CONSTANT INFLUENCE AND PECULIAR GRACE: THE ‘NEW BLACK’ IN COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP IN UNIVERSITIES

Joanna Peters
Director, Student Services
Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia
Kessels Road, Nathan 4111
Brisbane, Australia

Abstract

This paper explores leadership theory, research and practice as this applies to universities, particularly in Australia, in the context of the changing global context. It examines how relatively recent movements for shared, collaborative and distributed leadership in other domains is translated in educational settings – and more specifically in tertiary institutions. The paper identifies barriers, challenges and opportunities for staff working in academic, professional and administrative roles, and for students, in co-creating leadership for positive change within their universities.

Introduction

"...one could argue that leadership is seen as the new coordinating mechanism within higher education...Our study supports an understanding of leadership in higher education institutions as the art of balancing collegial trust and the modern technocracy. Personal skills and qualifications are essential, but the unique core of the university requires substantial collegial participation. " (Aasen & Stensaker, 2007, pp. 371,381)

What do we really know about the link between leadership and outcomes in higher education in Australia – or elsewhere? What does effective leadership mean? Who takes leadership roles in the academy? Who benefits and how? How are we applying what we know to ensure improvements across the sector? Finding answers to these questions should be a relatively straightforward exercise.

Leadership is a universal construct and happens within higher education institutions across the nation and the world. Universities pride themselves on their capacity for and commitment to theory development and empirical research to test propositions. There are a number of institutes within the sector, and within universities themselves, whose principal focus is leadership and management research and development. Those leading, working in and studying at universities are, by definition, intellectually curious, talented, informed individuals, surrounded by equally bright people, with access to systems and resources focused on knowledge creation and dissemination.

However, whilst there is a wealth of literature describing leadership in universities generally, and with some of this devoted to the Australian context, only a small proportion of this reports empirical findings about the effectiveness of university leadership, in whatever form, in predicting or delivering positive outcomes for the various stakeholder groups.

Perhaps it is salient to go back to basics and ask – what are universities for? In the Review of Australian Higher Education Discussion Paper, (Bradley, 2008) higher education is said to serve a number of functions in modern Australia, including the production, transmission and application of knowledge, the education of highly skilled members of the workforce, the enhancement of social inclusion, the reduction of social and economic disadvantage, and the transformation of individuals.

If a major purpose for universities in Australia is to deliver successful student outcomes, and from this, outcomes for their communities and society, then all elements within the university have a role to play in this. Senior leadership is responsible for direction setting and creating the environment for effective teaching for learning. Academic staff and managers develop and
deliver curricula that enable students to enter professions and society as ethical scholars, effective learners, and responsible citizens. Professional staff provide support and development services and programs to enrich students’ personal and career development, and improve the student experience and graduate outcomes.

Administrative staff facilitate student access to and negotiation through the structures, policies and systems scaffolding their participation in higher education. Other students also play a role in the successful outcomes of their peers, through involvement in learning collectives and their representative role in enhancing the learning community. Industry and the broader community are stakeholders involved in shaping the success or otherwise of student outcomes, through advisory boards, co-operative education programs, sponsorship, and service learning.

To be able to assess leadership we must define it, and to be able to assess it as effective we need to be able to either say what we think it should be, in terms of the purpose of education (normative) or show that it delivers a desired effect (tested via empirical studies). This question also requires some careful thinking about what types of leadership models are useful in an educational context, as well as differentiation of leadership from other things that might influence such outcomes (economic, social or other factors).

This paper attempts to examine one particular aspect of leadership in higher education in Australia, namely the perceived or demonstrated role of student support and development services – hereafter SSDSs - in contributing to leadership that impacts positively on student outcomes. Given this focus, the discussion is limited to this particular measure of institutional success and does not address other measures such as research, community engagement, revenue generation, etc. It also pre-supposes the capacity for sub-systems within the university (academic departments, professional units) to contribute to leadership that affects outcomes, and hence focuses on collaborative, shared or distributed leadership models.

Firstly the paper considers the issue of changing roles, repertory and relationships in universities in the era of globalisation. Then a very brief overview of theories of leadership, and of leadership in education is provided. Leadership in higher education is then explored in more detail, particularly against the current challenges facing universities around the world, and in particular, in Australia. The next section of the paper reviews the recent, relevant literature on collaborative, shared or distributed leadership in educational settings, with reference to research evidence linking distributed leadership with improvements in student learning or other outcomes (or proxies for these such as retention, satisfaction, and engagement), and/or on mediating variables (staff efficacy, organisational culture).

For the purposes of this paper, universities are defined as institutions undertaking research as well as teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and offering across some breadth of disciplines – in Australia this is the definition used in the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval processes (MCEETYA, 2007).

**Globalisation and the Modern University – Changing Roles, Repertory and Relationships**

In Australia, the shift of emphasis in education more generally, and in higher education in particular, across the last three decades has been from “nation building” to “competitive advantage in the knowledge economy”, and then to “privatization” (Marginson, 2006; Pick, 2006). During the era of nation building, education was conceived of as a social good, empowering both the individual and the country with skills and knowledge to advance the interests of both. Against this backdrop, roles and relationships within and between universities were relatively complementary, collegial, and collaborative. Individual and institutional actions and achievements were applauded rather more than rewarded. Good management and governance, rather than good leadership was important.

Education has always been a transnational enterprise, and, for many commentators the next era – that of internationalisation for competitive advantage - meant change that was just a matter of degree (quantitative rather than qualitative change). This paradigm provided for
cross border flows of ideas and people, whilst retaining national culture and character (Marginson & Sawir, 2006). In this view, higher education institutions were seen as expanding the minds and talents of Australian students to work overseas, sharing research with other universities across the world, and opening the doors to international students principally in the form of aid programs and for learning exchanges.

