# Leadership:

Professional communities
of leadership practice in
post-compulsory education

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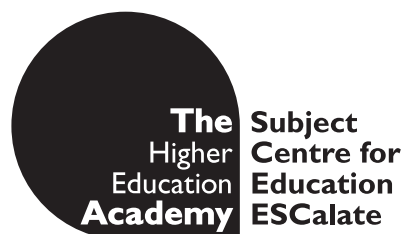
# Leadership:

Professional communities of leadership practice in post-compulsory education

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# Introduction



When I interviewed Dame Ruth Silver in 2005 about her long experience of leadership in post-compulsory education, she said that she thought that leadership was about 'winning hearts' and that this was how she and her staff developed leaders at Lewisham College:

> '….we define 'management' as 'getting things done through, with, and by others' and 'leadership' is 'developing the capacity to win hearts'. And our belief is that you cannot buy a heart, you cannot instruct a heart - that actually you really do have to win hearts, for the primary purpose of the organisation, for the decorum, the professional decorum you want to see in there….'
> (Interview with Dame Ruth Silver, DBE, 2005)

The social, professional, ethical and emotional link between leadership and professionalism identified by Ruth is a key area that will be explored in this paper in terms of the potential for the renewed development of public sector professionalism in post-compulsory education, focused on student achievement and mediated through communities of professional leadership practice. This is an important area for development, given relative problems that have emerged in recent years regarding the way in which corporate managerialism and commodification in new public management (NPM) has tended to emphasise economic profit and audit-driven quantifiable measurement of tangible outputs as key priorities both for leadership and for institutions (Maesschalck, 2004). This has been at the expense of more human public sector professional values and ethics contextualised in local situated examples of ways in which leaders can 'develop the capacity to win hearts'.

Leadership has been for some years a key area of strategic and operational importance in the UK post-compulsory education sector (CEL, 2006), being 'the buzzword on everybody's lips in educational Reform' (Blackmore, 2004). The Foster Report (2005) and DfES White Paper on FE Reform, *Further Education: Raising Skills Improving Life Chances* (DfES, 2006), outlined the UK government's view that 'strong management and leadership' were 'crucial in all providers' drive to improve quality' in the further education system (ibid: 52); a sector distinguished both by its huge size (£10 billion) and its strategic

importance for the purposes of skills development to serve the UK economy and promote social inclusion (Leitch, 2006).[1] [2]

In the above reports, the UK government strongly supported the idea that a 'major enhancement of leadership' was essential in the lifelong learning sector (DfES, 2006:50), particularly in colleges in the FE system graded as 'unsatisfactory' by Ofsted (ibid: 15). The government also confirmed in the White Paper on FE that it was introducing 'a qualification which all newly appointed college principals will be expected to achieve' to 'recognize leadership expertise' and provide a national leadership 'standard against which governing bodies can assess potential candidates for positions as college principals' (ibid). The Principals' Qualifying Programme (PQP) established by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership during 2006-08 is achieving this aim, with the intention of assisting the government-led focus on fostering major improvements in post-compulsory education by providing high quality leadership development for principals in the sector.

Yet while leadership is officially recognized in relatively straightforward, business-focused proactive terms in policy documents, staff in post-compulsory education institutions tend to be more sceptical and negative about the potential for leadership to change institutions in positive ways. Some researchers have also been critical about the ability of leadership to provide a generalized solution for the achievement of

massive institutional improvements. Many top-down policy-led changes and restructurings have occurred in the UK post-compulsory education sector during the past decades, leading both to 'innovation fatigue' and to cynicism about both leadership and management. Kelly, Iszatt White, Martin and Rouncefield (2006) are amongst a number of researchers who have traced the 'crisis in leadership' that arose in further education in the post-incorporation era following 1993. In this era, a 'customer-led' business focus developed in further education (Ainley and Bailey, 1997), influenced by the private sector reforms of the 1980s and informed by entrepreneurial ideologies that radically challenged more traditional public sector pedagogic conceptions founded on student-focused academic values. As Elliot (1996), Randle and Brady (1997), Kerfoot and Whitehead (1998), Goddard-Patel and Whitehead (2000), Ball (2003), and Kelly et al. (2006) discuss, teaching staff in post-compulsory education were loath to adopt new managerial, business-focused practices in replacement of an older public sector ethos in which the professional autonomy of teaching staff had been taken for granted.

The survival of colleges in this post-incorporation era became increasingly dependent on their performance against externally-monitored targets. Stringent audit and inspection regimes were imposed on post-compulsory education by its funding providers. Whitehead (2005) and Avis and Bathmaker (2004) describe the 'performativity' arising from this over-

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[1] *In this discussion paper, the term 'further education system' is regarded as more or less synonymous with 'post-compulsory education' provision and/or 'lifelong learning'. However, it is recognized that complex distinctions can be made between each of these terms: references for further information on this are provided.*

[2] *The final report of the Leitch Review of Skills,* Prosperity for all in the Global Economy: World Class Skills, *was published on 5th December 2006. The report states that the UK should urgently raise achievements by doubling attainment at all levels of skills to become a world leader in skills by 2020. The FE/PCE sector is crucial to this vision.*

regulation of post-compulsory institutions which Hargreaves (2003) has characterized as 'government-by-target'. Hargreaves (2003), Ball (2003) and Avis and Bathmaker (2004) observe that this kind of performativity is ultimately counter-productive. As Whitehead notes:

> *While performativity may well suit the government, which is clearly anxious to be seen to be effective and trusted controllers of the public purse, it does result in a loss of motivation and dynamism in many institutions, not least because performative work cultures are not cultures where trust is placed very highly. Performativity damages the vital trust relationship between staff and between staff and their managers, the result being that a majority in the FE workforce feel they are no longer trusted and relied upon to be able to make informed and professional judgements. So increasingly they don't. Instead, they learn a new work role, which is to value bureaucracy and procedure, to play the system.*
> (Whitehead, 2005: 18)

Day-to-day survival needs in post-compulsory education since incorporation demanded that institutions performed effectively in accounting for public funding, by producing ever-increasing quantifiable, rigorous demonstration of successful enrolment, retention and achievement results for students. A constant need to demonstrate 'improvements' has possessed the sector for some years, as noted by Wahlberg, Colley and Gleeson, who observed with concern in 2005 that, 'In the UK,

there has been a recent spate of interest in improving teaching and learning in FE that almost borders on a moral panic' (Wahlberg et al., 2005). In this atmosphere, given the potential for practitioners to be minutely audited and monitored to such an extent that their roles become commodified and deprofessionalized, Avis and Bathmaker proposed a new 'politics of hope' for the lifelong learning sector to be 'characterised by an aspiration towards critical and democratic practice'. Avis and Bathmaker also recognized, however, that such hope must not just be that of 'romantic possibilitarian' empty discourse enshrined in solipsistic 'reflective practice' (Avis and Bathmaker, 2004: 301) but should be grounded in situated, whole-sector structural proactive critique of professional practices within post-compulsory education.

