regine & Lewin, 2000). Until now, it has been largely defined as a notable organizing skill (Hosking, 1991). Network leadership refers to the individual ability to establish direct and indirect interpersonal communication patterns of influence (Brass & Krackhardt, 1999; Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002). However, networking is not exclusively an ability to constitute interpersonal links and make contacts with people. It is also a set of activities having structural power effects (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001) which are critical to understanding the distinctiveness of leadership in public administration. In organizations where power is diffuse, success or failure of the strategic process depends, among other things, on the capacity of leaders to constitute and maintain strong and durable networks. The particular importance of networks in the public sector has been underlined in the classic work of Laumann and Knoke (1987) and other researchers (e.g., Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997).

Actor-Network Theory (or ANT) can provide the theoretical anchoring needed to understand how a leader can become more successful in building networks. ANT was originally developed by the French sociologists of science Michel Callon (1986) and Bruno Latour (1987) as an approach to understanding the emergence and dominance of technological and scientific ideas. It is a combined methodological and conceptual tool which considers technologies and the networks of human and non-human actors (or "actants") linked to them as mutually constitutive. The technology and the actor-network are built up gradually and simultaneously as central actors (called "translators" in ANT's specialized language) succeed in mobilizing other participants and non-human entities as supporters of their definition of the technology while simultaneously redefining it in terms that can maintain this support. Technological artefacts become taken for granted ("irreversible") as the actor-networks surrounding them are solidified. Actors are attached to the network as the artefact in question is defined in such as way as to "translate" their needs and their identities, with different actors being quite likely to interpret the emerging "object" and their own role with respect to it in different ways.

The theory as developed by its originators involves an extensive and sometimes rather hermetic set of terms to describe its various elements. For example, theorists speak of "obligatory passage points" as the creation of nodes through which all actors must pass in order to obtain what they need. Theorists also talk of four sub-processes or "moments" of translation: "problematization" in which translators attempt to define an issue and offer an "obligatory passage point" drawing an initial set of actors together to solve it; "intéressement" in which translators determine and fix the interests of key actors so that they are willing to stay with an emerging project; "enrolment" in which representatives of main groups of actors are assigned "roles" and drawn together to build an alliance; "mobilization" in which the actor-network is extended beyond an initial group.

This set of conceptual and methodological tools can be relevant to examining leadership in public sector in three ways. First, the theory describes and explains how despite fragmentation of power and goals, it is possible to build networks of support around common definitions of an object so that they become taken for granted. Second, in this framework, a change, a "strategy" or any other managerial project can be taken as equivalent to a technological artefact or scientific discovery and thus the basis for the construction of a network. Third, ANT also offers a series of ideas about how such projects might be created, implemented and supported. Leadership, within this definition, becomes a "translation" process with all the potential elements of problematization, intéressement, enrollment, and mobilization leading potentially (but not deterministically) to the irreversibility of a well-defined project or initiative.

From the ANT perspective, the leader is a translator who will be recognized by his or her ability to pull together a powerful alliance with diverse internal and external actors. As a translator, an effective leader needs to "enroll" a network of actors so that an object such as a strategy or project may come to exist. An effective leader will recognize the need to think simultaneously in terms of both the project and the networks of support that they can engage (Demers & Charbonneau, 2001). He or she will be drawn to consider the diverse meanings that various project definitions may have for others and how those meanings might be reconstructed either discursively or practically to render them more or less attractive. He or she will also be more sensitive to the dynamic and shifting nature of consensus as well as the importance of irreversible investments in solidifying both networks and strategic projects.

An example of public leadership in the network mode: Strategic change in health care

Our own research in the health care field reveals the relevance of an actor-network lens to the understanding of public sector leadership. An example comes from a study of strategic change in

a large suburban hospital (Denis et al., 1996; Denis et al., 2001). Interestingly, the focal leader or "translator" in this case was not the Chief executive but a community health physician who moved through various administrative positions. Nevertheless, this individual was instrumental in co-constructing over time with several other key actors a network of support around a strategic change project that was to fundamentally transform the organization's mission: the acquisition of a university affiliation.

