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Recent trends
in leadership
Thinking and action in
the public and voluntary
service sectors

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Contents

1 Executive summary

This report reviews recent developments in thinking and action in relation to leadership in the public and voluntary sectors, based on published and in press academic literature and in observed practices on the ground. The aim of the report is to stimulate discussion about the implications for leadership for health care.

■ We found a dearth of analytical frameworks that recognise leadership as a dynamic set of processes within a complex adaptive system. The report therefore uses the Warwick 6 C Leadership Framework to organise the evidence in relation to leadership. The report is structured in six sections, reflecting this analytical framework (see Figure 1 below).

■ While reviewing the literature and ideas under all six categories within the Warwick framework, in this report we give most attention to the **contexts** of leadership and the **challenges** of leadership as these are particularly volatile at the current time and thus are the areas where ideas and evidence about leadership are changing most rapidly and most substantially.

Figure 1: The Warwick 6 C Leadership Framework
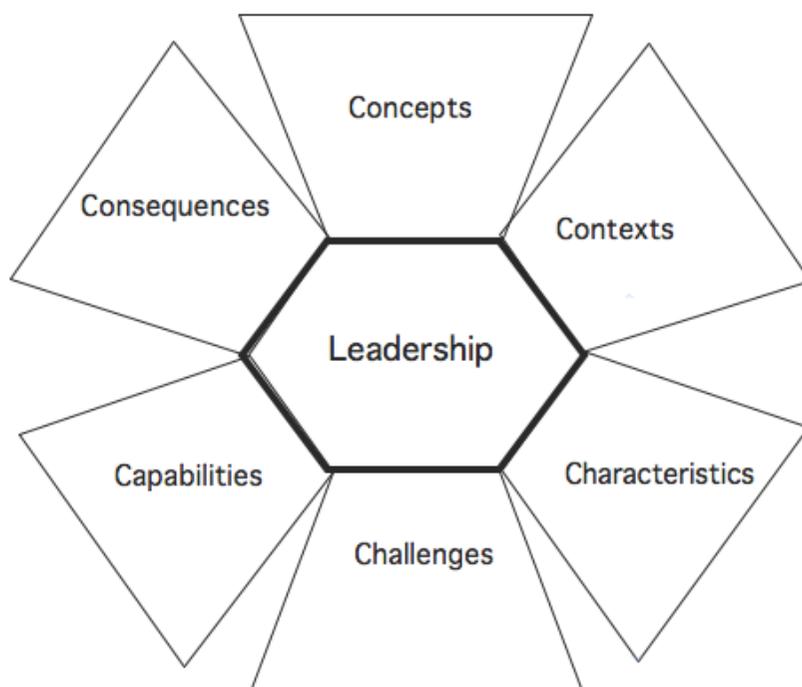
Source: Hartley and Benington (2010)

Concepts

■ Leadership is conceptualised in a multiplicity of different ways. The 'romance' of leadership, which embraces a heroic view of leadership

as a charismatic and necessarily beneficial element of organisations, is being replaced by a more critical view which also considers 'the dark side' of leadership and recognises that leadership can be destructive as well as constructive.

- There is a shift from seeing leadership as the individual traits of a particular personality, or as the characteristics attached to a particular organisational position, towards a greater interest in leadership as a set of processes concerned with mobilising action by many people towards common goals, and the framing of those goals.

- Current trends in thinking and action conceptualise leadership as a dynamic, interactive process taking place within a group, or across a network of organisations or actors, or mobilising a diverse set of stakeholders.

Contexts

- There is substantial new thinking and research about how contexts shape leadership thinking and action – and also about how leaders influence and interpret their contexts through sense-making and the framing of issues and ideas. This report suggests that there is a need to shift from thinking about leaders separate from their contexts, to thinking about leadership within the continuously changing context of a complex, adaptive inter-connected system.

- This report argues that the UK context is one of profound structural political economic and social change with, for example, a loss of confidence in both formal democratic politics and the competitive market economy; growing inequalities in wealth and poverty and well-being; the dilemmas posed by changing demographics and the ageing of the population; the need to find a sustainable future for climate, energy production and consumption; and an exponential growth in new information and communication technologies.

- Leadership will be fundamentally shaped by this Copernican revolution of changes in contexts and therefore in mindsets and behaviours. For example, there is a need for leadership antennae which are able to envision future scenarios, problems and possibilities, not just deal with the status quo.

- These changing contexts confront communities and governments with complex, new cross-cutting problems, so leadership cannot be restricted to working in vertical silos, but also has to work across the boundaries between different sectors, services and levels of government. This new context of 'networked community governance' (Benington 2011) will require a repertoire of leadership skills in mobilising not only hierarchies and markets but also networks, depending upon the specific context and the conjuncture.

- These contextual changes are reflected in changes in the relationships between citizen and state, between market, state and civil society, between levels of government and so on. The ability to work within the context of complex fast-moving and volatile patterns of networked governance becomes a crucial emerging leadership skill.

- Another crucial change in the context for leadership is the trend towards co-production of services for and with the public, rather than delivery of services to the public. Co-production links producers and consumers more directly to each other, and is likely to lead to innovation in both processes and services. The job of leadership becomes that of harvesting ideas for service change and improvement from users of services and from local communities, not just from government, staff and other stakeholders.

Characteristics

- The literature is starting to pay more attention to the variety of roles and resources needed for leadership, and therefore to the sources of authority and/or legitimacy for leadership, some of which may be societal, some organisational and some personal.

- This report sketches out the different types of leadership depending on the characteristics of the role. Leadership characteristics may be formal or informal; may be direct or indirect (ie, through face-to-face contact with 'followers' or through more distant engagement); and may be based on a range of different sources of legitimacy (eg, an elected political role, a managerial role, a professional role or a community leadership role).

- Some leadership activities are based on the formal authority of the role occupied by the leader, but other kinds of leadership (eg, in contexts of networked governance) require leadership that moves beyond formal authority, and mobilises influence. Different characteristics (as above) of leadership means that influence will be based on different forms of argument, types of evidence, ways to achieve influence and so on.

- Increasingly, there is an interest in the characteristics of distributed leadership and of leadership constellations and teams – ie leadership shared across different people and roles according to the task priority at the time, or the phase of the leadership activity.

Challenges

- Our review of leadership thinking and action highlights the many new and different challenges facing leaders in the NHS and other public and voluntary services. These are often linked to debates about the purposes of leadership.

- Clarifying the purposes of leadership – the challenges to be addressed – has come to the fore in leadership theory and practice. It is increasingly recognised that the kind of leadership required may vary according to the kind of challenge to be addressed. Leadership has to be fit for the purpose in hand.

- Leadership is also increasingly seen as having a key role in analysing and framing what the problem is that is to be tackled (eg, deciding whether it is technical or adaptive; complex or tame).

- There is a lot of attention being paid in both theory and practice to the distinction between tame, and wicked or complex, problems. Tame

or technical problems are defined as those where there is rough and ready agreement about the nature and causes of the problem, and about the solutions. The leadership challenge is to make the agreed action happen. Complex or wicked problem are defined as those where both the diagnoses and the solutions to the issue are unknown or contested. In these situations the role of leadership may be to work within the complexity and uncertainty, and to mobilise a number of different stakeholders to work out together what action needs to be taken, within the uncertainty.

■ These are different leadership challenges. Heifetz's adaptive leadership theory (1994) has been seminal in arguing that certain leadership strategies, styles and behaviours are particularly suitable for complex, challenges with unknown or unknowable dimensions to how they may be handled.

■ Heifetz presents seven rules of thumb about how to be an effective leader in dealing with wicked problems. Avoiding the temptation to become the hero who solves the problem for other people is key, as is ensuring that the people who have the problem are involved in the uncomfortable work to address it.

■ Another key theory and set of tools for considering the challenges of leadership is the public value framework developed by Mark Moore and John Benington. It enables the leader or leadership team to rise above the immediate demands of particular stakeholders, targets or time pressures in order to take stock not only of what the public most value (a contested question requiring critical dialogue with diverse publics), but also what adds value to the public sphere (a longer term question which goes beyond the interests of current consumers of services). Our report discusses several tools (eg, the strategic triangle; public value stream analysis) to help operationalise public value thinking and practice.

Capabilities

■ This short section suggests that leadership research and action is shifting its attention away from producing long lists of the desired personal qualities and competencies of individual leaders, towards thinking about the capabilities required to use a range of different skills within particular contexts and in pursuit of specific challenges.

■ Illustrative of this, the flirtation in some quarters with transformational leadership as the answer to organisational problems has been overtaken by the evidence that transactional styles of incremental improvement can also be valuable in organisational change, at different stages and in different contexts.

■ This report argues for greater attention to the skills of emotional intelligence and also for the importance for public managers of skills of leadership with political awareness or 'nous'.

Consequences

- It is harder, but even more important, to try to assess the impacts, outcomes and consequences of leadership in the current complex dynamic and austere context than under stable conditions. Establishing cause and effect becomes more difficult in these complex volatile environments than in more stable environments where simpler linear models may apply, yet evaluation of leadership impacts and outcomes is very important and should be attempted.