Gleeson and Knights (2008) critique the 'latest fad of distributed and transformative leadership as a new panacea to cure all the accumulated ''ills'' of Further Education in England', drawing attention to the 'invasive audit, inspection and performance cultures' in the sector. They observe that some middle managers are reluctant to be recruited as leaders, saying that such staff remain keen to retain their pedagogic values, continuing contact with students, autonomy and work-life balance rather than face the multiple challenges of providing leadership. Gleeson and Knights (ibid.) posit the need for 'a community of leadership practice' and for a 'rethink about leadership in the public sector'. This discussion paper puts forward one potential model for a community of professional leadership practice in post-compulsory education. The hope for leadership is that more flexible, equitable and situated leadership practices informed by pedagogic understanding and shared reflective dialogue with peers in a community of professional practice can provide a more empowering solution for post-compulsory education institutions.

# What is Leadership?



Theoretical attempts at definitions of leadership have all been to some extent limited and partial, despite thousands of publications on the subject. An enormous prior literature on leadership has mostly recognized that there is no one overriding theory that adequately describes the phenomenon of leadership. However, there is basic agreement amongst researchers and business thinkers on some common points of understanding in the definition of leadership. The international GLOBE (*Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness*) research project reported from a 1994 meeting at the University of Calgary involving 54 country co-investigators representing 38 cultures that this international leadership research project had defined leadership as 'the ability to motivate, influence, and enable individuals to contribute to the objectives of organizations of which they are members' (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta, (Eds), 2005: xxii; Jackson, 2005).

This generic statement does not really outline what leaders *do* to achieve this, though there is some general agreement about the rôles that effective leaders tend to fulfil. Firstly, leadership creates, interprets and sustains the vision, meanings and purposes in organizations. Secondly, leadership acts as a beacon for the mission, values and ethics to be upheld within this. Thirdly, leadership points to future directions for growth and change in the organization. Fourthly, leadership sets the tone and directs the standards for relationships with and amongst followers regarding communications and culture. Finally, leadership outlines strategic objectives and plans for organizations and facilitates effective management operations. Leadership is distinguishable from management, as summed up in the statement: *'leadership is doing the right things, management is doing things right'* (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). In other words, leaders determine the kind of actions to do; managers work out efficient ways to carry out these actions.

Leadership is an enigmatic, paradoxical concept, difficult to define comprehensively in formal academic terms and even harder to achieve effectively in practice in education. While leadership often straightforwardly 'just happens' as a commonsense real-life process in day-to-day situations, it is sometimes easier to experience directly than to theorize about. Effective leadership seems to depend to a large degree on an expert 'know-how' in operational practices that is difficult to articulate and teach to others. A growth in 'on the job' leadership

coaching and mentoring for educational leaders in work-based continuing professional development has occurred in response to the challenges of training staff to be good leaders. Grint in fact advises that leadership is best characterized as an 'art', because, paradoxically:

> *…. it appears to have more to do with invention than analysis, despite claims to the contrary; it operates on the basis of indeterminacy, whilst claiming to be deterministic; it is rooted in irony, rather than the truth; and it usually rests on a constructed identity but claims a reflective identity'* (Grint, 2000: 6)

Grint notes that leadership is best learned in a community of practice (ibid, 2000). In effect, it is clear that there is a limit to the extent leadership can be 'taught', as it seems it partly emerges intuitively and evokes instinctive responses. Humans naturally recognize and respect individuals who stand out from the crowd as capable leaders who seem to have the ability to exercise authority in legitimate, useful ways for the group involved. Semi-conscious residues of autocratic leadership and group herding behaviours necessary for survival in the animal kingdom affect humans instinctively. Left to themselves, groups of people gravitate naturally towards the adoption of social rules, adhering to a dominance hierarchy for security, with a leader identifiably 'in charge' at the top of a 'pecking order', with an ordered range of subordinates below in a chain of command. There is evidence that 'organized mammalian societies' require both socially dominant and hyper-dominant beings to be identified for the security, survival and reproduction of the group (Hutch, 2006; Wilson, 1998).

Despite this seemingly natural, intuitive side to leadership, the field of leadership studies is complex and highly contested: despite many publications and theories on leadership, no one universal theory predominates, despite the tentative definitions above. Some business writers and researchers have even queried whether 'leadership' exists at all as a distinct entity (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003) while others have drawn attention to the paradoxes and ironies of leadership (Handy, 1993 ; Manz, Anand, Joshi and Manz, 2008). Yet although there is general dissention about the effectiveness of theoretical leadership studies, mostly, there is agreement that leadership as a phenomenon exists, even though the complexities and ambiguities of its operation are manifestly evident.

A popular view of leadership is that formal leader-managers and informal emergent leaders tend to be dominant, charismatic individuals who attract 'followers' because of their confidence, persuasive communication skills and personal magnetism. Yet this is a simplified stereotype of leadership. Research in fact indicates that there is no one definitive set of 'traits' or 'behaviours' that characterizes leaders. Charisma, dominance and charm, though often popularly regarded as 'traits' of successful leaders, are not at all necessary conditions of leadership: there many different kinds of effective leaders with a variant range of qualities. It is also difficult to separate out leadership from the contexts in which it operates, and the 'fit' between leaders and the culture in which they operate is crucial.