The more recent move to globalisation has seen the “speeding up of time, a collapse of space, ...and rapid flows of people, ideas, goods, information, images and money” (Blackmore, 2002). This heralds a fundamental and qualitative shift from the concepts underpinning nation building and internationalisation to a commodification of education as a product, to the active pursuit of commercialisation, and to the emergence of a cross-national labour-force.

Some argue globalisation has been transformative, creating new ways of thinking about learning and research with multi-directional flows in communications, knowledge and markets (Ball, 1998), and transcending national borders. Others believe globalisation has been uneven in its reach (Yang, 2003), or has homogenised cultures in ways that advantage the west, create new forms of imperialism, and create a “fourth world” of those not just disadvantaged by capitalism, but totally excluded from it (Olssen, 2004; Tikly, 2001).

Whilst the perception may be either of globalisation as hegemony or harmonisation (Rizvi, 2006), higher education in this setting, is staged against a backdrop featuring marketisation of educational products, and privatisation of educational providers (Marginson & Sawir, 2006; Mok, 2001). In Australia, the last decade has also seen increased student financial contribution, introduction of domestic fee places, increased government subsidisation of private providers, voluntary student unionism (VSU), higher education workplace reforms, and extended quality auditing.

Universities are facing increasing competition at the national and global level regarding student quality, research funding and commercial competitors (Marginson, 2000; Marginson & Sawir, 2006). At the same time the very nature of what universities offer is being challenged both by government and from within the sector, and internal discourses are radically altered, from the generation of “ideas” to that of “profit”, to reflect this new reality (Kuiper, 2005).

Within institutions, there is also a process of redefining roles as academic staff become both more entrepreneurial and more “employee-like”(Dollery, Murray, & Crase, 2006), and administrative/management and professional staff assume or are expected to take a new prominence in strategic planning and decision making (Marginson, 2000; Szekeres, 2006). The tension between profit and the public good has never been stronger and this has implications for resource distribution and strategic decisions affecting staff and students, and for leadership at the institutional and unit (including SSDSs) level.

**Leadership**

“Leadership is not a destination for individuals and organisations – it is an ongoing journey that requires adaptation, transformation and change” (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2007):5

According to leadership theorists, leadership is about influencing others towards a common goal. It implies followership (Vroom & Jago, 2007), and organisational improvement. Leadership is distinguished from management in that the former focuses on relationships and positive change whilst the latter is more about the maintenance of systems and processes, and about achieving stability in the face of imposed change (Leithwood & Levin, 2005).

The literature on leadership in the last half century has drawn on management theory (Bennis, 2007; Kotter, 2001), on social systems theory (Goodson, 2000; Hargreaves, 1997; Hargreaves & Fink, 2005; , 2006), on identity theory (Luhmann & Eberl, 2007) and on complexity theory (Boyatzis, 2006; Schneider & Somers, 2006) amongst other paradigms.

Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) grouped leadership theories under six categories – trait, power and influence, behavioural, contingency, cultural and symbolic, and cognitive theories.
This paper advances a different way of conceptualising these, to provide a framework for considering how educational leadership theory has evolved. The categories used are Individualist, Interactionist, Inclusive/Inspirational and Integrative.

**Individualist Theories of Leadership**

These theoretical frameworks include those that attribute leadership effectiveness to inherent personal qualities or traits of individuals (Zaccaro, 2007), with later versions encompassing the notion that these traits could be incremented (i.e., learned or developed). This is where the “hero as leader” model sits, and sees the leader as extraordinary (born great) and their followers as mere mortals. An individual is expected to show enduring potential and capacity for leadership in a variety of situations.

A development of this model was attributing leader effectiveness to behaviour or personal style—allowing for leaders to choose their personal style trademark (rather than be born with immutable traits) and this approach, like the traits model, linked task and behaviours with outcomes.

There has been renewed interest in trait theory as researchers look at additive effects of leader attributes, consider explanations of relationships with outcomes that are complex and curvilinear rather than linear, refine understandings of distal and proximal effects, and consider malleable statelike individual differences (e.g., self-efficacy) as well as more stable traitlike attributes (personality) and view traits as constellations rather than isolated attributes (Zaccaro, 2007).

The metaphor of constellations will be picked up later in the paper.

**Interactionist Theories of Leadership**

These theories grew out of a dissatisfaction with trait theory—with proponents arguing that leadership is defined as much by the situation or context, and by the qualities and tendencies of others such as followers, as by the leader’s attributes (Golding, 2003). These approaches say a leader’s capacity is influenced by a number of contingencies, some outside of their locus of control, and that situations, rather than leader and follower scripts, influence outcomes.

A focus on context or setting rather than personal qualities saw the development of the contingency theory of leadership where task or relationship orientation was seen as predisposing a leader to act in particular ways given situational requirements, and where there is an interaction between the person’s personal traits and the situation (Fiedler, 1964 cited in Zaccaro, 2007).

Transactional leadership, which involves interactions of expectations and reward, can be said to straddle more than one leadership category—depending on whether is seen as pre-dating or co-existing with these (Bass, 1985). It describes an approach where outcomes are achieved through a mutual understanding, between leaders and followers, of rewards or sanctions for behaviours. This model allows for both parties to bargain or manipulate the situation to achieve required or desired goals. The currency of exchange is said to be first order with followers interested in things such as salary and conditions and management interested in productivity.

**Inclusive/Inspirational Theories of Leadership**

The term “inspirational” is used fairly generically here—to mean that the leader reaches something in others beyond their self-interest—and inspires them to participate and contribute. This provides for simultaneity of roles as others can also exhibit leadership as a function of their role or of their associations.

Bass (1985) argued that certain antecedents are necessary for the exchange between followers and leaders to move beyond transactional to second order needs (e.g., sense of
professional worth) and that when such things as warmth, trust and creativity were in place, transformational leadership was possible.