- Awareness of the limitations of tracing causal links (attributional issues, chains of events, timescales, criteria, the contested nature of public decisions and actions) is important. But so too is the value of trying to clarify whether leadership makes a difference.

- We suggest that public value stream analysis may help to map impacts and outcomes.

- In the sphere of leadership development, the approach to evaluation is enhanced by going beyond the Kirkpatrick framework into an explanatory (rather than descriptive) approach. There are a range of different approaches from hard research design using quantitative data and scientific controls through to more narrative approaches which explore meanings and understandings. Each may have their place in particular studies, though this report argues for a realist approach to evaluation, which examines 'what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why'.

The report concludes by noting that the elements of the Warwick 6 C analytical framework are all inter-connected and inter-active, and cannot be considered in isolation. The seventh C in the Warwick Leadership Framework is therefore Connectivity.

2 Introduction and overview

This report is based on evidence about recent trends in leadership ideas and practice, and in leadership development, in the public and voluntary sectors. It is based on three sources of evidence. First, we draw on the recent academic literature and we offer a conceptual framework and synthesis. Second, we reflect on the complex challenges which we observe leaders and their organisations to be facing as they grapple with profound changes in the economy, polity and society. Third we review some examples of innovative and good practice in leadership and in leadership development. The implications for leadership and for leadership development in health and other public and voluntary services are drawn out throughout the report.

The literature review includes not only published papers, but also some which are in press or are working papers. This allows us to combine systematic research on recent developments in public leadership thinking and practice, with a critical review of trends on the horizon.

We have organised this report around the analytical framework we developed in *Leadership for Healthcare*, (Hartley and Benington 2010). This helps to analyse public leadership as a dynamic and contested process within the context of a complex, changing and adaptive whole system.

Without an integrating conceptual framework, researchers and practitioners can talk at cross-purposes, using the same language to describe very different phenomena and to address very different questions, thereby preventing sensible discussion about what constitutes effective leadership, how it operates in practice, and under what conditions it produces useful impacts and outcomes. This is why we present an analytical framework early in this report, to frame later sections.

Yukl (2006) noted that: 'Leadership research has a narrow focus, and there has been little integration of findings from different approaches' (pp 445). This lack of an integrating framework has been noted by other writers (eg Storey 2004; Grint 2000; Burke and Cooper 2006). Burns (1978) wrote that 'leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomenon on earth' (pp 2). Since then, there has been an explosion of interest in leadership (Rogers *et al* 2003) in policy discourse and in practice (eg the recent mushrooming of leadership development programmes in the public sector, the wider use of the discourse of leadership in policy documents). Some have observed that leadership has taken over from management as the latest buzz word in government and public services, and is presented as though it is the solution to many intractable problem situations (eg, Martin and Learmonth 2011).

Hartley and Benington (2010) developed the Warwick 6 C Leadership Framework as a lens through which to scrutinise the leadership literature and to provide an overview of the key elements affecting leadership processes and outcomes (see Figure 1).

An analytical framework is not a theory. It does not seek to explain the causes of phenomena (as theory aims to do) but rather offers a structure for categorising and interpreting aspects of the phenomena – in this case public leadership. The grouping of ideas under different facets of leadership enables

the illumination of findings, the relation of these to other findings, the exploration of connections, and the identification of gaps and ambiguities.

The six elements of Figure 1 are as follows:

- **Concepts** What do writers and practitioners mean when they use the term leadership; how do different writers think about different aspects of leadership; what are the underlying theoretical assumptions being made? How are concepts of leadership changing in their meanings and usage in different contexts?

- **Contexts** Analysis of the political, economic, social, technological and ecological contexts can be critical for leadership thinking and practice, both because context creates constraints and opportunities, and also because effective leadership is sometimes able to (re)shape or reframe aspects of those contexts. The changes in global, national and local contexts, within which UK government and public services are being restructured, are key reasons why leadership is gaining in prominence as a desired solution, why ideas about appropriate leadership are developing rapidly, and why leadership development is undergoing such radical redesign at the moment.

This report will consider how the new political economic and social contexts (eg, ageing of the population; climate change; economic crisis; cuts in public expenditure, devolution of some responsibilities; vision of a big society but a smaller state and a more prominent and competitive private sector) have implications for leadership thinking and practice (eg, the leadership of cultural change while cutting budgets and staff; the leadership of place in dialogue with partners and grassroots communities; leadership across the whole public service system).

- **Characteristics** What are the defining characteristics of effective leadership within different contexts, specifically in terms of the roles, relationships and resources that are deployed in effective leadership activity? Leadership characteristics may vary in terms of being formal or informal, near or distant, singular or distributed; and in terms of their sources of authorisation (eg, legitimacy derived primarily from political, managerial, professional or community mandates). What additional leadership characteristics may be required for the new contexts and challenges facing the NHS and other public services?

- **Challenges** There is increasing recognition that leadership cannot be analysed as a set of behaviours or processes in isolation from the question of what leadership is trying to achieve, in terms of aims and outcomes. The leadership challenges are related to the implicit or explicit goals and purposes in question. In this report we consider in particular the challenges of leadership to create public value (Benington and Moore 2011; Williams and Shearer in press); and of adaptive leadership to tackle complex cross-cutting wicked problems (Heifetz 1994).

- **Capabilities** What are the mindsets, behaviours, styles, skills and capabilities which typify effective or successful leaders and leadership to tackle complex leadership challenges in these volatile new contexts? We draw on the idea of meta-competencies – the capability to recognise and adapt to changes in the external environment, to handle uncertainty, to be reflective, self-aware and self-critical, and to learn

from experience, including one's mistakes. These meta-competencies bring to mind Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* – practical wisdom.

■ **Consequences** How do we know what consequences different leadership activities have had, both inside and outside the organisation (eg, in terms of outcomes for partners, stakeholders, users, citizens and communities)? This requires evaluation of the impacts and outcomes of leadership activity not just in the short term but also in the medium and longer term. (The consequences of leadership in public services like education and health may not become apparent for 5,10 or 15 years). The judgement of the consequences of leadership is often a contested process (eg, the competing assessments of political leadership in relation to the Iraq War). What are the factors that shape whether leadership is seen as having successful outcomes, and what criteria are drawn on to come to this conclusion?

The Warwick 6 C Leadership Framework will be used to look at both leadership thinking and practice and also at leadership development and its evaluation. We review latest research thinking and publication in all six of the areas within our framework, but we spend most time in this report on two of the 6 Cs – the changing contexts and the distinctive challenges of public leadership.

This is because there are such profound shifts taking place in the tectonic plates of the ecological, political, economic, social and technological contexts – both in terms of immediate foreground changes in government strategy and policy, and also in terms of longer term deeper structural changes in society and economy. This has spawned interesting new thinking and writing about the changing context of public leadership, and the distinctive new challenges which leadership theory and practice now has to address.

3 Concepts

The romance of leadership is well documented (Meindl and Ehrlich 1987) – a phenomenon in which leadership is seen as a necessarily positive aspect of organisations, which creates valuable outputs and outcomes. In other words, the leader is conceptualised as a hero or guru, in terms of their characteristics, skills, efforts, impact and effectiveness. This kind of idealisation of leadership is found in many current documents about the reform of the NHS and other public services.

Leadership studies are increasingly highlighting the danger of attributing mainly heroic qualities to leadership behaviours and are emphasising instead the need to look at both the positives and negatives of particular leaders and leadership styles and behaviours.

Conceptually this means including in any analysis the dark or shadow side of leadership alongside the light and bright side. It also means focusing not just on the inputs and activities of heroic individual leaders, but also on the actual impacts and outcomes of leadership activity (the costs as well as the benefits, who loses as well as who gains) in specific contexts.

This re-conceptualisation of leadership as a complex and contested set of practices, to be assessed in terms of its outcomes in particular contexts, is particularly relevant in the NHS at present where there are competing ideologies surrounding the reform programme, and much resort to leadership as the answer to all problems.

An emerging approach, characterised as critical leadership studies (Martin and Learmonth 2011; Jackson 2005; Ladkin 2010; Zoller and Fairhurst, 2007; Collinson 2011), is more questioning about the benefits of leadership, highlighting the darker dimensions of power, control and manipulation which may be present in the processes and outcomes of leadership.

There are a range of definitions of leadership in the field, often reflecting differences in emphasis between competing concepts of leadership (Hartley and Benington 2010). It is useful to start with a working definition which will help delimit the areas we are concerned with. Stogdill's 1950 definition still has value:

> *Leadership may be considered as the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organisational group in its efforts towards goal setting and goal achievement.*

> (p 3)

We wish to extend this definition beyond organisational groups to also consider leadership of inter-organisational groups and networks, and beyond goal-setting and achievement to also consider impacts and outcomes. We shall therefore argue for the need to take a whole systems approach to leadership, and to think about leadership beyond the boundaries of specific organisations (where the majority of leadership studies have been focused until recently) and to also consider a wider network of internal and external stakeholders over whom leaders now have to try to exercise influence (Benington and Hartley 2009).