In the public sector, staff tend to be highly critical of leaders, particularly those at senior levels. Yet there is, despite this, an almost mythic attachment even in the most die-hard critics to the potential for new leaders to rescue crisis situations before cynicism kicks in: initial intuitive responses to leaders even sometimes

seem naïve, particularly during times of stress or at the start of new ventures. However, although 'followers' in the public sector may initially respond to leaders positively and place trust in them, staff are also often suspicious and cynical and give people a hard time if they don't live up to the faith placed in them.

While the notion of 'leadership' has tended to attract greater provenance than 'management' in recent years, the two are often confused. They are, however, complementary and both are needed for successful organizational operations, as the quotation by Bennis and Nanus (1985) above demonstrates. Leadership can also be either 'formal' or 'informal'. Formal leaders are those with a specific role in

management, while informal leaders may comprise anyone from any level of hierarchy. The traits and behaviours of leaders and the issues involved in symbolic leadership or 'meaning making' are amongst those issues that have been considered in more detailed studies of leadership which examine a range of different theories of leadership (Northouse, 1997, Jameson, 2006). For the past few decades, there has been increasingly less interest in 'trait', charismatic and heroic theories of leadership, as newer understandings of the social, democratic and flexible dimensions of leadership such as distributed or collaborative leadership have predominated (Jameson, 2007). The latter dimensions of leadership are appropriate to this study, as explored in the next sections.

# What is Post-Compulsory Education?



Often identified with further education, vocational, professional and lifelong learning, 'post-compulsory education' (PCE) refers to post-16 provision that is literally no longer 'compulsory' for students to attend that is concerned mainly with FE entry to Level 3 sub-degree work undertaken by post-compulsory age learners, situated for the most part outside of higher education.

In this paper, 'post-compulsory education' refers to provision in the lifelong learning sector funded by the LSC, including some 14-19 college provision, access and continuing education higher education provision. In 2003 post-compulsory education research (Jameson and Hillier, 2003), we described the diversity of PCE by noting that it comprised 'educational provision for post-compulsory age learners at sub-degree level in a range of post-16, adult and extramural education and training institutions', noting also the 'large amount of provision that could be termed ''post-compulsory'' in higher education, especially in full and part-time extramural, adult and evening classes' (Jameson and Hillier, 2003, Jameson, 2006).

The 2006 White Paper, *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES, 2006), positioned the further education system as the key sector identified to deliver the government's economic, social and vocational skills agenda, highlighting a marked focus on increasing quality and outcomes for learners. There is therefore a strong need for post-compulsory education providers to improve provision for learners. The PCE sector, which arguably includes and goes beyond further education, also educates the largest number of learners in the UK, being the most inclusive and economically challenged sector (Jameson and Hillier, 2003: 2). Its diversity and inclusivity is such that it seems most appropriate to describe it as the *'Yes, but . . . and'* sector (Jameson, 2006): the teaching, learning, management and quality challenges facing the sector and its leadership are considerable.

# Leadership in Post-Compulsory Education



A growing number of studies have been carried out in leadership in post-compulsory education in the past decade, including those by Briggs, 2005; CEL, 2004; Frearson, 2003a, 2003b; Gleeson, 2001; Gleeson and Knights, 2008; Goddard-Patel and Whitehead, 2000; Hill, 2000; Jameson, 2006, 2007; Jameson and McNay, 2006; Kerfoot and Whitehead, 1998; Leader, 2004; Lumby, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Lumby, Harris, Briggs, Gloer and Muijs, 2005; NAO, 2005; Randle and Brady, 1997a, 1997; Shain and Gleeson, 1999; Simkins, 2000, 2003, 2005 and Simkins and Lumby, 2002.

Earlier studies (Randle and Brady, 1997a, 1997b, Elliott, 1996, 1999) investigated and critiqued the corporate leadership and management styles adopted in FE during the post-incorporation period, noting that a climate of blame, fear of surveillance and distrust had emerged within post-compulsory education. Leadership and management were criticized for many faults, including behaviours described as 'macho', bullying, hierarchical, dictatorial, controlling, overly business-driven and autocratic. Power was observed to be almost exclusively at the top of organisations, specifically in the roles of principals, now labelled 'chief executives', while a

business-like 'client-centred' ethos prevailed, in which a small number of top managers held authority and power. Such studies observed the conflict between the business-like approaches of 'new managerialism' and an older public sector pedagogically-centred teacher professionalism whose freedoms were increasingly regulated and curtailed by masculinist, bullying forms of management in a background characterized by multiple restructurings, redundancies, failing institutions, and overstressed and overworked staff, notably in further education colleges. Researchers noted that lower echelons of staff and students in FE rarely were involved in running institutions: a 'them' and 'us' culture emerged, characterized by a new managerialist business culture based on 'strategic planning'.

However, in 1999, Gleeson and Shain critiqued the 'over-deterministic simplification' of views that a managerialist imperative dominated the culture of further education (1999:462). They observed that the situation was more complex and nuanced. Simkins and Lumby (2002) called for a more enriched, differentiated analysis of leadership and management in the sector (Lumby, 2000), while Lumby (2003a) summed up the limited nature of leadership research

in the sector by expressing concern that research on leadership in colleges had by 2003 had a limited focus on individual leaders, government policy and the power of leadership. Lumby stated that in her view a 'two dimensional oil painting' had been produced, when what was required was a more complex and nuanced 'analysis of a three-dimensional moving hologram' (Lumby, 2003a: 291).

Lumby's view that leadership research and development in the learning and skills sector could be expanded and enriched was generally shared. Successive post-incorporation restructurings had led to a concern about sectoral leadership, resulting in the establishment of the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) in 2003 with a mission to achieve major improvements in leadership in learning and skills, notably in further education, in which it was noted that a leadership succession crisis had been looming for some years.

As a result of CEL's establishment, a funded CEL leadership research dimension enabled the production of a greater number of more finely nuanced detailed research studies on leadership in the sector in 2004-08 than had hitherto been possible (see, e.g. Collinson and Collinson, 2007; Govindji and Linley, 2008). Although the requirements for a fuller, more differentiated leadership analysis of post-compulsory education have still not fully been met, the research findings of recent CEL reports has created an enriched strand of analysis of research on leadership as well as a range of practitioner research reports.