In addition to being charismatic, transformational leaders show individual consideration to their followers (e.g., mutual interest, promoting self-development), and provide intellectual stimulation in the form of encouraging creative thinking and developing problem-solving capabilities (Bass 1985 cited in Avolio, 2007). They also inspire motivation and act as role models (idealized influence). Gardner and Stough (2002) have shown empirically that emotional intelligence is strongly positively related to these three aspects of transformational leadership in senior level managers—-with the strongest correlation between individual consideration (Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire) and understanding others' emotions (SUEIT).

According to Kirkbride (2006) transformational leadership qualities can be developed (achieve greatness) using the "Full Range Leadership" approach which involves assessing participants' leadership position on the range of leadership approaches, and then competency building using stakeholder feedback, instructional workshops and coaching.

Burns (1978) who is credited with first defining both transactional and transformational leadership, said that transformational leadership is in fact moral leadership because such leaders inspire followers to look above their own self-interest to serve the common good.

Servant leadership is an elaboration of the transformational model, adding a further dimension to the moral judgment informing leaders' attitudes and actions (Graham, 1991). Servant leadership recognizes social responsibility and the rewards of serving the needs of others—both proximally and at the whole of world level. Davis (2003) described Collins’ Level Five Leaders (Collins, 2001) as servant leaders with attitude—honest, humble and self-effacing but terrier-like when it comes to scruples and diligence.

Cardona argues for a distinction to be made between pseudo-transformational leaders who may well appeal to the emotions of followers but in doing so manipulate them for their own ends, and transformational leadership that incorporates an evaluation of the influence the leader's values and actions have on the relationship between leader and collaborator. He distinguishes three types of partnerships between leaders and followers—economic, work, and contribution. In his view, collaborators are motivated not only by economic (transactional relationship) and professional rewards (transformational relationship), but by being able to contribute something beyond their self-interest and to transcend the lower levels of exchange relationship (Cardona, 2000). For this author transcendental leadership is servant leadership with charisma.

Intersectional Theories of Leadership

These approaches involve the intersection of leadership theory and other theories of human and social behaviour.

Brown and Trevino (2006) talk about the intersection of ethics and leadership studies and see resonance in particular between the study of ethical decision making and transformational, authentic and spiritual theories of leadership. They also see an intersection of these constructs with social learning theory where people pay attention to and emulate the attitudes and behaviours of credible role models.

These researchers say however that ethical leadership is a distinct construct from transformational leadership, authentic leadership or spiritual leadership— citing a transactional element in ethical leadership, where leaders offer some form of imperative or reward for adherence to ethical practices.

Smyth (1989) suggested that leadership is a form of enablement and aligned the concepts of "transformational" and "educative" action in his call to teachers and educational leaders to strive for self-understanding and critical social analysis. In his view true leadership meant constructing meaning, and in the case of educators, "courageous pedagogy".
Burke believes that a requirement of true leadership is for a leader to include purpose and meaning as part of their balanced scorecard of performance, in what he calls ontological engagement (Burke, 2006). He suggests there is a link between mindfulness (unitive thinking), spirituality (in the broadest sense of belief in a non-local collective) and effective leadership. Likewise Fitzgerald (2003) talks of spiritual principles that guide leadership practice for Maori peoples, particularly women leaders, and influence ethical decisions.

**Integrative Theories of Leadership**

One aspect of integrating leadership theories relates to the proposition that different forms and styles of leadership serve the organisation and its constituents at different points in its temporal lifecycle and against different kinds of prevailing pressures. Task oriented and leaders-focused approaches may be appropriate in certain phases or when confronting particular external conditions – but may be inappropriate or even dysfunctional as the organisation matures or in times of high competition or disconnects. Transformational leadership is seen as effective in times where organisations face challenge, uncertainty and change when longer term planning and a focus on shoring up the worth of the organisation is paramount (greatness thrust upon them).

Chemers (1993) proposed the co-existence of leadership approaches as relevant to zones of predominant interface between the person and their environment. In this sense dispositional, transactional and influencing approaches are seen as appropriate for different types of leadership activities – across any and all stages of organisational development. Succession planning and development of potential leaders will require different leadership attitudes and actions than inducting new leaders (Phelan, 2005).

Avolio (2007) seeks to lift the level of discussion of leadership theory to a new level of integration – providing for inspirational models to include authentic leadership development programs, and accommodation of contingencies such as environmental stability, cultural differences, industry type, group membership, organisational climate and other factors.

The evolution of management, then subsequently leadership theory is aligned with social and political trends – initially from the heroic leaders, then to the science of management, then to the heart of leadership. For some, a critical analysis of the purposes being served by particular leadership rhetoric is warranted (Sinclair, 2007), especially where this may be serving the interests of the powerful, and sidelining the needs of those not served (Robertson, 2006).

Effective leadership requires communication and connections between all involved in the enterprise (Kotter, 2002), and “practically wise powerful agents” who can demonstrate multiple intelligences (Durand & Calori, 2006). Integrative or dispersed leadership, responsive to flatter organisations and more organically orientated structures (Gordon, 2002) allows for a kind of strategic sharing and ownership of responsibilities, tasks, and influence.

The suffix in the word leadership also flags that this concept is more than that of the “leader”. Like scholarship, leadership is a process and shared condition which is greater than the actor (scholar or leader) undertaking it. It requires what Wordsworth saw as a “constant influence and peculiar grace” (Davies, 1975) not just from the people in senior positions but from all corners of the academy, to contribute to leadership for effective outcomes.

**Leadership in Education**

Educational leadership theory and practice has itself been informed, but not constrained, by thinking about general management and leadership in organisations, as well as by the paradoxes inherent in leading, with humility, those who also demonstrate leadership (Grint, 2007; Kodish, 2006). Much of the conceptualisation on leadership in higher education is derivative of the work done over decades on school leadership. Given that both sectors have, as a core purpose, the education of future generations, and in view of common constituencies (staff, students, parents, employers), this makes some sense. There are numerous other
Similarities between the nature, structure and operations of schools and universities. Effective school cultures are described as collaborative and connected, and leadership is deemed to be most effective when it is distributed and empowers agency across the school (Bossi, 2008; Davidhizar Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006; Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Ritchie & Woods, 2007; Slater, 2005).