Hartley and Allison (2000) consider three perspectives on leadership – the person, the position and the process. All three approaches may overlap

though different writers will explicitly or implicitly tend to focus more on one than another approach.

In the recent past, there has been considerable emphasis on the personal traits or behaviours of leaders, and a search to find the competencies which are most clearly associated with effective leadership. More recently still, there has been a growing awareness also of 'the dark side of leadership' (Burke 2006; Hogan and Hogan 2001), highlighting not only the limitations but also the dangers of particular leadership traits, styles and activities. For example, some research shows how charismatic leaders can create over-dependency in others they work with (Bryman 1992; Burke 2006); and it has been argued that charismatic individuals can also undermine the more plural and participative processes of group decision-making in democratic societies (Hartley and Benington 2010). Others have criticised an over-preoccupation with individual leadership traits, without sufficient recognition of how leadership skills and behaviours may need to vary between different settings, and with different sources of expertise or legitimacy (Edmonstone 2009). For example, Bolden and Gosling (2006) have critiqued the NHS Leadership Qualities Framework for being too generic, ambiguous and acontextual.

A definition of leadership based on position has also been popular in the public leadership literature – for example, the idea of super-heads in schools (Currie and Lockett 2007), elected mayors in local government (Leach *et al* 2005) and turnaround chief executives in local government and heads in education (eg, Turner *et al* 2004; Fullan 2005). However, evidence and experience over the last decade has shown the limitations of a purely positional approach to leadership. Currie *et al* (2005) point out the contradictions between a policy stance which calls for transformational leadership at the frontline but with an intense emphasis on centrally derived performance targets which allow little scope for transformation at the local level.

Other writers, while recognising the value of an analysis of the person and/or the position, have theorised and researched the processes of leadership. This is particularly clear in the approach of Heifetz (1994) who argues that leadership often has to go beyond formal authority and becomes primarily a process of influence. For example, he writes: 'To capture these uses of the term [leadership] in a definition, we can use the word "mobilize", which connotes motivating, organizing, orienting and focusing attention' (p 20).

An interest in leadership processes also involves considering the relationship between leaders and so-called followers, and how influence takes place between them. Interest in followers is a minority interest but can be very revealing about leadership processes (eg, Collinson 2005; Carsten *et al* 2010).

Interest in adaptive leadership and in leadership beyond boundaries, and beyond authority, has been increasing among UK public policy-makers and managers. They face raised expectations by citizens that governments and public services will respond to the complex cross-cutting problems facing them, their families and their communities, and public leaders have therefore recognised the need to work jointly with partners in the private, public, and voluntary sectors, and with civil society organisations, to tackle such cross-cutting problems.

There is an increasing research focus not on the individual or on a single leadership position, but on distributed leadership across an organisation or network (Spillane 2005; Gronn 2002). This seems increasingly important in the context of partnership working, inter-organisational activity, and whole systems working, where leadership is often dispersed (Hartley and Allison 2000), collaborative (Huxham and Vangen 2000), collective (Denis *et al* 2001), or contested (Currie and Lockett 2007; Hartley and Benington 2011).

However, as some critics have noted (Grint 2010), if everyone can be a leader, based on their work as an influencer, then the term leadership loses its analytical edge. It is for this reason that we will need to turn later to examining the characteristics of leadership, to distinguish different resources and roles in leadership.

Implications for policy and practice

For research, there is a need to clarify the implicit definitions and underlying assumptions about leadership manifest in that specific context; to take a critical approach to 'the romance of leadership', to also analyse its shadow side, and its positive and negative consequences for different groups.

There is a need to think about leadership not just as the personal qualities of an individual in a formal leadership position, but also as a dynamic interactive collaborative process, which takes place between different groups of people in a continuously changing context, with the leadership roles shifting between different people at different times. This is expanded on within the two sections below on the contexts and the challenges of leadership.

4 Contexts

The leadership literature has tended to pay lip service to the importance of differing contexts, but has been less clear (except perhaps in relation to military leadership) about how the context has an impact on the opportunities, constraints, styles, processes and outcomes of leadership. It has been argued that the context of leadership is like the weather, sometimes noticed but only superficially commented on (Porter and McLaughlin 2006).

However, this situation is changing as more writers are becoming concerned both with how different contexts shape leadership thinking and action, and also how leaders may try to influence and interpret their contexts.

While context has an impact on the opportunities and constraints within which leadership is exercised, some writers have pointed to how leaders can also shape aspects of context (eg, Grint 2005; Leach *et al* 2005). How leaders make sense of the context and explain their sense-making to others is a crucial part of the challenge of leadership, as we explore in the relevant section below.

This is a particularly important moment in time to be considering the interaction between leadership and context.

First, over the past couple of decades, leadership in the UK health service has taken place in a context of continuous change, upheaval and churn in organisational structures, cultures and practices – which has both shaped and constrained the possibilities for leadership thinking and action. .

Second, current government proposals in the Health and Social Care Bill to abolish some of the current NHS structures and governance arrangements (eg, to phase out strategic health authorities and primary care trusts, to hand over commissioning of services to groups of GPs, and to open up the NHS further to patient choice and private competition) will unleash a further period of large-scale organisational and cultural change, and fundamentally change the context for health leadership.

Third, and most importantly, the changes proposed for the NHS, considerable in themselves, need to be set in the context of wider political, economic, social, technological and ecological changes in society. Many of these are global in origin and scope, but they all have far-reaching implications also for citizens, communities, governments and public services (Benington 2011).

Some of the latest thinking about the profound changes taking place in the political economic ecological social and technological contexts, and the implications for public leadership, is discussed in Hartley and Benington (2010) for NHS service delivery and organisation (SDO), in Benington and Hartley (2009) for the National School of Government, and in Benington (2011) for the Local Authorities Research Councils Initiative (LARCI). The summary below is based heavily on Benington's work for LARCI on New Horizons for Local Governance (Benington 2011).

Examples cited of the structural contextual changes facing governments, citizens and communities include:

■ the escalating revolution in information technologies, networked communications and social media

- volatile ecological and unpredictable climate changes

- a peak in the oil supply, requiring a search for more sustainable sources of fuel and energy

- shifts in geo-political and economic power away from the USA and the UK towards India and China

- a collapse of confidence in global financial markets (and in economics as the dominant discipline for government discourse and decision-making)

- a growing loss of respect for politicians and representative democracy

- ageing of the population – a crisis in pensions and in care for elderly people

- infantilisation of a generation of young people, many of whom have little opportunity to work, to contribute, or to take on adult responsibilities within society

- growing inequalities between rich and poor, both within and between countries.

Many of these structural and cultural changes are already impacting on the day-to-day lives of citizens and communities, as they grapple with the challenges of caring for older relatives; worrying about job prospects for themselves and their sons and daughters; facing unexpected floods in their towns and villages; increased security threats at airports; scepticism about the honesty and courage of their elected representatives; and the opportunities and pressures presented by the speed and intensity of global information and communication networks and the new social media.

These complex cross-cutting problems do not fall neatly within the responsibilities of any single level of government or any single public service. Such changes also impact in different ways in different localities and in different communities of interest and identity. They have different implications and meanings, for example in Manchester compared with Swindon, for Muslim communities compared with African-Caribbean communities, and for the health service compared with the civil service.

In order to have early warning of longer term trends and changes, governments and public service, leaderships need to have highly sensitive antennae out into the external environment, a well-developed capacity to scan the far and near horizons, to read the changing barometer and to interpret the signs of the coming weather storms. Forward-looking research, scenario planning, analysis of futures, and prophetic leadership which can make some sense of the changes, and provide a compass bearing and a torch to give a sense of direction in the fog of uncertainty, become even more important at times of systemic change (Benington 2011; Hartley and Fletcher 2008).

One of the distinctive features of this current wave of technological, ecological political, economic and social changes is that they are taking place simultaneously. When combined they amount to a seismic shift in the tectonic plates of western industrial society.

It is likely that within the next 5 to 10 years this will come to be recognised as the birth pangs of a whole new epoch for society – the emergence of an

Case study: Leadership across the whole public service system

'An elderly disabled relative of mine lives on her own in a small village in Herefordshire. We keep in touch by regular telephone calls and occasional visits. One day when I rang there was no reply. When I rang the following evening there was still no reply, so I started to worry. As it was Friday evening I was not sure what to do, so I phoned directory enquiries and asked for the emergency number for this part of Herefordshire. I was quickly put through to a receptionist at the local police station who took my details and said she would phone me back in about an hour. When she phoned back she said "We sent a community support officer round to your relative's home and found the house in darkness. We knew this would add to your worries so we tracked down a neighbour with a spare key and went round to the house together but found no one there. We knew you would be relieved that she was not lying injured or unconscious on the floor, but we also knew that you would worry about what had happened to her. So we contacted the district nursing service who rang one of their staff who was off duty at the time, who told us that your relative had been taken into hospital for emergency treatment on her ulcerated leg. She said she thought that the hospital was in another area, so we telephoned around and found that she was in a specialist unit in Gloucestershire. Here is the name and telephone number of her ward." When I thanked her for this outstanding service she said "You're very welcome – it's only what I'd hope for if it was me and my own mother in a similar situation".'