The story of this strategic leadership episode is a fascinating one because of the cyclical and recursive dynamics associated with the co-evolving nature of the change project, the actor-network supporting it, and the position of the focal leader over time. Initially, the leader was able to mobilize internal support for university affiliation because it was expressed (or "translated") in developmental terms. It was particularly popular with a group of younger medical specialists and was seen by almost everyone as an opportunity to enhance the organization's prestige. The positive image was leveraged into an enhanced role for the initiator of the project and the creation of a strong alliance among the hospital's administrative and medical leaders. This group pursued the university affiliation, extending the network of support beyond the organization's boundaries. The proposed teaching hospital mission happened to fit with the needs of a smaller university's Faculty of Medicine to broaden its base in order to ensure survival – thus, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine joined the network. The support of the government (and a particular government minister) was obtained in exchange for an organizational commitment to budget reductions. However, through the process of attaching external actors to the network, the project itself was modified: it had to fit the needs of the Faculty of medicine (implying new modes of physician remuneration) and it had to meet the governments' financial conditions. The project was implemented by the leadership coalition, but its consequences were such that internal

enthusiasm was considerably reduced. In other words, the network of internal support became fragmented. This eventually led to the departure of the focal leader and other members who had supported the initiative. Yet the hospital has maintained its university affiliation. In the long term, this initiative has undoubtedly strengthened the position of this hospital and enhanced its value to the community. The focal leader moved on to become the Associate Dean of the (same) Faculty of Medicine and eventually Director of a Regional Health Board.

This vignette illustrates the relevance of actor-network theory to an understanding leadership in the public sector. Actor-network theory takes us beyond a static conception of leadership. Leadership initiatives that build and extend networks of support around strategic projects inevitably change the projects themselves. That is the nature of translation. The "intéressement" of new actors may result in the "désintéressement" of others. Conversely, the evolution of strategic projects and their associated networks can also lead to changes in the political positions of focal leaders, as clearly happened in this case. This dynamic and processual perspective surely provide a much richer understanding of leadership processes than more traditional variance models in which leadership behaviours are posited to lead to fixed outcomes frozen in time.

A value perspective

Leaders in public sector organizations must not only deal with dispersed power. They also face the challenge of generating sustainable decisions and strategies in a context of multiple or conflicting objectives. They often work with actors belonging to different institutional spheres and supporting divergent viewpoints, interests and values (Townley, 2002; Ferlie et al. 1996). A successful leader will therefore have to incorporate a variety of logics or rationalities into organizational strategies which will be legitimate as long as the ordering of multiple logics is acceptable for the various stakeholders inside and outside the organization. Put another way,

interacting with people supporting different logics of action necessitates finding a way to articulate appropriate and viable collaborative arrangements that reconcile competing values.

Over the last fifteen years, some researchers have given attention to the paradoxical nature of leadership. Amongst others, Quinn (1988) proposed the competing values framework in order to explain how leaders deal with divergent requirements coming from the competing demands of stakeholders. Quinn defines eight leadership roles on which strategic leaders can draw on depending on who they are interacting with. Here, leadership resides in the ability to exhibit contradictory and opposing behaviours. Following Quinn, other researchers have demonstrated that leaders who perform multiple leadership roles and are more likely to use them are more effective (Denison et al. 1995; Hooijberg, 1996). Although this so-called "behavioural complexity perspective" may be useful for understanding leadership in the public sector, it does not explain the processes by which a leader juxtaposes or reconciles divergent frames.

A recent body of work by French sociologists (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, 2000; Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999), the conventionalist school, may be helpful in redirecting the behavioural complexity perspective to leadership as it pays attention to the processes by which a compromise among competing rationalities may become possible. In conventionalist terms, the world is structured around a limited set of fundamental logics or rationalities. More specifically, following an in-depth analysis of classic work in political philosophy, Boltanski and Thévenot (1991; 2000) identified six "worlds", "cities" or constitutive value frameworks that structure social arrangements: the "inspirational," "domestic," "opinion," "civic," "market" and "industrial" worlds (see also Amblard et al., 1996; Durand and Weil, 1997).

The “inspirational” world refers to the legitimacy of the spontaneous vision, imagination and creativity of the artist. The “domestic” world is a world of tradition ruled by the principles of loyalty and the respect of authority based on assigned roles, status and duties among individuals. The world of “opinion” or reputation values the achievement of public recognition and prestige. The “civic” world values civic duties and the suppression of particular interests in the pursuit of the common good. The “market” world is driven by the interests of competing actors who take part in a commercial game in order to achieve their personal goals. Finally, the “industrial” world is driven by the search for efficiency and standardization.