However the sectors are strikingly different in many respects, and these are significant for any consideration about what makes for effective university leadership – as well as effective leadership within universities at the level of SSDS, faculties, or research centres.

Universities undertake research as a core function, they compete aggressively for students nationally and internationally, their students are adult learners who subsidise, to varying degrees, their participation in their own learning. Possibly more significant is the nature of the academy itself. Faculty staff, whilst on the payroll on their institution, very often have strong allegiances beyond their host university to colleagues in their fields of enquiry, in public and private enterprise, around the globe.

Therefore, whilst it is useful to draw from theory and research about leadership in schools, it is also important to consider how these might apply to universities (Pope & Miller, 2005).

Leadership in Higher Education

“In academic contexts, leadership may sometimes be as significant (if not more significant) for the damage it causes as for the benefits it brings in its wake.”

(Bryman, 2007, p. 707)

Universities are complex organisations and require high levels of skilled leadership. They are complex precisely because they serve various stakeholder groups. Universities are places of learning and professional preparation for diverse groups of students – and so teaching for learning is core to their purpose. At the same time, academic staff are expected to advance knowledge in their own areas of discipline expertise through pure and applied research. Increasingly universities are commercialising to generate funds to acquit these two core functions well, and to compete for diminishing government financial or other support (Randall & Coakley, 2007).

Universities engage with, and serve, local, national and international communities – through collaborative projects with staff, and service and work integrated learning, and exchanges for students. Globalisation has intensified the complexity of university governance as institutions market to, partner with and deliver programs to individuals and organisations across the world (Marginson, 2000; 2006). Complexity exists not only within universities themselves, but in their external context - and things are getting more complicated (Pick, 2006).

Unlike commercial or public sector organisations, universities are not characterised by clear hierarchical lines of reporting or management authority (Ulukan, 2005). Faculty staff are expected to look outwards as well as upwards for leadership in their disciplinary areas. Academic management positions are often occupied on a rotational basis, and leaders may be appointed, rather than seeking such roles. They may then occupy such positions for short periods, and return to their substantive appointments without expectations of leadership aspiration, capability, development or succession planning.

Reward and recognition regimes, both internal and external, can favour individual achievement in research over team or departmental achievement, or teaching or service. There may be little or no succession planning for faculty leadership positions, or even for more senior leadership roles. Advances in technology are expanding the democratisation of knowledge and challenging, rightly or wrongly, the role of academics as content experts.

The relationship of universities with their students, as a primary stakeholder group, is also changing. Students’ roles as customers of facilities, clients of services and labourers in the learning enterprise (Servanci, 2004) are being reshaped through external factors such as user-pays funding models, workplace demands and social networking patterns which create
permeable boundaries around their learning and peer group communities. Efforts to broaden access to higher education to students from wider educational backgrounds, combined with internationalisation and, more recently, globalization of the student body, have resulted in universities catering for students with diverse learning experiences, capabilities and needs.

Universities are described as collectives of actor groups with different goals (Considine, 2006) or multiple universes (Hermanowicz, 2005). Social capital exists within groups (bonding) and across groups (bridging) with shared interests (Evans & Carson, 2005). The spaces between stakeholder territories in universities (some described as fault-lines (Rowland, 2002), provide fertile ground for creating new organisational conversations about the student experience. For Marginson (2000, p. 34), the healthy development of universities depends on “organisational synthesis between professional academic and administrative and managerial labour” – constructive collaboration to achieve common goals.

In systems theory, these spaces act as organising places for new knowledge (Considine, 2006) and the existence of boundary objects that connect the different groups on some dimension (in the case of universities this could be student leadership development or civic engagement). A shared sense of connection to a greater whole is what then drives new connections (Amey, 2005) whether these be strong or weak ties (Smith, 2006).

In universities, as in most organisations, those skilled in networking and collaboration (boundary spanning) can achieve better outcomes than those trying to work within their own knowledge base and from one political camp. According to Bennis (2007), leadership will become increasingly collaborative in the new global organisational order, and for Dealtry (2001) this is critical for universities. Fullan (2001) sees this as crucial for opening up opportunities for re-culturing and transforming education.

In view of the public and private expenditure on universities, their significance in the domain of innovation and knowledge creation, their role in educating bright people for bright futures, their impact on local and broader communities, their inter-relationships with industry and commerce, and the specialised nature of their workforces, the importance of getting leadership right cannot be overstated.

However, there are fundamental questions that need to be addressed in getting leadership right in higher education. A key question is “right for whom”? Who benefits when leadership is effective in universities? As mentioned above there are numerous stakeholders – staff, students, employers, partners, local communities – who are privileged by success in the academic enterprise. As well as this, broader social and intellectual purposes are served through the advancement of knowledge, and of scholarly practice in research and teaching.

Leadership – Shared and/or Distributed

Distributed leadership, therefore appears to be an idea whose time has well and truly come. (Gronn, 2008, p. 654)

Although the concept of distributed leadership was first proposed in the 1950’s by an Australian psychologist to describe power sharing and turn taking in small group dynamics (Chesterton et al., 2008), and in spite of what might be an intuitive appeal of a theory of leadership which empowers many, and privileges process over position, distributed leadership has really only resurfaced in academic discourse this decade (Gronn, 2002). However, almost as a metaphor of itself, the concept of distributed leadership had found traction much earlier at the level of leadership practice in the school sector in the US – with prescriptive and monitored standards for school leaders in that country including reference to multiple and distributed leadership.

The education sector (learning and teaching) may have been ahead of organisational theory (business) and the scholarship of leadership more generally (academic discourse) in espousing the potential of distributed leadership to deliver outcomes for two reasons, both of which have been discussed earlier.
Firstly, the business of education is learning, and distributed leadership maps effectively onto the “learning organisation” (Senge, 1990), where all stakeholders (principal, teachers, students, funding bodies, community) have a role to play in delivering on school outcomes. Furthermore, education for learning requires leadership for collateral and continuous organizational, as well as individual, learning (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003) with excellence in personal leadership “closely linked to enthusiasm for being educated” (Marques, 2007, p. 924).