This is an example of a public servant (a relatively junior policewoman) working at the front line, in a round-the-clock 24/7 telephone service, who clearly sees her job as providing a 'joined up' service to the citizen – putting herself in the other person's shoes and working across organisational and geographical boundaries, co-ordinating information and action from the grassroots community and between services and between counties. She worked with a clear sense of the public value she was able to add by looking outwards to the citizen and the community, rather than upwards and inwards within her own organisation.

era defined and transformed by the new information and communication technologies, and the intense patterns of inter-connectivity provided by the social media – and requiring very new patterns of networked governance and public leadership.

These profound structural and cultural changes will require not minor adjustments in thinking and behaviours, but a fundamental paradigm shift – a Copernican revolution in mindsets and behaviours, involving a radical shift in our assumptions about the relationships between:

- the citizen and the state

- the state, civil society and the private market

- the public, private and voluntary sectors/spheres

- different levels of government, which now need to be seen as overlapping spheres rather than separate tiers

- the centre and the frontline

- hierarchies, markets and networks.

The dominant metaphors for government in the post -war period have been mechanical – the machinery of government, levers of power, chain of command, and cogs in the machine, for example. This worked pretty well as a model for an industrial age, based upon mass production of standardised products and services, along linear assembly lines with a Taylorist division

of labour between separate processes, in a fairly stable political, economic, technological and social context.

There are many aspects of government and public service work which still require the routines and reliability of these standardised forms of production. A well-ordered hierarchy and a clear command and control structure, together with a good bureaucracy, is an essential backbone for good governance and public leadership in many situations, as shown in Warwick's research and development work on leadership in contexts of post-conflict reconstruction – in South Africa, Southern Sudan and Northern Ireland.

However the pyramid-like structures of Weberian bureaucracy are often too rigid, inflexible and top heavy to be able to adapt to the deep and rapid changes in the external context, particularly in view of the speed and intensity of the new interactive information and communication technologies.

So it is becoming increasingly clear that organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors need to picture themselves not only in terms of machines and pyramids, but also in terms of organic living systems, continuously evolving and adapting as they interact with a changing external environment.

This requires a new paradigm of government and public service leadership as part of a complex adaptive system, in which each part is closely interacting with all other parts, as in the ecosphere (Uhl-Bien and Marion 2007; Marion and Uhl-Bien 2001).

These new paradigms are likely to be influenced by fresh perspectives emerging in biology, ecology, physics, and the neurosciences. These all emphasise the limits of reductionist thinking (analysing phenomena in terms of their separate component parts), and the importance instead of whole systems thinking (understanding the properties which emerge from the interactions between the components – tasting and smelling the cake as well as analysing the separate, uncooked ingredients).

Citizens and communities are increasingly confronted by a whole series of complex cross-cutting problems (eg, ageing and community care; child protection; climate change; crime and the fear of crime) for which there are no simple solutions – and indeed where there is no clear or settled agreement about either the causes of, or the best ways to tackle, such problems.

These are sometimes called wicked or adaptive problems and they require a different leadership approach from tame or technical problems. (See section below on leadership challenges for a fuller discussion).

There is a growing recognition that such problems and leadership challenges need to be seen as part of a complex interactive and adaptive system, rather than as a simple, mechanical chain of cause and effect (Benington and Hartley 2009; Benington and Moore 2011; Stacey 1995, 1996; Waldrop 1992; Wheatley 1992).

The profound restructuring of the ecological, political, economic, social and technological context reinforces the need for the whole public service system and its leadership constellations to think and work in a more coherent and co-ordinated way. For example, as the UK and its regions and localities confront the consequences of the recession and the restructuring of global financial markets, the public leadership role has to extend from place-shaping to place-shielding – providing a 'holding environment' (Winnicott's term, as

Case study: Leadership in partnership in Leicestershire

The previous government's Total Place pilot programme has proved to be an opportunity to test whole systems thinking and cross-service leadership in 13 pilot areas. For example, the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Total Place pilot focused on alcohol and drug misuse.

This revealed the need to cultivate greater connectivity not only between the many public bodies involved (for example, the NHS, the local authorities, the police, Job Centre Plus, the Home Office, and regional organisations), but also between these public bodies and the voluntary and informal community sector (for example, the Muslim community leaders and the mosques) and the private sector (supermarkets, off-licences, and nightclub owners).

Many differences in interests, values and ideologies were identified between these various groups, in relation to the contested questions surrounding alcohol and drug misuse and what to do about it.

Previous research on partnership working (Geddes and Benington 2001) suggested that rather than trying to establish a consensus view too quickly, it would be more robust to start by surfacing the tensions and identifying the differences in perspective between the various stakeholders, and only then moving on to try to negotiate a coalition of common interest.

In order to help to develop whole systems thinking and cross-service action across the boundaries of different organisations, Warwick Business School was invited to develop a leadership in partnership programme jointly with and for all the main public and voluntary services in the sub-region (linked to a postgraduate diploma in public leadership and management).

This helped to create a cadre of public leaders from local government, the NHS, police, fire and other services, and to give them an opportunity to develop some shared concepts and decision support tools (eg, public value, the strategic triangle, value stream analysis, adaptive leadership).

This helped to bring some innovative thinking to the problem of alcohol and drug misuse.

This kind of collaboration and connectivity across the whole system has also identified gaps and overlaps and duplication between services, and led to more co-ordinated planning and some significant savings, including the piloting of shared leadership development programmes between all the public bodies in the area.

However, it has also highlighted the tensions between horizontal thinking and working (leadership of place, focused on complex problems which cut across the divisions between services, sectors and levels of government) on the one hand, and the vertical lines of accountability upwards to national government for specific services on the other hand. This tension was felt particularly acutely by the NHS representatives, as they tried to find a balance between their horizontal accountabilities in the Leicestershire Leadership in Partnership programme, and their vertical accountabilities to the Department of Health and national priorities like QIPP.

applied to leadership by Heifetz 1994) within which citizens and communities can be helped to think through the risks and uncertainties they face, to confront different interests and perspectives, to debate difficult choices about priorities, to engage in deliberative democratic forums to develop their identity as a local public, and to find a common purpose and direction during a period of fundamental change (Beck 1992; Benington 1996; Benington and Moore 2011).

The whole systems challenge is not just to achieve greater co-ordination or closer partnership between separate bodies, but to explore a collaborative sharing of ideas, budgets, and staff across the traditional boundaries between different sectors, services, and levels of government – and (most challenging of all) between the state and the citizen. The leadership

challenges are huge – not only to learn to lead services across organisational and sectoral boundaries, but also to lead networks and movements within civil society.

Whole systems thinking and leadership action also leads to radical questions about the relationship between levels of government.

- What are those issues which manifest themselves at local level but where neither the causes nor the solutions can lie at local level?

- What are those issues where national government should insist on minimum standards across the whole country without any local variation? And what are those issues where national government has to let go and let local organisations respond to the diversity of their local context, and develop innovative local solutions. This classic tight/loose question will become crucially important in the NHS of the future.

- This may require acceptance of 'variable geometry' and 'variable speed' in patterns of governance and public service across the country.

- In any case, where is the centre? In some cases, the centre is not in Westminster or Whitehall but may be on the streets of a neighbourhood in Wolverhampton, or on a hospital ward in Manchester.

Public leaders increasingly question the traditional assumption that national government is always central government. And they are learning to lead and govern in ways that are not only multi-level, but also polycentric – developing new patterns of networked governance and public leadership across several different nodes.

- Responsibility for tackling complex cross-cutting issues (like alcohol and drug misuse) will sometimes have to be shared between several different sectors, services and levels of government. This will require new patterns and structures for cross-sector and cross-service governance. In Leicestershire, and some other areas, a public service leadership board is being formed in which the elected leaders and chief executives of the local authorities, the chief constable, the NHS chief executives and other bodies are taking shared leadership responsibility for the whole area.

- This will pose many challenges in terms of both steering (how do you develop a clear strategic direction between several different partners?) and accountabilities (which may have to be upwards to national government, downwards to users and communities, and outwards to partners and stakeholders).

The co-creation of health and public services

Public leaders are increasingly recognising that citizens and communities are part of the whole complex adaptive system – within, not outside the system.

Traditionally the private and public sectors have made a clear distinction between producers and consumers. Public services have been delivered (like post or pizzas) to users, who are seen as waiting outside the boundary of the organisation.

However, within the new paradigm of networked governance, the boundaries between the traditional producers of services and their consumers and users are increasingly blurred and bridged.