Despite a limited set of recurrent value frameworks, collective settings or situations will rely on a mix of the different worlds according to conventionalist theory. To gain respect in a given world, individuals have to show the attributes that fit best and incarnate their superior principle. Because individuals in an organization will not always identify with similar worlds and because a single individual may identify with multiple worlds, the invention and negotiation of conventions becomes critical to ensure coordination and cooperation. A convention is an artefact or an object that crystallizes the compromise between various logics in a specific context. For example, a convention might be a quality improvement policy in a public service organization where the rules of the market and the industrial worlds act in synergy.

A leader, in conventionalist terms, is someone who will work in order to stimulate a set of processes that generate accommodation or compromise between values that compete for legitimacy. From a conventionalist perspective, an organizational strategy could be defined as a convention and by extension, the processes used to formulate strategies may be an occasion to affirm or reaffirm certain core values. Thus, an effective leader will demonstrate his or her virtuosity in competencies or behaviours that are viewed as appropriate with respect to different

worlds. A successful leader must be able to make an appropriate reading of the institutional order because the analysis of prevalent values is critical to reduce the potential for open conflict. Specific organizational devices (committees, internal contracts, incentive schemes, performance indicators) may help him or her to achieve compromise because they represent institutional mechanisms for mediating between the different values while legitimizing his or her own status.

From this perspective, a successful leader will be someone who is able to navigate with credibility between different worlds and also someone who is able to represent the incarnation of the worlds with which organizational members identify. When the competing values of different worlds are intense, one approach to leadership may involve co-leaders (e.g., the administrative and artistic directors of a museum; or the administrative and clinical leaders of a health care organization) who individually represent different worlds but can bridge their differences at the personal level within the "domestic" world (Chiapello, 1998).

The strategic leader, for the conventionalist, can also be conceived of as a *"critic."* The role of the *"critic"* is central to the argument of Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) in their analysis of contemporary capitalism. In fact, it is only by explicitly contesting dominant or emergent logics that organization members can secure an influential role in the strategy formation process. In conventionalist term, the leader is someone who through his or her personal association with highly valued worlds is able to open up and renegotiate established conventions leading to enhanced organizational and personal legitimacy. Without active critics, organizational change will take shape according to previous arrangements among the different worlds. Critical thinking questions the normative assumptions behind current strategies or developments (which worlds are favoured or rejected) and may help in fostering change.

An example of public leadership in the conventionalist mode: the National Film Board

This example draws on work by Mintzberg and McHugh (1985) on strategy formation at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), as well as other public sources. The NFB is a cultural agency that produces and distributes films reflecting the Canadian identity and reality. It is financed by the federal government of Canada. In this type of organization, a continuous tension exists between the need to preserve the autonomy of filmmakers (the "inspirational" world) and the need to set up an efficient organization ("the industrial world") to respond to external demands (government bureaucracy, etc.). John Grierson, the founding leader of the NFB incarnated various logics: the inspirational world based on strong identification with and expertise in the British tradition of documentary film, as well as the civic world exemplified by a strong sense of duty and patriotism. By holding these two logics (inspirational, civic) in constructive synthesis, the founding leader was able to secure the growth and legitimacy of the NFB during the second World War while maintaining the commitment of its film-makers.

However, the end of the war saw a decline of civic values, or at least of patriotism, as a basis for the legitimacy of the NFB. The role of the NFB was contested by private film companies (market logic). The autonomy of the filmmakers (the inspirational world) was also criticized for its relationship with certain subversive political forces. The founding leader left and was replaced by an internal member of the NFB and then in 1949 by Arthur Irwin, an external person without film or government experience. In order to restore a balance between the autonomy of the inspirational world, the demand to rationalize administratively and to maintain the role of NFB in the promotion of civic values, Irwin negotiated an agreement with government officials: a "new film act" (in fact, a "convention") that ensured growth. Design and conventions were used to operationalize a viable compromise between the inspirational and the industrial worlds.