Secondly, educational settings are organisations where power is vested not so much in roles but in relationships, where trust is of prime importance in creating and leveraging influence in social systems. Here distributed leadership facilitates the building of “trust – first” connections (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 160), and with that trust comes capacity building. In what are complex higher education settings, “leadership best serves by enabling (as opposed to enacting or controlling) the knowledge processing environment” (Martin & Marion, 2005, p. 140) and, by not only responding to knowledge gaps, but creating them.

For some commentators, universities represent fully cultural systems, with bounded sub-cultures, and with creative frisson points where these connect (Considine, 2006). Boundary erasures (Bloland, 2005) or permeability of these sub-cultures, allow for collaboration and creation of new power bases, and for distributed leadership for local or institutional benefit. While schools are organisations where leader-centric authority is unlikely to harness the true value proposition of a learning organisation, universities are even more so, with the titular head (vice chancellor) more aptly described as a “first among equals” (academic leaders) (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 62).

The definition of distributed leadership as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals (Gronn, 2002a) has been likened to the collegiality of the university community of scholars (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003). Given the relative autonomy still enjoyed by scholars and professionals in academia, a distributed leadership approach can capitalise on self-leadership across the organisation, and super-leadership (engendering self-leadership) from those in positions of nominal authority (Houghton, Neck, & Manz, 2003).

While organisational leadership theory was continuing the search for the formula for the heroic leader (Sinclair, 2007), education was recognising the leaders within, and finessing a theoretical framework that would account for and accentuate the “powerful relationship between vertical and lateral leadership processes” (Harris, 2008, p. 174).

Gronn, one of the main proponents of distributed leadership, suggests that there are two ways of thinking about the concept (Gronn, 2008). The first sees leadership as a behavioural aggregate of dispersed responsibility (attributed or assumed). In this view, individuals may share leadership tasks, to different degrees, and in different sequences, and the product of such dispersed role taking is the sum of its parts.

The second interpretation of distributed leadership, and favoured by him, is that of concertive action. Here, through spontaneous collaboration, shared roles or institutionalised practices, the outcome of conjoint agency and interdependencies is greater than what would have been achieved through any individual contributions. This notion of a gestalt derived from co-association and connectivity, fits with the concepts of “flow” (Hooker & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003) or “valuable disconnects” (Cutchler-Gershenfeld & Ford, 2005) where creativity is sparked as much by the synapses between agents as by solo or silo endeavour (Armistead, Pettigrew, & Aves, 2007; Ensley, Himeleski, & Pearce, 2006; Nissen, Merrigan, & Kraft, 2005; Vangen & Huxham, 2006).

Having lagged behind the education sector in exploring the domain of distributed leadership, organisational leadership theory is now starting to see this as “the new black” – more probably explained by changes in the corporate world (downsizing, outsourcing, boundary dissolution, globalisation, collaborative advantage) than by any values driven commitment to individual empowerment or participatory democracy. (Gronn, 2008; Hartley, 2007).
Various terms have been used for models which claim agency for more than one individual in delivering leadership, including shared (Pearce & Conger, 2003), collaborative, dispersed, delegated, democratic and transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). James Spillane, another of the key thinkers in the terrain of distributed leadership says distributed leadership is a relative but not a replica of these other multiple or leader-plus models (Spillane, 2006).

For him, distributed leadership is high on intentionality, and may incorporate features of these other models (democratic, collaborative) when useful, but always has capabilities greater than any one of them, and is agnostic, and situational, in terms of the most effective mechanism of social influence. It centre-stages leadership practice rather than positions. In this sense distributed leadership theory is itself “stretched across” models in the same way that distributed leadership is said to be across roles at the organisational level (Spillane, Sherer, & Coldren, 2005).

This view is not shared by proponents of these other models however. For Woods (Woods, 2004; , 2005) distributed leadership may have breadth and eclecticism, but it is lacking in conceptual depth and the dimension of moral synthesis. He sees distributed leadership as essentially an analytical construct, describing the phenomenon of maximising organisational performance through concertive action, with a functional, not authentically empowering approach to human capacities.

Democratic leadership deconstructs the power relationships within the organisation and revisions it as a new collective of creative agents, facilitating what he calls “substantive liberty” (Woods, 2005:39) In this sense distributed leadership may be organisationally transformative but democratic leadership is socially transformative – so stretches across political and ethical, as well as individual and organisational boundaries, and interdependencies.

**Leadership Distributed - in Higher Education**

“….it is important for the Program (and the sector) to move beyond the literature to an understanding and definitions of “effective leadership for learning and teaching in higher education”…. based on empirical evidence. … there is a need for an approach that .. takes into consideration the transitory nature of many roles in higher education and the various contributions that academics and other professional staff make to learning and teaching. The distributed nature of much of the leadership in higher education must be recognised in the understanding and assessment of the success of leadership” (Parker, 2006)

Distributed leadership may be a useful framework for understanding, assessing and developing leadership in higher education. Whilst not unique to universities, a number of aspects of their structure and operations would appear to lend themselves to a model of leadership that is distributed.

Firstly, as noted earlier, universities are staffed by faculty who are experts in their own disciplines, and some of whom would be leaders, nationally and internationally in their field. These knowledge workers may be as, or even more motivated by intrinsic motivation or peer recognition than by positional authority within their own institution, or by organisational rewards. Such “substitutes for leadership” (Anderson, 2000; Kerr & Jermier, 1978) would also apply to a range of professional staff working in universities (librarians, educational designers, systems analysts, counsellors etc).