In the private sector this phenomenon of co-creation of goods and services is creating a new breed of pro-sumers, who are both producers and consumers. For example, Wikipedia has emerged as one of the world's largest and most regularly used encyclopaedias. It has around 19.5 million pages, 15 million articles in 270 languages, 11.7 million registered users, and 91,000 active contributors – but only around 35 paid administrators. This is because Wikipedia is co-created by its users who offer their knowledge and expertise free, and for the common good.

Similar innovative approaches to co-creation with users and stakeholders are being explored and tested in many areas of public service (for example in school classrooms, hospital wards and neighbourhood communities). We can expect to see the development and testing of many innovative patterns of co-creation of public services and of public value jointly between users, citizens and communities (Alford 2009). The Young Foundation has produced many collaborative experiments and pilots in creating new institutions and service forms, and has also produced *The Open Book of Social Innovation* (Murray *et al* 2010).

This means that public policy-makers and managers must learn how to lead processes of change beyond their sphere of formal control. In traditional models of governance the state retains control – over budgets, services and decision-making. Under the emerging model of networked governance, control has to be shared between many different organisations and actors – in the private, public, voluntary and informal community sectors.

Building a big society in the context of a shrunken state, a more competitive private market, and cuts in budgets and staffing, will therefore require radical new patterns of public leadership, particularly in local communities and at the frontline of public services, including health. .

Implications for policy and practice

The profound contextual changes facing local communities and governments, plus the Copernican revolution in mindsets needed for the new globally networked society, together mean that innovative new patterns of governance and public leadership are emerging at local level.

Many leading-edge public organisations are already pioneering new approaches along the following lines:

- Public authorities increasingly see their role as to help develop their citizens and communities as well as to deliver services – community development as well as service delivery.

- This requires them to look downwards to the grassroots level, an outwards to other partner organisations, not just upwards to national government, and inwards to their internal organisation.

- Looking downwards involves focusing on what practical outcomes they want to achieve for and with their users and publics.

- This involves dialogue about what the public most values (which may involve making difficult trade-offs between competing priorities).

- It is also important to consider what adds value to the public sphere (which may mean counter-balancing what the current generation most values against the longer term public interest for future generations yet unborn, eg, in relation to ageing of the population).

- Looking outwards involves thinking about how other organisations in the public private and voluntary sectors can be harnessed in joint efforts to tackle the complex cross-cutting problems facing citizens and communities, and how their commitment, their staff and resources can be mobilised around the achievement of jointly agreed public value outcomes. The community budgeting pathfinders and health and well-being trailblazers are testing out the scope for this kind of collaborative working in practice.

- Looking inwards means re-aligning all activities and expenditures behind the outward-facing public value outcomes. This may involve using public value stream analysis to identify which internal processes and activities add to the public value outcomes (and then reinforcing these activities); which subtract value (and then stopping doing those activities); and which are stagnant (and then bending and re-aligning them behind the agreed public value outcomes).

- Looking upwards involves a different relationship between national government and local public services, in which there is less detailed prescription from Westminster and Whitehall, and where public authorities 'don't ask for permission but for forgiveness'. The Localism Bill and the power of general competence invite local authorities to take the lead in engaging with local communities in working out solutions to local needs – and this includes health.

Governance and leadership of this kind will not always be comfortable. It may involve:

- refusing to collude with the fantasy that the public authority and its leadership can, on its own, solve the complex cross-cutting problems facing communities

- challenging national government and other agencies in the private public and third sectors to take their share of joint responsibility for grappling with these problems

- challenging the public to move beyond blaming and scapegoating and to take it share of responsibility for resolving problems and finding innovative solutions

- asking questions and learning more about the context, not just providing answers. Recognising that the context may be changing and consequently leadership responses may need to change.

5 Characteristics

Until recently, leadership was mainly discussed as though it was a set of personal qualities intrinsic to the individual leader, regardless of context or role in the organisation. However, there is now a greater interest in how the context and the role both have an impact on leadership characteristics and tasks, and the ways in which different sources of authority and/or legitimacy have an impact on what can or cannot be achieved by a leader.

Hartley and Benington (2010) set out the case for considering different types of leadership based on different roles and resources (including personal and positional power). The characteristics of leadership are likely to vary in differing situations –between formal and informal leadership; between direct (near, face-to-face leadership) and indirect (distant, aiming to influence others without direct contact) leadership; professional (eg, clinical) and managerial leadership; and political and managerial leadership. There is also community leadership to consider.

Heifetz (1994) draws a distinction between leadership with authority and leadership without (or, Hartley and Benington argue, beyond) authority. By authority, he means power conferred through a formal source of legitimacy, eg, appointment to an organisational position such as chief executive, or election to a role such as politician. Leadership beyond authority has different sources of legitimisation, often from below (eg, from clients, citizens and/or communities) or horizontally (eg, from peers, partners and other stakeholders), rather than only from above (eg, by formal mandate).

The sources of legitimisation for leadership beyond authority can include recognition by peers and the public as a significant voice or influence in a social system (for example an opinion leader among doctors, or a health campaigner in the voluntary sector); and/or the authorisation that can come from creating a coalition between different organisations and interests to achieve a common goal. (Benington and Moore 2011).

Those leading with formal authority compared with informal authority have different sources of legitimacy, and access to different political, social and organisational resources to achieve their goals – including the use of hierarchy, command and control, and instruction rather than influence.

In a later book Heifetz, Gradhow and Linsky (2009) revise Heifetz's previous formulation and suggest that we need to distinguish leadership from authority. They suggest that we need to 'view leadership as a verb, not a job. Authority, power and influence are critical tools, but they do not define leadership. This is because the resources of authority, power, and influence can be used for all sorts of purposes, and tasks that have little or nothing to do with leadership…' (p 24).

There is also growing recognition that the sources of organisational and individual leadership power may vary within public services. There has been a growth of interest in the roles and the resources of clinical leaders compared with managerial leaders in health (eg, Edmonstone 2009; Spurgeon *et al* in press; Darzi 2008). Spurgeon *et al* (in press) note that clinical leadership has moved 'from the dark side' to 'centre stage' and other writers also indicate this (eg, Baker and Denis in press). Edmonstone catalogues the differences between the sources of expertise for a health service manager compared

with a clinical leader, and while this is not empirically derived it does point to important differences in the ways in which clinical leaders compared with managerial leaders are likely to address problems, take up the leadership of change, weigh up evidence, convince colleagues and so on.

There is also a growing recognition that the behaviours and actions of organisational leaders (such as chief executives, head teachers and so on) cannot be seen in isolation, but need to be set in their institutional, including national governmental, context (eg, Currie *et al* 2005; Leach *et al* 2005). The strategic leaders of organisations in health or education are not acting alone but have to take account of what they are tasked to achieve from national government, the protection of reputation and so on. Currie and Lockett (2007) argue that this means that in the NHS and in education, concepts such as transformational leadership (eg, Burns 1978; Bass and Avolio 1990) are shaped by the amount of power and discretion available to the leader, which itself is affected by the policy context.

The sources of authority, legitimacy and organisational and individual power for leadership are shaped by the wider policy and organisational context. The growing recognition of a more differentiated approach to leadership, which includes the roles and resources (in our terms, the characteristics) of leadership means that there is now more space in the academic literature, and in policy and practice, to accept the varied contributions of different types of leadership. Yukl (2011) argues for a more contingent view of leadership (ie, situation-based) due to differences in sources of power and legitimacy in different organisational situations.

For example, this leads into a wider recognition of distributed or collaborative leadership (Spillane 2005; Gronn 2002) which is sometimes also called dispersed leadership (Hartley and Allison 2000). Denis *et al* (2001) go further and argue for the need to consider leadership constellations, by which they mean that the task of leadership may, formally or in practice, pass between different leaders with different skills and characteristics at different phases of a project or where different challenges have to be faced.

Implications for policy and practice

The idea of a great leader was popular for a time in the policy literature (eg, super-heads, directly elected mayors) but the research evidence is pointing in a different direction – that the model of an individual great leader is not likely to work effectively in tackling the complex cross-cutting problems now facing citizens , communities , public services and governments. There is now a stronger interest in distributed leadership and in the characteristics and contributions of leadership teams, constellations and processes, in particular contexts, at particular times and with particular roles and resources. This reinforces the idea, from the previous section, of leadership not so much as the inborn or inherent characteristics of particular types of people, and more as a process which takes place between groups of people in specific contexts and conjunctures.

The consideration of characteristics also helps to reinforce the need for a contingent view of leadership, with sources of authority and legitimacy varying according to the role and power bases of particular types of leader. It also means the recognition of a wider range of leaders and opinion-shapers and movers and shakers within organisations and networks, than solely those in formal positions of leadership or authority.

6 **Challenges**

While leadership used to be considered as an important activity for its own sake, and in its own right, increasingly writers – and policy-makers – are asking 'leadership – with what aims and for what purpose?'.