The following periods were marked by continuous evolution stimulated by the leadership of film-makers in the service of creativity and as well as by the need of the NFB to respond to pressures for rationalization while at the same time paying attention to its role as a promoter of civic values. Throughout its history, leaders at the NFB have played various roles in securing or reaffirming a viable compromise between potentially conflicting logics. In a striking example, one leader of the mid-eighties produced a document entitled "Efficacité créatrice" (or "Creative Efficiency") that became the basis for yet another evolving compromise between inspirational and industrial logics at a time that the NFB's survival was again threatened. Such leaders acted as "critics", periodically shaking up the organization in order to protect the work of film-makers or to stimulate it. The capacity to align internal production with external expectations is an important component of leading at the confluence of conflicting values.

Tensions such as those encountered at the NFB between the inspirational world and the pursuit of rationalization (industrial world) permeate public organizations in the field of arts, education and research. Others sets of tensions are also common in the public sector. For example, the current appeal of market ideology and mechanisms for renewing public management clashes with pre-existing inspirational and civic orders. Such situations raise dilemmas for the practice of leadership. This is explicitly recognized in some training programs for public leaders. For example, the so-called "duality program" of the Leadership Center in the UK National Health Service (NHS) is structured around "couples" or pairs of administrative and clinical leaders from different organizations in order to find ways to bridge conflicting worlds.

A practice perspective

Public organizations are not only permeated by diffuse power and divergent objectives. They also have to deal with a complex system of rules and procedures which require from people who

work within them – managers and professionals – a considerable amount of both technical and informal knowledge. Change in these organizations often takes place through the way in which people exert their discretionary power as they are apply rules and routines on a daily basis (Feldman, 2000). Moreover, public administration, particularly in the large public service sectors of education, health care and social services, the quality of services provided is largely dependent on people and their explicit and tacit knowledge. It is not unusual to observe a mismatch in these organizations between decisions made among top managers and the realities of operating professionals or of the "street-level bureaucracy" (Coble-Vinzant & Crothers, 1998). A successful leader in this type of organization will need to bridge this gap. In order to do so, would-be leaders need to know how to navigate the contradictions between complex rule systems, how to manoeuvre among multiple foci of decision making, and how to ensure that available expertise is brought to bear on decisions within structures that are respectful of public and professional accountability norms and procedures. Knowledge, and *a fortiori* tacit knowledge gained through experience is crucial. Leaders need to be skilled *"practitioners"* within the complex web of public sector decision making.

Recently, leadership theory and research have begun to promote ideas about constant experimentation, learning, plausible judgment, active listening etc. (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). More specifically, two approaches to strategic leadership have been developing some insights into the question of knowledge. These are the so-called cognitive complexity (Jaques, 1989) and social intelligence approaches (Zaccaro et al., 1991). Cognitive complexity refers to the mental processes of retrieving and analyzing information. Authors claim that cognitively complex individuals search for more information and interpret it in a more complex way (for reviews, see Stish, 1997; Streufert, 1997). In addition to cognitive style, some authors suggest that leadership

requires interpersonal skills such as empathy, motivation and communication. According to Boal & Hooijberg (2001), social skills refer to the ability to notice and make distinctions among individuals, to monitor one's own and other feelings, to discriminate, and to use appropriate information about the social environment gained through experience. Sternberg, Wagner, Williams & Horvath, (1995) found that effective leaders are able to rapidly assimilate tacit (non-articulated) information and use emotion. While offering a new perspective, this work, like the leadership literature discussed earlier remains limited because it tends to retain a persistent variance model perspective. The work is once more centered on the measurability of individual capacities instead of trying to qualitatively capture how strategic leaders put their experience into action in everyday settings.

A social practice perspective can be useful to highlight the question of knowledge in leadership and overcome these difficulties. In a break with positivist American sociology, some social scientists such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Giddens, de Certeau, Vygotski, etc. have in the last few decades manifested a strong interest in the practical accomplishments of skilled social actors in the production of social life. They adopted a position that recognizes the competencies of the individual and the centrality of knowledge to the production and reproduction of the social world. Albeit to different degrees, these authors claim that there is a practical rationality rooted in the concrete detail of daily life. As Gherardi (2001) argued, practice connects knowing with doing. This perspective therefore promotes a focus on the nature of everyday life and the central role it plays in the social world (de Certeau, 1984). The everyday is where we enter into a transformative praxis with the outside world, acquire and develop communicative competence, and actualize our normative conceptions.