Many academic and professional staff are also members of professional associations whose accreditation and standards prescribe such things as ethical practice and requirements for ongoing professional development. These sub-cultures increase the complexity of universities (Boyatzis, 2006) as places to study and work (Hermanowicz, 2005; Turnbull & Edwards, 2005), and may make leading them in any kind of change agenda an “odious task” (Meister-Scheytt & Scheytt, 2005, p. 76). Leadership in universities demands empowerment of followers and learners rather than having them merely benefit from it (Swansson, Mow, & Bartos, 2005; Vardiman, Houghton, & Jinkerson, 2006), plus the capacity for leading clever people who may not want to be led (Goffee & Jones, 2007).
Universities are increasingly expected to generate revenue through entrepreneurial activities and commercialisation of intellectual property. Organisational development literature over the last three decades and more recently complexity theory have highlighted the competitive advantage of organisations where distributed leadership provides for high creativity and innovation, as well as responsive and productive commercial alliances with third parties. Good university governance involves leadership roles at a number of levels across academic and central elements, and the capacity to achieve excellence and unity across loosely coupled entities (Swansson, Mow, & Bartos, 2005) both in the academic realm and in business success (Dealthy, 2001).

In a similar vein universities are, more than ever before, partnering with community agencies and government departments in delivering on their service or community engagement agenda. Again, the capacity for individuals at all levels, and in different departments and roles within the organisation to be able to take initiative and develop ideas and projects for mutual organisational benefit, is a predictor of successful collaborations across sectors (Sandmann & Weerts, 2008).

According to Wraga (Wraga, 2001) educational leaders are also morally obliged to educate the wider public, and educational and commercial partners, about the business of effective education – for university leaders and for their peak body, this means an imperative to question the policies of government, and argue for “moral purpose”. Also, as universities are the primary provider of teacher education they have a second order imperative to prepare educators for the school sector who will expect and exhibit democratic leadership (Starratt, 2001) in the environments in which they eventually teach, thus furthering this process with future citizens. So this means leadership in universities, arguably even more so than in other educational realms, needs to take account of empowerment of followers/learners (Vardiman, Houghton, & Jinkerson, 2006). Cognitive enterprise through distributed leadership is as crucial as product delivery (Amey, 2005).

Finally, universities themselves can be said to be at the cutting edge of new networking technologies that create webs of knowledge, social contacts, and business partnerships. These allow staff and students to communicate across and around their organisation in ways that democratise participation in agenda setting, policy development and decision making. Distributed leadership resonates with networking cultures (Hartley, 2007).

The validity of distributed leadership has however been challenged (Hartley, 2007). For detractors, distributed leadership is a normative rhetorical device, increasingly employed by regulatory bodies, as part of a wider public policy agenda for greater collaboration across sectors, and a networked regime of governance. Some commentators argue that managerialism works against distributed leadership by centralising decision making in the executive (institution level) and in the funding regulators (sector level). In this respect higher education may have been moving in a direction where distributed influence (traditionally based the model of the collegiums) is being subtly pressured to contract at the same time it is being expanded in the school sector (Bess & Goldman, 2001). Others take this further and say the new rhetoric about distributed leadership may in fact be an attempt to legitimise central control over dispersed semi-autonomous units (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008).

The less cynical see distributed leadership as the new way for drawing academic managers, competent at the faculty level, into institutional governance (Meyer, 2007), and of reclaiming the true political (as opposed to managerial) meaning of mutual accountability, ie “taking responsibility for that which is of common concern” – namely the goals of the university (Zepke, 2007, p. 312).

In the higher education arena, theorists have suggested that effective leadership is some combination of vertical and horizontal practice - “blended leadership” (Collinson & Collinson, 2007a; , 2007b) or “directed collegiality” (Knight & Trowler, 2000), “neo-collegiality” (Braskamp & Wergin, 2008) “adaptive leadership” (Getz, 2007; Heifetz, Kania, & Kramer, 2004; Randall & Coakley, 2007), or “infusion” (Sandmann and Weerts, 2008). Furthermore, particular patterns or configurations of distributed leadership may have potential to improve
outcomes more than others (Stoll and Seashore Louis, 2007), and it may be the nature of the activity, rather than authority attribution, that links the actors most effectively.

It is interesting to note that research has identified a stronger preference for collaborative work and shared decision making in people who self select to work in university settings, than in other work environments (Frankel & Schechtman, 2006), and also the need for leadership to be meaning-making relevant to their particular context (Bess and Goldman, 2001).

Given the history, purpose, nature and context of higher education institutions, it is not surprising to find that recent literature relating to leadership in this sector is talking up the value of distributed leadership. In the UK the Foundation for Leadership in Higher Education (FLHE) commissioned a wide ranging study of distributed leadership, and aspects of this are reported later.

In Australia the federal government sponsored Australian Centre for Learning and Teaching (previously Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education) has, as its mission, the advancement of learning and teaching practices in higher education providers (including public and private providers). In late 2006 a colloquium was sponsored to “undertake work to support understandings of ‘leadership’ to underpin the program” (Carrick Institute Report p 1). The government has also funded, from 2007, the LH Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management to “provide a new national focus for enhancing the quality of higher education leadership, management and governance in Australia” (Press Release 1 May 2007).

Leadership in Student Support and Development – All Over the Place

“A university should therefore be accountable for fostering a climate that enables students to involve themselves responsibly in university life. A university where students are investing a high quality of effort with respects to many aspects of university life – both academic and non-academic – is most likely a lively and effective environment for student learning and development”

(Tam, 2007, p. 74)

Student support and development services in higher education institutions exist to assist individuals achieve their personal, study and careers goals, and to contribute to their university’s agenda of delivering positive student outcomes overall. This role is articulated in The Role of Student Affairs and Services in Higher Education: A Practical Manual for Developing, Implementing and Assessing Student Affairs Programmes and Services, developed by the International Association of Student Affairs and Services Professionals (IASAS).

Whilst the structure, funding and reporting relationships of these services varies across institutions, and even though any one university may offer different combinations of services and programs (counselling, welfare, health, equity, accommodation, child-care, financial, academic skills development etc), such units are represented in some form in every university, and in a similar way in most post-secondary and secondary educational institutions.