The findings of some of CEL's studies indicate that trends from earlier periods of post-incorporation marketization and scrutiny still permeate the FE system. A leading emphasis continues to be placed on scrutiny, accountability and external measurement to benchmarks, though some disjunction between the kind of measurement required in institutions and the actual goals set forth by government policy has also been noted by CEL researchers (Fox, Kerr, Collinson, Collinson and Swan, 2005: 2.1). Addressing the difference between government imperatives and the actual work being done in colleges, Fox et al. commented on the focus of CEL's research:

> *CEL's research begins from a focus on what it is that people in leadership positions in FE colleges actually do. This contrasts with models of leadership which are often decontextualised. Such examples include recent concerns with transactional, heroic, transformational and distributed leadership; models which remain popular in leadership literatures, but which lack a substantial empirical understanding of how they are adopted and used in practice. From our research perspective, we have found that leadership work in FE colleges is less about the work of a few talented individuals and more about the successful organization of a complex network of situated leadership practices involving staff from across the organization.* (Fox et al., 2005: 2.2)

In recent leadership studies in post-compulsory education, including those by CEL, much interest has been expressed in collaborative, networking and engagement aspects of leadership. In reaction to the history of post-incorporation FE 'micro-managerialism', which was generally seen as destructive and undermining of both staff and

students, less emphasis is now being placed on hierarchical top-down management and more on the potential for leadership to develop a beneficial climate for renewed public service engagement focused on learners and 'environments for the realization of student strengths' (Govinji and Linley, 2008).

For this, the creation of values-based organizations, notably those guided by a coherent set of ethics and values by which the organization operates, is regarded as increasingly important (Jameson, 2006). Beneficial rôle-models are provided by leaders who give detailed attention to co-ordinating and understanding the living and the lived environment, the people, relationships, contexts, needs and daily actions of staff they work with, rather than acting remotely as distant, controlling managers issuing a series of orders from 'on high' to subservient troops below. Such leaders are more likely to create high trust situations in which staff and students can thrive. Kelly et al. (2004) discuss this gaining of trust in relation to their leadership research in the sector:

*The traditional notion of leadership as 'leading from the front' is therefore not nearly as important in FE colleges as gaining the trust of organizational members as followers and gaining their permission to be led (Iszatt White et al, 2004; Kelly et al, 2005).  Thus, leadership depends on gaining legitimacy. This gaining of legitimacy is often through relentless attention to a multitude of varied, and what might sometimes be called 'mundane' tasks.*  (Kelly et al, 2004).

Binney, Wilke and Williams (2005) promote 'living leadership', the kind of flexible leadership required for the 'gaining of legitimacy' through engagement in everyday, authentic, ordinary actions rather than the inert or passive controlling management of those who sit back and run the show from closed doors. It involves the sort of hands-on 'leadership work' that Ruth Silver describes in her view of a principal as the kind of person who can be seen, when necessary, to act 'with her sleeves up, brushing the steps', while simultaneously remaining careful not to compete with or 'micromanage' day-to-day operational leader-managers. As Ruth has noted, the leader steps in with mindful engagement 'to do whatever needs to be done' (Jameson, 2006). Through such authentic engagement in day-to-day leadership tasks and the sharing of this in a reflective dialogue based on an honest critique in a community of professional practice, helpful improvements in leadership development can be achieved.

# Leader Professionalism

As noted in the previous section, during the post-incorporation era a growing tension developed in post-compulsory education between the 'performativity' of new public management responses to external audit and inspection demands, and a pedagogically-focused 'passion to educate', which, combined with collegiate trust, had previously characterized the professional teaching workforce. The potential for a clash between 'professionalism' versus 'managerialism' is a key one for post-compulsory education, in which staff in a range of roles, including those in leadership, management, teaching and administration are qualified with professional status in a variety of occupations. Both managers and teacher professionals may regard themselves as autonomously in charge of their area of expertise, resulting in a clash of power and culture.

Managers tend to be driven by loyalty to the organization and duty to achieve external funding requirements, outputs, outcomes and budgetary control. They tend to view lecturers and administrators as resources to be managed and 'controlled' for the achievement of efficient quality outcomes for the organization. Professional lecturers, on the other hand, tend to view themselves as accountable to the recipients of their services (students, business clients or other staff), and to national or international professional standards, sometimes linked to the 'community of practice' (CoP) of a professional network. The allegiance of professionals is usually more strongly tied to colleagues, students/clients and outward-facing links with professional bodies than to any one institution, whereas managers may often be focused on inward-facing loyalty to the particular institution they are 'managing'. Randle and Brady (1997a) identified that managers were concerned with authoritative control of systems, processes, staffing, quality assurance mechanisms, institutional loyalty and financial management to implement strategy planned by senior leaders, while teachers tended to be more concerned with pedagogy, learners, public service ethos, the maintenance of trust and tactic professional knowledge in peer-group networks, professional standards and autonomy (1997a: Figure 1.6).

Managers can therefore sometimes be at odds with professionals in a clash of power and cultural conflicts (Hall and Marsh, 2000). Some professional leaders, notably those with strong confidence in their own professional standards, can transcend the limitations

of transactional management to resolve such conflicts by regarding themselves as simultaneously professionals and managers, yet still the differences between the two roles can result in tensions. The word 'management' itself has been somewhat under pressure from negative connotations linked with the 'new managerialism' which was equated with autocratic and dictatorial managerial positions adopted by many senior management teams in colleges following 1993. The rise of 'managerialism' in education has also been linked with the production of business-inspired mission statements, strategic plans, quality systems, marketing plans and targets for quantifiable accountability (Simkins, 2003: 228). Dissatisfaction with managerialism has encouraged researchers and practitioners to seek alternative solutions to the ongoing need of educational institutions for effective educational leadership.

Avis (2003) discussed these kinds of tensions in relation to the role of trust, performativity and teacher professionalism, observing that target-setting and action-planning performance management tends to operate within a 'blame culture', and is 'at odds with current strictures surrounding the knowledge economy, which emphasise fluidity, non-hierarchical team work, and high trust relations . . . (Avis, 2003: 324). Blackmore (2004: 439) described cultural 'dissonance' in education as a clash between 'performativity requirements based on efficiency and narrowly defined and predetermined criteria of effectiveness and success' and 'teachers' professional and personal commitment to making a difference for all students based on principles of equity'. Briggs (2005a) was amongst those who critiqued a simplified dichotomy between 'managerialism' and 'professionalism' in further education, noting that a number of different kinds of 'professionalisms', including those relating to values, roles and contexts, were in operation in the sector.