Developing and mobilising dialogue with other stakeholders about the goals and public purposes to be pursued, and the outcomes to be achieved, are now seen to be a critical part of the job of leadership. In a steady-state society and steady-state organisations this may be a less prominent question for leaders, but it has increasingly come to the fore as society grapples with complex cross-cutting problems (explored in more detail in the section on contexts above).

The role of leadership in analysing and framing complex problems has, in some ways, always lain at the heart of leadership studies (eg, Stogdill's 1950 definition was about goal setting and goal achievement, and many other definitions are based on purpose or task). However, until recently the psychological framing of much leadership research has tended to focus on the person or processes rather than the purpose(s) of leadership.

Important new research is changing that. A number of writers have distinguished different types of problem or challenge and argued that they call for different types of leadership. First, Heifetz's (1994) seminal distinction between technical and adaptive problems has had increasing influence in the leadership literature (though the poorer quality citations are simply drawing on the phrase adaptive leadership, and failing to recognise that Heifetz's characterisation of leadership is foundationally created on what the leader or leadership is trying to achieve).

Technical problems include those that have been encountered before, where the causes are fairly well understood, for which known solutions already exist, and which can be addressed by a particular organisation, profession or service. Technical problems may be complicated but they are potentially resolvable through existing practices. The leadership challenge is to make it happen. One example of a technical problem in the health service is the need to wash hands to prevent the spread of infection within hospitals. Staff in hospitals know the evidence and they agree about what needs to be done (at least formally) – the challenge is to make it happen in practice.

By contrast, adaptive problems are characterised by a lack of knowledge or agreement about either what causes the problem or what might solve (or ameliorate) it. Furthermore, adaptive problems often require changes in values, attitudes and/or behaviours among those who are involved in the problem field – they may be unwittingly or wittingly contributing to the problem along with other people. This may require a painful recognition by leaders and stakeholders that they are part of the problem as well as part of the solution – and the challenging and giving up of long-held beliefs and attitudes.

Attempting to resolve an adaptive problem may throw up other challenges because the problems are cross-cutting and interrelated. Often, large groups of people have to join together to contribute to solving the problem, through changing their mindsets and behaviours. An example of an adaptive problem is childhood obesity.

Clarifying the purpose of leadership is so close to the heart of the question for Heifetz that he defines adaptive leadership as 'mobilising people to tackle tough problems' (1994, p 15). Adaptive problems require a different kind of leadership in which the leader must refuse to collude with the fantasy that he or she has magic solutions to the problem and instead must persuade 'followers' that they may need to be involved in addressing the problem and may indeed be part of the problem as well as part of the solution. The leadership challenge in these circumstances is to confront the complexity of the problem and seek to orchestrate the work of a range of people to address it.

The work of Heifetz (1994) is particularly relevant for thinking about the leadership of complex and cross-cutting problems, where neither the means nor the outcomes are clear or agreed upon. His work is valuable not only in terms of framing and addressing the challenge, but also in terms of challenging the ways of working with various stakeholders involved in the problem: identifying the adaptive challenge; creating a safe but challenging holding environment; regulating the distress; maintaining disciplined attention; protecting the voices of leadership from below; moving continuously between the balcony and the battlefield (see later for detailed discussion of these). Benington and Turbitt (2007) have tested ways (over a three-year period) in which leaders can address complex or uncertain challenges using the adaptive leadership framework in a very complex policing situation in Northern Ireland – the Drumcree demonstrations.

Heifetz (1994) outlines a framework of seven principles for adaptive leadership, show below.

John Stewart (2001) and Grint (2005) drawing on the work of Rittell and Webber (1973) have drawn a similar distinction between tame and wicked problems. Certainly, the idea of wicked problems has gained currency in public service organisations over the last few years. Tame problems are broadly equivalent to Heifetz's technical problems – we are roughly agreed about the causes and about the solutions of the problem, and have the know-how to address and deal with the matter. Wicked problems are those where there is no consensus about either the causes or the solutions to the problem, which are complex, intractable and often interrelated with a number of other issues. We examine these two approaches to challenges because they have major implications for leadership strategies, styles, processes and behaviours.

The constitutive and perceptual nature of the problem is also captured in the idea that a problem may be seen and experienced differently by different stakeholders. What is a crisis to a patient arriving at A&E may be a technical problem to the emergency team who have dealt with this kind of situation many times before. Part of the skill of leadership is in understanding how others frame the situation and then taking into account that framing, or influencing it.

Recent work by Benington and Moore (2011) and by Williams and Shearer (in press) has been examining leadership for achieving public value outcomes in healthcare and other public services. This builds on earlier work on public value by Moore (1995) which has enjoyed increasing recognition in the UK as an approach to thinking about the value that public organisations and public leaders and managers add to society.

- Identify the adaptive challenge – the leader needs to think hard about what the real underlying challenges are (which may not be the same as the presenting problem) and also whether the issues can be dealt with by technical or adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership is indicated where changes in thinking and behaviour (including one's own) are required to grapple with difficult issues.

- Give the work back to the people faced by the problem – avoid the temptation to solve people's problems for them; engage them in the adaptive work and in their taking responsibility for their contribution to the problem and to the change process.

- Regulate the distress necessary for adaptive work. Heifetz notes that where levels of personal or social distress are very high, a society may reach for extreme or repressive measures to try to restore a sense of order and control, although for an adaptive challenge this may not solve the problem. So authoritative action is likely to reduce distress while inaction will increase it. A wise leader will keep the level of distress in a range in which people can function effectively, paying attention to the issues but not getting overwhelmed – creating and maintaining sufficient heat to keep things cooking, but not so much heat that everything boils over and spoils. This may involve 'cooking the conflict constructively'.

- Create a 'holding environment' in which the painful adaptive work can be done effectively; this can be a physical and/or a psychological space, providing both safety and also stretch and challenge. Heifetz (1994) defines the holding environment as 'any relationship in which one party has the power to hold the attention of another party and facilitate adaptive work' (p 105). An adaptive leader needs to think carefully about the physical and psychological space in which adaptive work gets done.

- Maintain disciplined attention to the issues – recognise the seductions of work avoidance and other displacement activity (for example, dependency, projection, fight/flight), and relentlessly bring the focus back on to the primary task, which is the adaptive challenge.

- Protect the voices from below or outside – ensure that all perspectives and interests are considered, that minority viewpoints are taken into account, and that dominant views are questioned and challenged.

- Move continuously between the balcony and the dancefloor (or battlefield in Benington and Turbitt's (2007) work at the Drumcree demonstrations) in order to combine a helicopter overview of the whole situation and strategy, with an understanding of the changing operational situation at the frontline. The balcony view enables the leader to see all the players on the battlefield and also to look out to the horizon to see longer-term issues. The frontline battlefield perspective gives a strong sense of what issues are like on the ground, and what they feel like for the various players, which enables the leader to have greater empathy and understanding in order to regulate the distress and lead the adaptive challenge. It also enables the necessary linking of strategy and operations, and a continuous oscillation between the two modes of leadership.

Moore (1995) and Benington and Moore (2011) discuss the importance of public leaders and managers thinking carefully about and aligning three elements that are needed for a successful strategy to create public value outcomes. These can be summarised as framing the public value proposition, gaining sufficient legitimacy and support to achieve the desired public value outcomes, and mobilising operational resources (from both within and outside the organisation). This can be portrayed diagrammatically as a strategic triangle.

Figure 2: The strategic triangle of public value
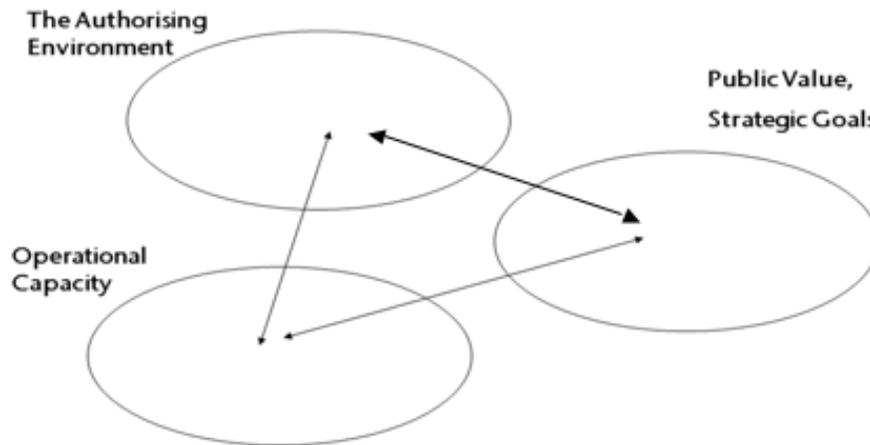
Source: Benington and Moore (2011)

The three elements of this strategic triangle are:

- clarifying the public value goals and outcomes that are aimed for (what is the value proposition in terms of adding value to the public sphere; and what does the public most value?)

- mobilising commitment from the authorising environment (have all the stakeholders who are necessary to provide legitimacy and/or support of the public value proposition been mobilised?)

- aligning operational resources to the desired public value outcomes (are the necessary resources of money, people, skills, technology and equipment harnessed behind achievement of the desired public value goals and outcomes?).