Within SSDSs there are generally a number of professionally distinct service units with managers leading and directing the work of staff in those functionally diverse groups (Evans & Carson, 2005). Within these different units, practitioners (psychologists, social workers, career counsellors, doctors, nurses, teachers etc) not only deliver direct services to clients (principally students and staff of the institution), but also initiate and implement developmental and strategic programs to enhance the quality of the learning and working environment for all members of the university community.

These practitioners, like their academic colleagues in Schools and Departments, create, innovate and lead at the individual level, while their collective efforts are also directed, through their managers, to support organisational goals. Furthermore, like faculty, these staff have allegiances to their own professional disciplines as well as to the unit and to the
institutions. Their work reflects different aspects of scholarship (Boyer, 1990) depending on their interests and orientation, and such units can be said to be “leader-full rather than leader-led” collectives (Allen & Cherrey, 2003).

In this sense, leadership in student support and development units is evident across service units and at practitioner, unit manager and director level – reflecting both a “strataplex”, where cognitive, interpersonal, business and strategic leadership skills are exercised across complex operational domains, and at different levels (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007), and a distributed approach to leadership.

In most cases, SSDSs impact very broad territory in universities. Staff in these units work with students at all stages of their academic lifecycle, and from all faculties (unlike staff in academic elements whose contacts may be limited to students in their own faculty and a small number of cross-discipline and cross-institutional recruits); with staff from all academic and central elements (either through direct service, advisory or committee work); and with external partners (high schools, employers, external agencies, community, alumni). Effective leadership in these units is therefore concerned with not only with the quality of their own direct services and programs, but with “larger issues of institutional concern” (Schuh, 2002).

Passionate advocates for greater collaboration across academic and SSDS elements in universities say collaboration and distributed leadership will not only improve diversity and student engagement (Kezar, Eckel, & Contreras-McGavin, 2008), but will advance a return to participative democracy in universities to restore the pre-eminence of universities’ roles in knowledge creation (competitive advantage) and in developing students as fully realised people (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007) and as future citizens.

Finally, as for individual academics working at the learning coalface, the business of staff in SSDSs has always been about the affective as well as the cognitive in the student experience of university (Beard, Clegg, & Smith, 2007) and professional respect is achieved through service in concert with expertise. Teachers might be said to be principally concerned with how students learn – while support staff may be working with issues of why/why not (motivation, self esteem, disadvantage). For those for whom universities are concerned with “knowing” and not “feeling” this can be unfamiliar and threatening territory – for support and development practitioners (as for emotionally intelligent lecturers), this has to be a place to be fully across, for effective learning to occur.

Given the nature and mandate of student support and development units in universities, leadership is needed all over the place – with individual clients in a service relationship; within and across its own professional sub-units; at the interface with academic and other elements; at the strategic level within the institution; within the professional associations; and at the level of peak advisory group to government and community.

The majority of studies linking student support and development services with student outcomes are reported in the North American literature on the role and impact of offices of “student affairs”. Key contributors to this literature cite the importance of effective SSDSs on student retention, engagement and/or achievement (Kezar, 2003; Kuh, 1999; Kuh, 1994; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Schuh, 2002; Schuh, Kuh, Kinzie, & Manning, 2006).

More recently the literature from this region is exploring the role of student affairs units at the institutional level in changing organisational culture, in ways that have direct effects on institutional climate, culture and staff empowerment, and therefore indirect but positive effects on student outcomes (Engstrom, 2003; Kezar, Eckel, & Contreras-McGavin, 2008; Kezar, Eckel, Contreras-McGavin, & Quaye, 2007; Kezar, Glenn, Lester, & Nakamoto, 2008b).

There is also a body of work about effective leadership within student affairs units, most of which conflates with models of distributed leadership (Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Malaney, 2002).

In the UK the literature around professional managers in higher education institutes (Rosser, 2004; Whitchurch, 2006a; , 2006b; , 2007) is relevant to the question of the role and impact of
student support and development services, although it is much broader than this particular sub-system.

In Australia, an analysis of the qualitative feedback provided by graduates four months after the completion of their studies (Scott, 2005) showed that respondents rated "support received" as contributing around 11% to the quality of their institution. Another research report undertaken for the then Department of Employment Education and Training, concluded that student retention and experience were impacted positively by student support and development services (Promnitz & Germain, 1996). However this research was limited in its scale and generalisability, and has not, as far as can be determined, been replicated.

Articles concerning the role of student support and development services in Australia also include their role in community building to improve student outcomes (Stone, 2005) and in examining perceptions of their role in advancing university agendas, and working across boundaries (Conway, 2003; Small, 2008). Within their own institutions, such units in Australia also routinely conduct research to understand their efficacy in improving student outcomes, or proxies for these, and undertake continuous improvement processes, including leadership development, to strengthen their capacity to fulfill their mandate.

**Student Leadership**

*Higher education must place students at the centre of its focus within a life-long learning perspective so that they are fully integrated into the global knowledge society of the twenty-first century. Students must be considered as equal and fundamental partners and stakeholders in their own education with the right to organize themselves as they see fit within the context of their educational institutions, systems and communities.*


Students vastly outnumber the combined forces of faculty, professional staff, administrative and general staff, and members of the executive and governing bodies in universities. In medieval times students were deemed to be, at the same time, both citizens of the university and apprentices in the business of scholarship. With massification of higher education, along with the advent of increasing student contribution to tuition costs, and the commodification of education for an export market, the roles of students in universities as learning labourer (Servanci, 2004) and of citizen of the academic community, is expanded increasingly to that of consumer (of products and facilities) to client (of services) (Harris, 2005), through to co-creator, with the reciprocal responsibility this entails (Rowland, 2002).