Drawing on the social practice perspective impacts the way in which leadership is defined. Leadership in practice means looking at how leadership is constituted, how it is accomplished and how it occurs over time in organizations (Whittington, 2003). From a social practice perspective, leadership is not something one does by oneself. Leadership's effects and impacts emerge over time from actions and interactions. A practice perspective on strategic leadership implies that leadership is socially constructed through action and daily conversations (Hosking, 1991). Such a perspective emphasizes the routinized character of organizational life and tries to understand how strategic leadership emerges from routines and discourses. For example, in one of the first applications of this perspective, Knights and Willmott (1992) proposed conceptualizing leadership processes by looking at the practices of senior managers. They studied a series of verbal exchanges among senior managers in a financial company in Britain in order to show how the dominant definition of the situation is discursively negotiated.

Effective leaders of the social practice perspective are skilled individuals exercising their leadership by mobilizing knowledge in action and by being competent social performers. Mobilizing knowledge successfully implies being able to catch the larger picture emanating from local events. Having a broader vision of how things are working, effective leaders in public organizations try to pattern the attention of their colleagues, subordinates and even their superiors through subtle dialogues and meaningful micro-acts concerning the changes in the environment, the definition of success, the interpretations of political changes and so on (Johnson, 2000). They also have the ability to routinely use appropriate tools and words aiming to co-construct meaningful explanations of change and crisis. The practice literature suggests that as competent social performers, effective leaders are people who possess a great understanding of the social characteristics of internal and external actors with whom they are

interacting. They deploy professional expertise, political abilities, historical knowledge, emotions, and so forth in an appropriate way and at the right time to influence strategy (Samra-Fredericks, 2003). More specifically, they are able to adapt the way they present and convey their objectives depending on their interlocutors and to perform appropriate emotions in order to attract the attention of a recalcitrant employee or an intransigent stakeholder.

In sum, leadership, from a social practice perspective, is produced and reproduced in daily routines and micro-conservations (Westley, 1990). Leadership is, in some ways a mundane activity requiring experience, timing, social awareness and relational capability. By suggesting the need to track the activities, knowledge, and skills that are more or less explicit to leadership, such a perspective may produce knowledge that is more adapted to the needs of leaders in public organizations.

Examples of leadership in the practice mode: universities, research agencies and museums

To illustrate how leadership is fabricated through situated and local practices, we will draw on the insights from three papers that present case studies of public organizations (Leitch & Davenport, 2002; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Oakes, Townley & Cooper, 1998). These papers demonstrate the importance of looking at the multiple micro-processes by which leaders use their tacit knowledge and act routinely.

Leitch & Davenport (2002) studied stakeholder relationship management during a significant change in a major public sector research funding agency in New Zealand. The agency had to move from a role of resource-allocation to a support role for research development and integration. During the change, the top management team deployed strategic ambiguity through metaphors to manage the competing demands of various internal and external stakeholders. For

example, the agency's leader used the metaphor of "investment in innovation" in order to enter into a dialogue with stakeholders and to stimulate creative engagement from them. But he omitted to consider the contradictory effects of this metaphor. Some stakeholders who had little interest in the new orientation interpreted this metaphor as a symbol of the agency's desire to remain economically-oriented and associated the process's ambiguity with managerial incompetence on the part of the research agency's leader. This example illustrates how in a highly political environment such as the public sector, the successful use of strategic ambiguity depends on the leaders' capacity to tacitly decode or reflexively map out the multiple interpretations carried by metaphors whether used officially or not.

In a very different way, Jarzabkowski (2003) studied the role of the top management team (TMT) in three UK universities undergoing strategic change for coping with decreased public funding. Her longitudinal study pays attention to the systemic links between leaders, strategy activities and the collective structures of the universities throughout strategic change. As surprising as it could first appear, one of the findings was that leadership was not the main influence on strategic change in the university. Even though all three cases acquired a new leader during the change, none of them was the catalyst for the changes. Change arose out of evolving interpretations and systemic needs. Rather, the top management team (TMT) became mediators of the contradictions between internal actors and collectives structures. Through their daily strategic practices (e.g. planning, income generation, etc.) the TMT distributed shared interpretations predisposing continuity or stimulating change. In all cases, leaders drew on past interpretations (e.g. the academic strength of the university is based on research excellence) and activities in order to promote the change (generate more funds). This paper provides an illustration of how leaders support change through existing routines. Part of the leadership

process depends on the leaders' ability to adjust, transform and modify existing organizational activities in order to encourage stakeholders to endorse their views.