It seems that a more supportive framework for professional leadership within PCE is necessary if the widespread sectoral improvement aims earlier outlined in the government-led initiative, *Success for All*, are ever to be achieved (NAO, 2005). Educational leadership is best focused on the concept that academic leadership and collegiality can be combined with the practices of management, as has been achieved in some high performing institutions. Effective 'pedagogic' leadership provides high levels of professionalism in the disciplines of education, including up to date knowledge and expertise in the field (Briggs, 2005b: 232; Busher and Harris, 2000: 109). Good academic leadership requires high quality, responsive, continuously improving and adaptable professional competence in pedagogic methods, for the benefit of students and other teachers. Within the debate on leadership, it is important that both practice and theory have an ongoing role in shaping our concepts and practices.

Staff development activities that encompass 'reflective practice' may be used to develop a rich interconnection between professional leaders' theoretical knowledge ('know what') and practical knowledge ('know how'). The concepts of 'reflective practice' and 'reflection-in-action' derive from Donald Schön (1983). Schön proposed that we should challenge theoretical models of 'technical rationality' with concepts of the deep practical knowledge deriving from the 'tacit' understandings of experienced professionals (Schön, 1983). These concepts have been both frequently applied and much criticized. Some critics have dismissed the concept of 'reflective practice' because of its under-theorised widespread adoption, while others are concerned that 'reflective practice' may disguise subtle surveillance of staff (see Gilbert, 2001, on the problematic 'rituals of the confessional'). However, if appropriately contextualised, theorised and

sensitively applied, the concept still has value. Lingard *et al.* (2003) describe the role of 'teacher-leaders' in schools: 'staff whose deep understanding of pedagogic leadership encourages them to be lifelong learners themselves, and to engage with education in the same way students do', as '…. leaders who themselves model effective professional learning by examining their own practice and working alongside staff . . . (Lingard *et al.*, 2003: 43).

We discussed in the previous sections that leadership cannot easily be taught. Leadership can, however, be developed, though the rich knowledge of in-depth expertise some leaders naturally possess requires 'know how' as well as procedural knowledge to be transmitted when new leaders take over. A model of leadership in which teachers are seen as pedagogic leaders working in collaboration with other professionals to explore and develop 'know-how' is particularly useful in education. Avis and Bathmaker (2004: 301) propose a model of teacher professionalism that can inform learning leadership. The professional 'leader-manager' can foster the growth of 'teacher-leader' staff in institutions in which the culture is informed by collegial pedagogic models of leadership and critical collaborative dialogue. This kind of organisation tends to be characterised by *a high degree of leader-member exchange* or 'high LMX' (Briggs, 2005b: 224, citing Howell and Hall-Meranda, 1999: 683) with a good sense of trust and creative interaction between leaders and team members, resulting in co-operation, mutually critical friendship and effective performance outcomes.

This is markedly in contrast to those PCE institutions in which a rigid hierarchy of management still exists, as one interviewee commented in a recent research study on trust and leadership in the sector:

*In my college, which… was low trust, the hierarchy was almost visible. The hierarchy of,* 'I'm upper class and I look down on him because he's middle class. And I'm middle class and I look up to him ... I look down on them because they're lower class' *— you know, the [John] Cleese sketch. That was completely visible between senior management team, middle managers and staff - the hierarchy completely visible in terms of the fact that lecturers in this low trust organisation deliver off the shelf lessons, teach 24-25 hours a week, do their paperwork, turn up for parents' evenings, and they don't have a brain — they are just a pair of hands. Middle managers make the decisions as to where and what lecturers do. And senior managers tell middle managers what to do. I don't think that people believe me when I say that these models are still working out there in the sector. People don't believe me when I say I can take them to a college where this class structure in the hierarchy of the organisation is visible. But it's out there: it's living.*
(Interviewee from Trust and Leadership project, Jameson, 2008a)

In organizations such as that described, in which fixed hierarchies have been created in an implicit class system and in which managers perceive themselves (and are perceived) as much more 'important' or

'powerful' than practitioners, there may be barriers of misunderstanding and resentment between 'managers' and 'academic' or 'professional' staff. By contrast, an organization managed by leaders with sufficient humility to perceive of themselves as learners may be one in which people at all levels can grow and develop. Paradoxically, humility, while at first appearing to make leaders subservient, in fact tends significantly to raise followers' respect and regard for leaders over the longer term: the quality of 'humility' is a core defining feature of Jim Collins's Level 5 concept of 'great' leadership (Collins, 2001).

A shared model of professional leadership amongst those who perceive that everyone benefits from learning, including leaders at all levels, can be informed by authentic, democratic dialogue with practitioners. The role of *coalitions* within professional networking and collaborative leadership (Mullen and Kochan, 2000) in the creation of 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in PCE provides a useful model for future development (see next section). This concept takes 'distributed leadership' to more advanced, creative levels, enabling us to recognize the *coalition* as 'a dynamic and organic creative entity' fostering 'synergy, empowered and shared leadership, and personal and organizational transformation' (Mullen and Kochan, 2000: 183). Mullen and Kochan note that their concept of the 'coalition' '. . . was conceived using Bolman and Deal's (1993: 60) advice to 'Empower everyone: increase participation, provide support, share information, and move decision making as far down the organization as possible' (Mullen and Kochan, 2000: 187) to improve organizational operations. This means empowering leader-managers throughout the organization in a *'heterarchy'* (Grint, 2005) or network of interconnected relations, rather than just envisaging leadership at the top of a hierarchy of top-down power.