The challenge of leadership to achieve public value outcomes

The concept of public value highlights the importance of focusing on processes and outcomes (what value is being added to the public sphere, by whom and how?) not just on inputs and outputs, or on input/output ratios and productivity. For example, public value perspectives in the health service will focus on improvements in public health and in preventive strategies, and on the respect with which patients are treated, as well as on reductions in hospital waiting lists and times. Public value outcomes in education will take into account the cultivation of a lifelong thirst for learning, questioning and reflection as well as the achievement of high test scores in annual exams.

Leadership for public value creation can be pictured in terms of an open system in which inputs are converted, through activities and processes, into outputs and outcomes, with the active help of co-producers and partner organisations.

Figure 3: The public value stream
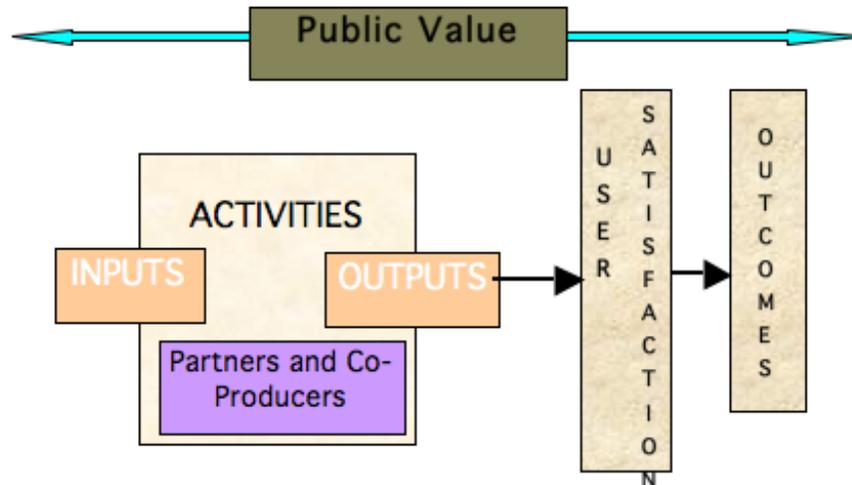
Source: Benington and Moore (2011)

Analysis of the public value stream can be used to clarify the specific public value outcomes desired for specific groups of citizens, communities or services. Leaders can then focus on three key questions:

■ At what stages in the process is public value clearly being added? Where is a positive contribution to the desired public value goals and outcomes being made? These are the stages/processes in the public value stream which need supporting and strengthening and resourcing.

■ At what stages in the process is public value being subtracted or destroyed? What activities are not actively contributing to the achievement of the desired public value goals and outcomes? Can they be realigned and reharnessed behind the desired public value goals and outcomes? If not, how can these activities be removed or stopped?

■ What parts of the public value stream are lying idle or stagnant? Where is there little or no movement, either forward or back, towards achieving the desired public value outcomes? What can be done to unblock the situation and mobilise new flow, energy and actively to achieve the goals?

The assessment of value includes aspects of public satisfaction, but also goes beyond this, as public value outcomes are measured in terms of economic, social, political and ecological value added to the public sphere. Public value outcomes may therefore include factors which are not easily registered in public satisfaction surveys (eg, investment in the maintenance of clean water supplies, or the repair of sewerage systems, which may not be visible or apparent to the individual service-user). The achievement of public value outcomes may also include the use of state authority to constrain certain activities for the public good (eg, drug dealing, under-age drinking, or child pornography).

Public value outcomes are therefore complex and contested, and frequently involve trade-offs not only between 'goods' and 'bads', but also between competing priorities (Kelly *et al* 2002). Nevertheless, the concept of public value helps to focus attention on the processes by which it is created or co-

created, and on the outcomes – for whom and with whom.? Public value can therefore be used not only as a conceptual tool for strategic planning, but also as a heuristic device to stimulate debate between competing interests and perspectives, and to generate dialogue about how to improve services, about who gains and who loses, and about relative benefits and costs.

Implications for policy and practice

There has been a tendency in the past to view leadership as an absolute quality, inherent in certain kinds of individuals and actions. The leader would define the challenges to be tackled, and what actions needed to be taken. There is now an increasing view that leadership challenges are not absolute but relative – relative to the problem to be tackled, the context, the conjuncture and the aims and purposes to be achieved. Indeed, defining the challenges to be tackled, and the changes to be aimed for, is often part of the process of leadership through dialogue with stakeholders. In this perspective the first leadership challenge is to analyse and conceptualise the problem to be tackled, and to mobilise the group or groups who need to tackle it. So the foundational question and challenge is: leadership for what ? Whether the purpose of leadership is organisational improvement or turnaround step change; whether it is concerned with change at the micro (eg, small group) or the macro (societal) level; whether the problems to be addressed are technical or adaptive, tame or wicked – all of these are now increasingly being seen as central to defining the leadership challenges, and the leadership approach will need to be different for each of these different problems.

This is an argument that leaders need to adapt their strategy and their style according to the problems being encountered. It also means that leadership development programmes need to start with a consideration of the specific contexts and challenges (both current and future) and only then to think about the capabilities to be enhanced through development programmes.

Heifetz's (1994) framework for adaptive leadership is increasingly recognised as an effective strategy for tackling complex or wicked problems. However, this is intimately linked to analysis of the type of problem to be addressed. It should not be reduced to being just the latest leadership jargon or fad. It emphasises the value of leaders asking critical probing uncomfortable questions, not just providing easy solutions for others.

Another key theory and tool for considering the challenges of leadership is the public value framework, because it enables the leader or leadership team to rise above the immediate demands of particular stakeholders, targets or time pressures in order to take stock not only of what the public want but also what adds value to the public sphere. The strategic triangle provides a decision support tool to generate key questions.

7 Capabilities

Considerable effort has been made among leadership researchers to identify the skills, mindsets and behaviours which make the difference between effective and less effective leadership. These are sometimes called competencies, though we prefer the language of capabilities (Hartley 2002; Hartley and Pinder 2010).

There are a variety of competency frameworks which are used by public service organisations to recruit, develop and promote managers or other leaders in their organisations. For example, the NHS has for some time had the Leadership Qualities Framework, and this has very recently been modified and extended, with the claim that it is now differentiated according to the level and/or the circumstances of the leader. There is now also a competency framework for medical leadership (Clark *et al* 2008).

However, while competency frameworks can be valuable in communicating clarity about expectations and behaviours linked to perceived effectiveness for public leaders (Raffel *et al* 2009), they can also be limiting when they are applied without recognition of the context in which leadership is exercised or the purposes which leadership is aiming to achieve (Burgoyne *et al* 2005; Bolden and Gosling 2006).

There is a growing interest in emotional intelligence as one area of capability in leadership (eg, Higgs and Aitken 2003; Kerr *et al* 2006) suggesting that emotional intelligence is a predictor both of leadership and also an identifier for leadership potential. Others argue that emotional intelligence is too limited and that it is better to think about the emotional labour that leadership undertakes or engages with (eg, Ashkenasy and Humphrey 2011).

Another quality that is starting to gain attention in the literature is the political awareness (or political astuteness) of leaders and managers in public and other organisations as they deal with the diverse and sometimes competing interests of a range of stakeholders (Hartley and Fletcher 2008).

With the increased emphasis on leadership constellations, and with leadership sometimes being exercised by a team or a partnership, there is a noticeable gap in the literature around assessing leadership capabilities across a whole team, rather by an individual. However, there has been some work by the NHS Leadership Council about how to prepare and develop boards of NHS trusts in terms of their leadership effectiveness as a whole board. Day (2001) and Benington and Hartley (2009) have argued for the need to shift the attention of leadership development to encompasses whole teams, not just individuals and their personal development as leaders.

Throughout the public services in the UK – and alongside the private sector as well – the last decade has seen considerable interest in transformational leadership (concerned with envisioning, energising and enabling according to Nadler and Tushman 1990). Some authors have promoted such a leadership style as superior to transactional leadership. However, recent writing has critiqued this polar-dimensional distinction from three directions.

First, that in many complex change situations (such as mergers of hospitals, for example), there is empirical evidence that both transformational and

transactional leadership may each be important at different stages of the change (Peck *et al* 2006; Edmonstone and Western 2002).

Second, the possibilities for being truly transformational are hedged about by the institutional pressures of goals and targets set by national government, and thus the character of transformational leadership may be different in the public compared with parts of the private sector, with a greater emphasis on professional and expertise-based leadership (Currie and Lockett 2007).

Third, there is an emerging literature about the dark side leadership, to which transformational leaders can be prone (Burke 2006; Hogan and Hogan 2001), since the charismatic element within transformational leadership can create high levels of dependency among followers and possibly undermine the opportunities for ownership, participation, and democratic governance of the transformational change process.

Implications for policy and practice

There is a place for competency frameworks in helping individual leaders and aspiring leaders to clarify some of the skills that they may need to lead, but there is a real danger if leadership knowledge is defined solely or primarily through individual competencies.