Given the complexity of rules and procedures in the public sector, leadership in practice also depends on the capacity of leaders to design, diffuse and use appropriate managerial tools for supporting their actions. Oakes, Townley and Cooper's (1998) work constitutes a fascinating example of how management tools subjectively operate to support a governmental reengineering effort in provincial museum and heritage sites in Alberta (Canada). Although local managers were reluctant to foster the "new public management" ideology, business plans acted as a pedagogical practice by enhancing subtle changes in managerial identity. As managerial tools, business plans induce a form of "learning by doing" and their daily use by the agency's directors pervasively transform who they are as managers in favour of the new orientation. The capacity to promote managerial tools and use their micro-effects to subjectively control the direction of change is intrinsic to the day-to-day practice of leadership.

Implications for Practitioners and Researchers

The three perspectives presented above have drawn attention to the consequences for leadership of some key features of the public sector organizational context that we identified at the beginning of the previous section: diffuse power (associated with the network perspective), divergent objectives (associated with the value perspective) and complex systems of rules (associated with the practice perspective). This multifaceted framework focuses the attention of both practitioners and researchers on the essential features of leadership in public organizations.

For practitioners, the framework suggests a need to look beyond leaders as individuals to examine the processes associated with acquiring and using power, legitimacy and knowledge.

For example, drawing on the network perspective, a public leader must see him or herself as embedded in an ongoing process shared with others (an active node in a multifaceted constantly shifting network), not as an external authority able to impose his or her will. Attention must therefore be given to understanding what actors inside and outside the organization want and can support, and designing and redesigning managerial projects that can slide through windows of opportunity where interests converge long enough to ensure irreversibility (see Kingdon, 1984).

Drawing on the value perspective, leaders need to consider what fundamental societal value systems are in play, how they are reconciled, and how both the organization and the leader as an individual might position themselves to best represent values at the heart of the organization's identity. To deal with competing logics, the leader must also attempt to bridge alternate identities and value systems that are nevertheless inherent to the organization's existence and survival.

Finally, the social practice perspective brings the leadership process down to earth by showing how patterns of decision making are embedded in positioned practices and routines. Some leaders are more skilful than others in using routines, interactions and other the tools available to them to move events in directions they seek to promote. These skills can be acquired both individually and organizationally through active participation in the routines of strategic decision making. Achieving genuine impact in complex public sector contexts requires skilful effort over a long time: this is a call for patience, persistence and subtlety. The most successful leaders will be those who are willing to commit both to their organizations and to desired managerial and strategic developments over the longer term.

For researchers, taking into account these three perspectives will direct leadership studies towards a more dynamic, processual and contextual vision of leadership that adds richness and

depth to the static variable-based conceptions that have dominated in the past. However, this will require recourse to more qualitative, longitudinal research methods that follow leaders and leadership teams over time to reveal cycles of leadership actions and their consequences.

However, this is not a view that promotes easy prediction. There are no simple recipes for leadership effectiveness through having appropriate traits, fitting one's style to the context or "being charismatic" although all these undoubtedly play a role. Moreover, these perspectives do not plump down on one side or other of the entrepreneurship-stewardship debate but could be compatible with both of them depending on whether leaders decide to destabilize old networks, build new ones and act as critics or creators of new routines (the entrepreneurial perspective) or whether they promote the stability of existing networks, defend established conventions that reconcile competing values and develop their leadership skills through the rehearsal and usage of existing routines (the stewardship perspective). Whichever path they take, they will need to build on and deal with the three underlying forces that we have suggested embody leadership in public organizations: power acquired by collectively operating within networks, legitimacy acquired by incarnating and bridging the values that lie at the heart of organizational identity, and knowledge that is embedded in and acquired through participation in organizational routines and practices.

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