# Professional Communities of Leadership Practice
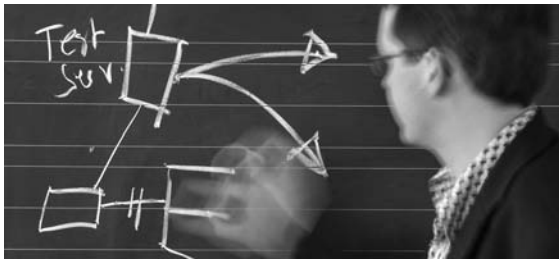


Originating from the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), the model of a community of practice (CoP) recognises and develops the socio-situational learning that occurs amongst a group of people who share a passion for developing and refining a particular 'practice'. This 'practice' can be linked to a professional role, body of knowledge, topic of interest, issue, or a series of processes or problems. CoPs regularly come together to interact, sharing their knowledge and expertise to develop 'practice' relating to the subject of interest on a long-term basis. The area or 'domain' of knowledge that is the focus for the community is shared in common, although membership can be geographically or culturally dispersed. The CoP therefore consists of the three elements of 'community', 'domain' and 'practice' (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002:4). CoPs can be either tightly or loosely structured, but they routinely involve voluntary social networking, longer-term interaction and a shared area of passion. Spontaneously evolving communities of practice cannot really be set up or 'controlled' by management, as by definition they are 'self-organizing'. Such naturally occurring CoPs have been differentiated from intentionally designed communities of practice (Jameson, Ferrell, Kelly, Walker and Ryan, 2006). The latter require a specific design to suit flexible networking and democratic work practices between practitioners engaged in collaborative learning, built on relationships of trust (Mason and Lefrere, 2003).

Although voluntary communities of practice are of necessity self-organizing, intentional CoPs can be designed using leadership teams set up and managed within and between organisations. Team leadership groups can be set up to tackle particular tasks and to develop mutually supportive critical practice, as in the CAMEL (Collaborative Approaches to the Management of e-Learning) HEFCE/Leadership Governance and Management-funded JISC infoNet model for the development of a community of practice (JISC infoNet, 2006, Jameson et al., 2006). Although this has its origins in the development of a CoP for e-learning based on the agricultural model of a farmers' self-help group in Uruguay, the model has also been applied to other areas such as leadership and team development (Jameson, 2007). CAMEL specifies that the following are needed to set up an intentionally-designed CoP:

**A Community of Practice:**

- *takes time to develop*

- *requires trust which requires time; however social elements and face-to-face meetings can speed up the process*

- *requires a shared passion*

- *requires commitment by all parties*

- *can stimulate and inspire to give confidence to instigate changes in practice*

(JISC infoNet, 2006, see also *Appendix 1*)

**e-Learning CAMEL Johari Windows:**



*Figure 1: Using Johari Windows in CAMEL to share tacit knowledge (adapted from JISC infoNet, 2006)*

There is a need consciously to plan for the successful teamwork of leaders who form part of an intentional community of practice. Team performance in leadership groups is affected by the degree to which the team has high levels of social and project management skills and is capable of fostering reflexivity amongst team members (Hoegl and Parboteeah, 2006). Teamwork, social and project management skills can be facilitated and enhanced through collaborative leadership development programmes linked to the criteria outlined above for the development of a CoP. A willingness to engage in honest critical reflection to improve leadership practice should form part of this work. The CAMEL model encourages this through a progressive series of partnership visits that are collaboratively planned and documented, focused on 'things which matter', expertly facilitated and evaluated, with a 'strong emphasis on tacit knowledge and making this explicit' (JISC infoNet, 2006). As part of the CAMEL project, the management concept of Johari Windows (Luft and Ingham 1955, JISC infoNet, 2006), was introduced to encourage participants to engage more
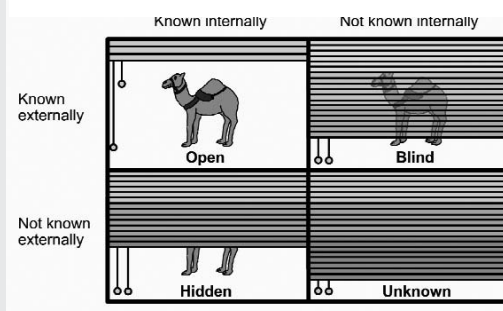
reflectively in mutual honest critique about their 'know-how' of self and others regarding practice. The idea is to encourage participants in a CoP gradually to share more knowledge in a trusting way, by drawing back the shutters of the blind, hidden and unknown areas of what is known. The top left window is the 'open quadrant' in which people share ideas in honest critique, 'warts and all', representing knowledge that is shared externally and internally about practice (*Figure 1*):

Given the kinds of multiple tensions and difficulties that have affected leaders in post-compulsory education, as discussed in the previous section, and the many challenges for large-scale improvements facing the sector, there is a role for shared levels of leadership development through the setting up of new, funded intentional professional communities of leadership practice linked to knowledge-sharing, as in the Johari Windows concept. It is argued that leaders can benefit from more structured development of shared knowledge, mutual reflective critique and the trust that is built up gradually within a professional

community of leadership practice (Ferrell, 2007; Jameson et al., 2006, Jameson, 2007). A community of leadership practice can accelerate leadership development by encouraging meaningful dialogue and diverse perspectives to enable leaders to achieve higher levels of mutual learning regarding the multiple challenges faced by leadership.

However, such a community of practice requires also the conscious adoption of values-based distributed and collaborative forms of team leadership to develop trust and enable genuine dialogue between professional leaders in post-compulsory education. In a recent interview on trust and leadership in the lifelong learning sector, one disillusioned interviewee noted that:

> *I don't believe that communities of practice exist in the FE sector ….. I think the CoP concept is fundamentally not applicable in FE, because there has to be some commonality for a CoP. There is no commonality, there is constant change and constant turmoil. Only when this Principal that I talked about shut the doors to the outside world and filters, filters, filters very carefully what he lets in to interrupt his college, can any stability to be achieved.* (Interviewee on Trust and Leadership, Jameson, 2008a).