This report develops the alternative concepts of leadership capabilities and meta-competencies – the qualities of practical wisdom and the art of judgement in complex, difficult, fast changing and uncertain situations. There is a need to think about capabilities of whole teams (eg, boards,

partnership bodies, senior management teams, work teams) rather than solely individuals.

Recent work suggests that some attention to emotional intelligence and to leadership with political astuteness is important, particularly in leadership work outside formal authority relationships, where understanding the goals, interests and values of partners is important, and where building coalitions to achieve outcomes is crucial. There is relatively little leadership development at the moment on these matters.

8 Consequences of leadership

There is surprisingly little solid research evidence about whether or not leadership is effective, and under what conditions. Researchers and practitioners often claim that their models or frameworks of leadership behaviours or leadership processes are effective but are more diffident about presenting the evidence on which such claims may be established.

It is a difficult area. Perceptions and measures of effectiveness are shaped by attributions (the explanations which human beings give about cause and effect, which may not be accurate). Leadership is in any case rarely part of a simple chain of cause and effect, but rather one perturbance in a range of dynamics in a complex adaptive system, where there might be effects with multiple causes which are difficult to track. The assessment of impact may also depend on the timescale over which it is considered (Hart in press).

The issues are made more difficult for public leadership because policies, values, choices and actions are generally both ambiguous and contested in the public sphere. Goals are rarely simple, and different stakeholders will take different views (or positions) about the value and effectiveness of actions.

We have found two frameworks which are useful for providing concepts and questions which may help to track some of these effects, albeit imperfectly and 'through a glass darkly'. First, from a purely organisational perspective, Yukl (2006) argues that effectiveness can be assessed in terms of efficiency and process reliability; in terms of human resources and relations; and in terms of innovation and organisational adaptation.

Second, the work of Benington and Moore (2011) proposes public value stream analysis as a way to identify key processes by which a social system (ie not only the organisation but its partners and other stakeholders) may provide what the public values and what adds value to the public sphere. This is shown in Figure 3 above. Hartley and Benington (2010) use this second framework to organise the empirical research on leadership effectiveness in health care, finding more evidence about activities and about immediate outputs (including staff satisfaction) than about service quality or wider or longer term outcomes.

Identifying research that examines leadership development effectiveness is also somewhat thin on the ground (eg, Avolio *et al* 2009; Hartley 2010; Edmonstone and Western 2002). How do we know whether leadership development programmes, events and experiences have an impact on participants and their work, making them better or more effective leaders, who achieve better outcomes for users and communities? Many leadership development programmes are not evaluated at all, or where they are the evaluation is simply at level 1 of the Kirkpatrick (1966) framework, ie whether the participants self-reported that they found the course/programme/event useful or interesting. There are relatively few studies which examine whether learning is transferred to the workplace let alone whether that learning is manifest in behaviours, or whether leadership results in better outcomes. However, part of the trouble in some evaluation is that it focuses on what happens rather than why it happens. Hartley and Tranfield (2011) argue for a realist approach to leadership development

evaluation because this approach aims to assess not only whether there are outcomes from leadership and its development, but also what generative mechanisms might explain how the outcomes are created.

Most established approaches to evaluation have tended to provide descriptive accounts, and view leadership programmes on the basis of a logic of Intervention(I) – Outcome(O), based on the assumption that more effective performance can be achieved by filling gaps by development interventions in much the same way that mass vaccination programmes in medicine aim to deliver mass benefits from a single intervention. Such an approach has been dubbed the deficit model.

By way of contrast, a realist approach to evaluation (Pawson and Tilley 1997) draws attention to the importance and interplay between Context(C) and the Generative Mechanisms(M) that result from Interventions (I) and produce specific Outcomes (O). Consequently, a realist approach to leadership aims to understand not only what happened, but to provide insight into why certain outcomes resulted from the application of programme characteristics to people in particular circumstances. A realist approach, therefore, takes a much more comprehensive approach and operates on C-I-M-O (Context-Intervention-Mechanism-Outcome) logic (Denyer *et al* 2008). As a result, a realist approach addresses the key question: 'what works for whom in which circumstances and why?'. By taking a realist view for example, evaluations should be able to begin to address why the same intervention works with some people in one organisation, but not in another. Figure 4 places realist evaluation of leadership development alongside other approaches which can theoretically be used in leadership evaluation.

Figure 4
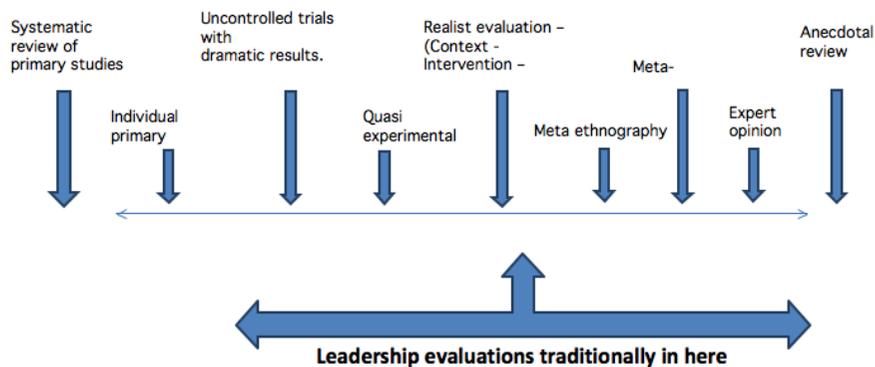
Implications for policy and practice

In a view of leadership as a complex dynamic contested and dialogical process, then establishing cause and effect becomes more difficult than in simple linear models, yet evaluation is still important and should be attempted. Awareness of the limitations of tracing causal links (attributional issues, chains of events, timescales, criteria, the contested nature of public decisions and actions) is important. But so too is the value of trying to clarify whether and how leadership makes a difference. We suggest that public value stream analysis may help to map impacts and outcomes, and to link them to inputs and activities. .

The approach to evaluation of leadership development is enhanced by going beyond the Kirkpatrick framework into an explanatory (rather than descriptive) approach. We review a range of different approaches to evaluation of consequences of leadership from hard research design using quantitative data and scientific controls through to narrative approaches that explore meanings and understandings. Each approach can have its place in particular studies, though this report argues for a realist approach to leadership evaluation, which examines 'what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why'.

9 Conclusions

We have used the six elements in the Warwick 6 C analytical framework to organise the ideas and evidence in this report. These are:

■ the *concepts* that are used to analyse and define leadership

■ the *contexts* in which leadership is exercised

■ the *characteristics,* roles and resources that have an impact on the types of leadership to be exercised

■ the *challenges* of leadership in terms of its aims, purposes and goals

■ the *capabilities* for effective leadership

■ the *consequences and outcomes* of leadership.

This framework is particularly relevant in the dynamic and changing context of the public services in the UK. It offers a view of leadership beyond the traditional focus on the individual and argues that leadership needs to be seen as grounded in an analysis of whole complex adaptive systems. There is a need to think not only about leaders as individuals but also about leadership teams and constellations, as leadership is often distributed and shared across a group of people with different sources of authority, legitimacy and expertise.

Each of the elements of the Warwick Six C framework offers a set of perspectives and ways of examining the evidence and practice in relation to leadership. For example, the *Challenges* element provides ideas and evidence about the purposes of leadership and how these are framed. It is particularly important to 'begin with the end in mind' and to think about leadership as a means to an end. It is valuable to think hard about the specific problems that leadership seeks to address, and how to tackle these, recognising that the challenges may be dynamic and that they may sometimes be at least partly constituted, or framed, through the sense-making activities of leadership. If it is to be effective, leadership cannot be divorced from the analysis of the context and the challenges to be confronted.

There is an implicit seventh C in this framework – *Connectivity.* Our analysis of changes in the context has emphasised the inter-connectivity between different nodes within the complex adaptive systems, and the need for public leaders to work across and beyond the boundaries between the public, private and voluntary sectors; between different levels of government; between different services and between the citizen and the state.

Each element of leadership is inter-connected with the other five dimensions we have identified, and it would be foolish to focus on individual elements of the framework separately, without considering the whole inter-connected system. For example, it is not feasible to think about or try to develop the capabilities of leadership without taking into account the leadership model (concepts), the sources of power and legitimacy for leadership (characteristics), the external policy contexts and the internal organisational context (contexts), to think about the goals or purposes for which leadership is exercised (challenges) or to have some awareness of the impacts or

possible impacts, both for the task in hand and also to achieve positive outcomes for the public sphere (consequences).

The dynamic and volatile context of public services in the UK means that leaders need to pay close and constant attention to the framing of challenges and an assessment of the contexts within which leadership is exercised to produce public value outcomes. Many traditional leadership frameworks have failed to keep pace with a rapidly changing world and this is one of the reasons why the inter-connectedness of the 6 C framework needs to be emphasised. Leadership itself is a dynamic process of influence, not a static set of defined skills to be deployed.

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