This role expansion means that students can potentially exercise more influence on the institution than possibly at any other time. In Australia this is mitigated by the reduction in collective activity heralded by recent legislation to weaken student unionism, and by the pressures students experience from competing demands for paid employment. The capacity for universities to embrace and harness student input to program design, and inclusive curriculum development, is arguably enhanced where leadership can be with and by students, rather than solely of them, as learners.

Without engaging students as fully functioning members of the learning community, capable of leadership participation and development alongside their intellectual development, universities run the risk of downgrading students' educational experience and impoverishing their personal growth (Beard, Clegg, & Smith, 2007). As important, though, is the diminishing returns to the universities themselves by not capitalizing on multiple perspectives in their own improvement agendas.

Student leadership in universities can take the form of involvement in governance, representation on issues and in decision making, advocacy for individual or institutional outcomes, peer mentoring, residential advising, peer supplemental instruction, alumni engagement, community organizing and community development. Universities where distributed or collaborative leadership pervades planning and everyday operations will not
only lead by example and provide supportive environments for student leadership to manifest itself in many or all of these ways, but will benefit from multiple leadership perspectives and capabilities (Beard, Clegg, & Smith, 2007; Harris & Cullen, 2008).

Challenges and Opportunities for Staff Working in Academic, Professional and Administrative Roles, and for Students, in Co-creating Leadership for Positive Change within their Universities.

“Focusing on how professional and support services are delivered is an essential element of university leadership.”

Bolden, Petrov and Gosling, 2008b:25

“…the focus is on what and how students learn and develop, and not on how successful the teachers and leaders wish to be. The ultimate payoff is enhanced student learning and development, not increased power or status for the faculty or the administration.”

Braskamp and Wergin, 2008:35

One of the challenges facing staff and students in co-creating leadership for positive change within their universities relates to significant time pressures and competing demands now facing those who teach, research and study in our institutions. Relationships take time to establish and foster and engagement is possible only where participants see short-term as well as longer-term pay off for their investment of effort and ideas. However, there is also an inherent opportunity here. Students taking leadership roles in peer mentoring, advocacy and representation, if appropriately trained and supported, can provide first responder roles for the student community, thereby freeing staff time for other functions.

Another challenge for students relates to financial need. Many students (in Australia, and elsewhere) work long hours in paid work to fund their attendance at university. The opportunity that presents itself to universities is to create a culture of "jobs on site" to enable students to be paid for work on campus – especially but not exclusively where this relates to some of the leadership roles identified above. The long held view that students should volunteer their time, for work on committees, for mentoring, for peer assisted study etc while staff expect to be paid for this, must be challenged, given the prevailing situation of students being both time and finance poor.

A more philosophical challenge relates to the need for academic, professional and administrative staff to understand the conceptual shift in student roles described above. As universities play out the realities of true globalization (ideas flow), and of genuine distribution of leadership across levels and boundaries (influence flow), so too their managers, teachers and service providers can revision their relationships with students. The opportunity here lies in the capacity of universities to leverage off learning from students (both in terms of their outcomes and their views) about improving the student experience, and benefiting from students, and alumni, as their most potent ambassadors in student recruitment and graduate employment.

A challenge for SSDS professionals is the relative paucity of empirical research directly linking the work of professional or administrative staff with student outcomes, although evidence of indirect effects - links to other institutional and personal outcomes, as mentioned earlier - are stronger (Jackson & Kile, 2004). Often research purporting to show causal links is really highlighting associations, or actually assesses the impact of the support need rather than the support service on these outcomes (Wharton, Wang, & Whitworth, 2007). The opportunity this presents to all those working in SSDSs, at all levels, is to enrich their work, and that of their colleagues, through such enquiry.

Leadership that engages the head (intellect), heart (emotions) and hands (behaviours) of multiple players provides for “veritable and sustained performance beyond expectations” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). This kind of distributed leadership approach would seem best fit for SSDS, as has been found in other aspects of university leadership and in other countries (Waggoner & Goldman, 2005). However given different cultures, traditions and institutional
priorities, there can be no “right way” and no end point in view, except to continuously commit to “work to transform our institutions and ourselves” (Allen & Cherrey, 2003, p. 41).

The best leaders in SSDS can do is maintain a “positive restlessness” and provide and indeed encourage “leadership from every corner” (Kuh, Kenzie, Schuh and Whitt, 2005) and all over the place.

Conclusion

Universities are like constellations. They contain, not control, numbers of bodies creating and reflecting light. The shape they take, and how they are perceived, are more than the sum of the brightness of individual stars, the clusters of asterisms, and the relationships stretched over these. Different perspectives of observers create different views. The connections between entities are as important as the entities themselves - without the spaces between, there would be no transmission of light.

Universities, like constellations, are believed to confer knowledge and wisdom, and provide direction for human effort. Stories are created about each of them, and these narratives endure. Universities, like constellations, exert a constant and universal influence, whilst maintaining their own peculiar grace. They both also embrace dark nebulae – areas where currently there is little or no light and which require further exploration and understanding. It seems that improving leadership in universities, and the role student support services can play in this, could be described this way.

Universities around the world can also be said to be part of regional asterisms, which in turn form a global constellation. Conceptions of effective leadership in universities with diverse cultures and traditions will differ (Wang, 2007), but the intersection of knowledge and understanding about these will strengthen rather than detract from the brightness of the constellation.

Of all of the models of leadership, distributed leadership sits most comfortably with this depiction of universities. Distributing leadership across sub-systems creates constellations of influence, through relationships within and beyond their boundaries. It connects individual stars into a collective whose shape has meaning, and a capacity to inspire.

The originator of the concept of distributed leadership, Cecil Gibb, and arguably its most articulate contemporary advocate, Peter Gronn both worked under the influence of the brightest of all constellations (Crux1,2). Perhaps this augurs well for continued research in Australia, about how distributed leadership can improve outcomes for student support and development services in universities around the globe.

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1 Southern Cross
2 Definition: 1. a vital, decisive, or pivotal point. 2. a perplexing difficulty (Random House Unabridged Dictionary 2006)
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