For the establishment of some 'commonality', there therefore needs to be a conscious model adopted in which leadership is responsibly shared in a planned way. 'Shared', 'distributed' and 'collaborative' leadership models all foster and enable social processes involving relative levels of empowerment

and engagement in leadership by more than one person (Jameson, 2007). Essentially, these concepts are all linked to the idea that, rather than solely resting with one individual or a small group, usually at the top of the positional hierarchy, leadership responsibility is delegated, more or less effectively and completely, to other individuals who may be formal and/or informal leaders. *Figure 2* depicts some of the differences between 'shared', 'distributed' and 'collaborative' models of leadership. It is argued that 'collaborative leadership' is the most appropriate model to link to the setting up of communities of leadership practice. As Raelin (2003) suggests, cited by Jackson (2005), this is a timely and much-needed development:

> *in the twenty-first century organization, we need to establish communities where everyone shares the experience of serving as a leader, not sequentially, but concurrently and collectively'*
> (Raelin, 2003: xi; Jackson, 2005: 1321).

Nevertheless, the concept of *'collaborative leadership'* is not as developed in its theoretical background and history as 'distributed leadership', and it therefore requires consideration.

Leadership collaboration has been conceptualised as distributed-coordinated team leadership for effective team performance (see Mehra, Smith, Dixon and Robertson, 2006), while 'collaborative leadership' tends to imply a *process* of working together (literally *co-labor-ating*) to share power, authority, knowledge and responsibility. A greater degree of active, equal participation in consensus-building and meaning-making is involved in collaborative leadership than is implied in merely 'sharing' or 'distributing' power (see *Figure 2*).
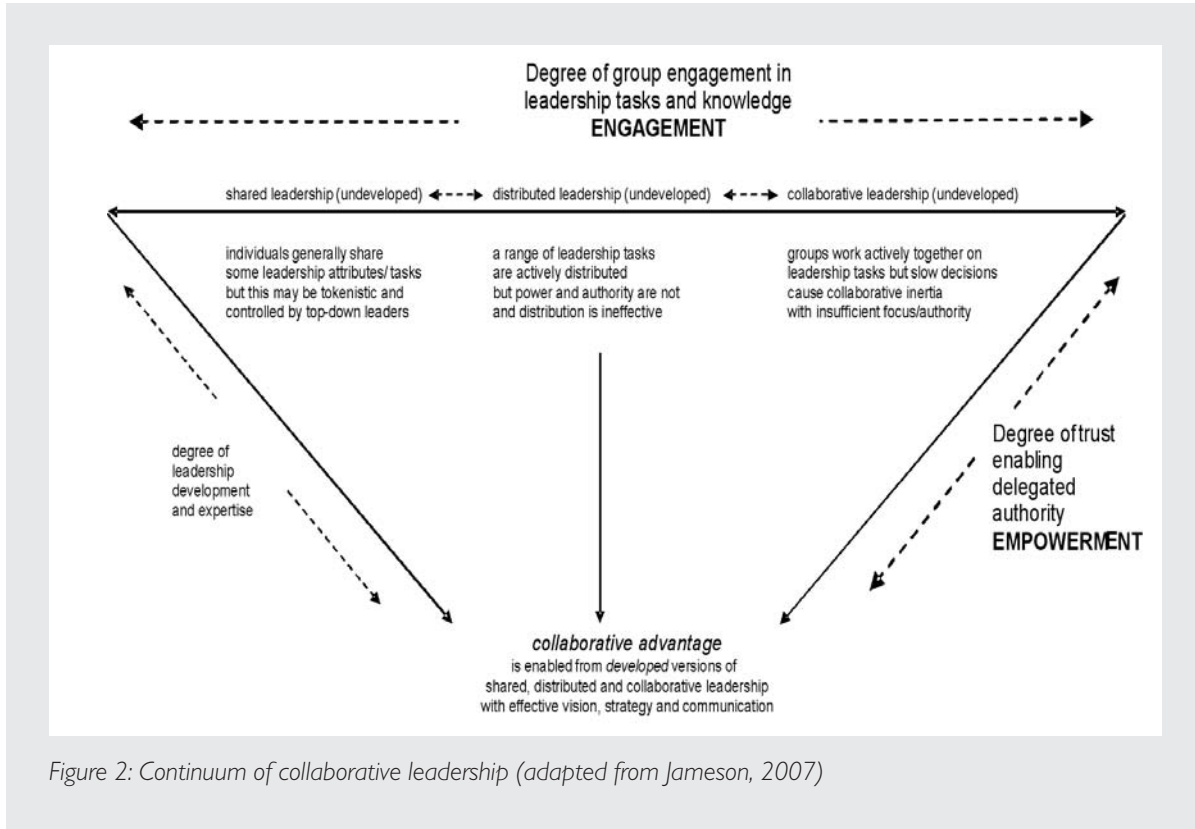
Figure 2: Continuum of collaborative leadership (adapted from Jameson, 2007)

If undertaken genuinely and effectively, collaborative leadership will tend to *transform* organisations to become more inclusive places through synergistic, dynamic processes of active engagement in leadership's vision and values, while being empowered with the knowledge, authority, responsibility and goal-directed problem-solving to improve provision. 'Collaborative leadership' can, if done effectively, change the entire organisation by enabling everyone to be seen as a leader of a particular domain of work. As one CEO interviewee described it regarding the 'importance of team work': …. 'no matter how big the problem, if you've got four hundred people trying to solve it, you can solve it'. (Jameson, 2006:190). *Figure 2* summarises the extent to which 'shared', 'distributed' and 'collaborative' leadership situations can be envisaged as being more or less engaged and empowered. As the continuum reaches a common vision in which 'collaborative advantage' from the synergy of group working on leadership is achieved, there is a point at which both engagement and empowerment are achieved in all three theoretical models. In Ruth Silver's terms, this would be the point at which leadership can begin to 'win hearts' and foster 'professional decorum' to high standards through dialogue and mutual friendly critique.

# Conclusion



Leadership is a key area of strategic and operational importance in the UK post-compulsory education sector. The sector is distinguished both by its huge size (£10 billion) and its strategic importance for the purposes of skills development to serve the UK economy and promote social inclusion (Leitch, 2006). Post-compulsory education includes further education and is to some extent synonymous with 'lifelong learning'. The Foster Report (2005) and DfES White Paper (DfES, 2006) outlined the UK government's view that 'strong management and leadership' were 'crucial in all providers' drive to improve quality' in the further/post-compulsory education system. Leadership is therefore an important area of operations in the sector, being officially recognized in business-focused proactive terms in policy documents.

Staff in post-compulsory education are more skeptical and negative than policy-makers about the potential for leadership to change institutions in positive ways. Some researchers have also been critical about the ability of leadership to provide a solution for the achievement of massive institutional improvements, as many top-down policy-led changes and restructurings have occurred in the past and the sector has been characterized by 'new managerialism' and reductive performativity. Clashes between managerialism and professionalism have resulted in some conflict between managers and teaching staff. However, these conflicts are to some extent superficial and can be overcome by leaders who regard themselves as professionals able to transcend the limitations of transactional managerialism.

A collaborative model of professional leadership can be informed by authentic, democratic dialogue with practitioners. The role of coalitions that foster professional networking and collaborative leadership can be creatively developed through the establishment of intentionally designed communities of leadership practice. The CAMEL (Collaborative Approaches to the Management of e-Learning) JISC infoNet HEFCE/LGM-funded model for communities of practice is discussed as one model which provides a useful template for the development of shared knowledge through professional communities of practice in collaborative leadership. It is argued that this provides a helpful way of enabling and supporting leaders to advance their understanding and 'know how' in leadership practices in a sector currently facing significant challenges from demanding external targets and continuous monitoring in an 'audit culture'. The difficult history of 'new managerialism' in the sector needs to be consigned to history and the page turned to a new beginning as post-compulsory education leaders engage in mutually supportive critical reflections via positive shared leadership development.

# Appendix 1: How to make a CAMEL CoP



*Figure A1: JISC infoNet CAMEL CoP Materials available free at* www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/camel.

The CAMEL (Collaborative Approaches to the Management of e-Learning) model for a community of practice (CoP) is described in more detail in JISC infoNet (2006) and Ferrell and Kelly (2006). Instructions for the intentional development of a 'designed' community of practice based on the principles of CAMEL are included in JISC infoNet's HEFCE/LGM-funded publications available free of charge at: www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/camel. The JISC infoNet site also includes instructions and infoNet kits on a variety of other useful project management concepts and tools that are relevant to CoP and project development.

The JISC-funded eLIDA CAMEL project (Jameson, 2008b), a successor project to CAMEL, was developed to test the CAMEL model for the second time. The eLIDA CAMEL included the consciously designed additional feature of the 'critical friend' (Professor Mark Stiles of the University of Staffordshire), who was recruited to the eLIDA CAMEL from the first CAMEL project. The eLIDA CAMEL applied the CAMEL CoP model to a design for learning pedagogic community in HE-FE (see *Figure A2*) and has achieved significant outputs, publishing a variety of different case studies collected

from its further and higher education participants. CAMEL itself has been rolled out to a number of other successor projects, including the Higher Education Academy e-Learning *Pathfinder* project, which has adopted the CAMEL model, including also the 'critical friend' feature developed successfully in eLIDA CAMEL.

Key features of success in both the CAMEL and eLIDA CAMEL projects were linked with the "designed features" of CAMEL as a community of practice model that is applicable in a variety of different contexts. Dubé et al. (2004) refer to these kinds of design principles as the "structuring characteristics" of CoPs:

- *Partners felt that the CoP project was built with honesty and trust.*

- *The success of the 'designed' features were appreciated.*

- *It was important to state at the outset the vital elements of the model.*

- *There had been careful consideration of the size of project team.*

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- *Minimalism was employed for tasks: processes were not that complicated.*

- *The nomadic feature of the project was a real success.*

- *The project's success lay in the fact that it was "bottom-up not top-down".*

- *The celebratory nature of the project was an important element.*

- *Total honesty about what worked and what did not work was important.*

(JISC infoNet 2006, Jameson, 2008b)

Figure A2 depicts the cycle of community of practice visits in the eLIDA CAMEL project, which trialled CAMEL for the second time and recommended that the design principles for the CoP had again proven successful.
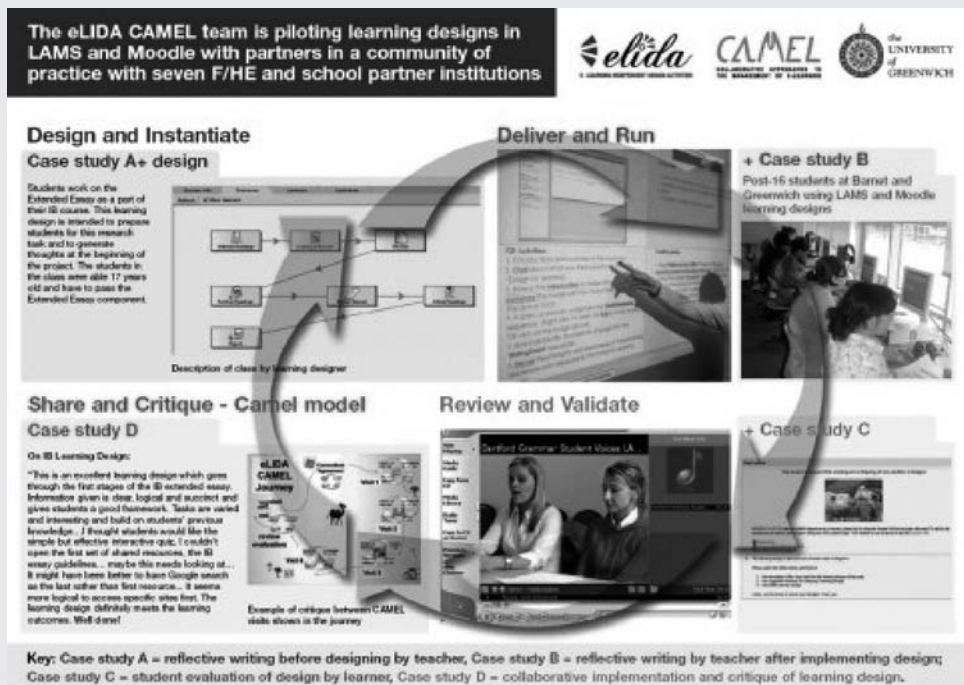


*Figure A2: JISC eLIDA CAMEL Project Framework Demonstrating Cycle of CoP Visits*
*Available at: http://dfl.cetis.ac.uk/wiki/index.php/ELIDA_CAMEL and at: Jameson, 2008b*

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