National School of Government

"Whole systems go!"

Improving leadership across the whole public service system

Propositions to stimulate discussion and reform

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"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

John Quincy Adams, 6th US President.

Executive Summary

i. This report was commissioned by the National School of Government and the Public Service Leaders Alliance. It complements a wider enquiry by the Cabinet Office into the public service leadership academies.

ii. This report addresses the question: 'What would it take to create more effective leadership of the whole governmental and public service system?'

iii. The current economic crisis provides a significant catalyst for this review. Recession requires a radical review and restructuring of governance and public services. More effective leadership across the whole system is seen as one of the best ways of reducing transaction costs between separate organisations, of improving productivity and performance outcomes, and of releasing more public value for users, citizens and communities.

iv. However, recession is not the only catalyst for new approaches to public leadership and leadership development. The world is in the throes of an even more fundamental and far-reaching global restructuring of the ecological, political, economic, technological and social context, which, we argue, requires a 'Copernican revolution' in the basic paradigms for governance and public service.

v. The new paradigms include thinking about government and public services as 'complex adaptive systems' and organisms, rather than as machines or physical structures (e.g. 'levers' or 'silos'). This also requires a radical re-design of provision for leadership and management development, in order to stimulate continuous self-improvement in performance across the whole public service system, and visible and measurable outcomes for users, citizens and communities.

vi. Warwick Business School research on public leadership leads us to put forward seven propositions for radical change in policy and practice and in leadership development across the whole public service system:

Proposition 1:
The need for new paradigms of governance as a complex adaptive system and new practices of political, managerial and civic leadership across the whole public service system.

Proposition 2:
The need for new patterns of 'adaptive leadership' to tackle tough, complex, cross-cutting problems in the community, where there may be no clear consensus about either the causes or the solutions to the problems.

Proposition 3:
Whole systems thinking and action includes the capacity to analyse and understand the inter-connections, inter-dependencies and inter-actions between complex issues, across multiple boundaries – between different sectors, services, and levels of government.

Proposition 4:
Leadership development programmes need to join up to address whole system challenges, and Whitehall needs to support this with new organisational and financial architecture.

Proposition 5:
Leadership development programmes need to translate individual learning into organisational and inter-organisational action and improvement. This requires completely different starting points from traditional leadership development programmes.

Proposition 6:
Strengthening leadership skills and capabilities for working across the whole public service system will require radical innovations in practice at three main levels (fast track graduate entry; mid-career movers and shakers; and corporate leadership top teams) and in two main arenas (multi-agency teams; and partnerships for local leadership of place) – plus a new requirement for all members of the Senior Civil Service to have spent at least three months working at the front-line.

Diagram 1: The Warwick Model for Whole System Leadership Development

	A traditional model for leadership development	An alternative "whole systems" model for leadership development
Unit of Analysis	The Individual	The Workgroup/Team
Starting Point	Theory	Practice/Problem
Location	The Retreat	The Front-Line

Proposition 7:

The above commitments to action-oriented leadership development to encourage working across the whole public service system need to be counter-balanced by an equally strong commitment to critical analysis of the changing context, and rigorous reflection on the experience of leadership in practice (both success and failure).

The above propositions and proposals are developed in fuller detail in the Main Report, opposite.

Conclusion

Our judgement is that the time is now ripe for a major new initiative to promote and cultivate leadership capabilities for working across the public service system. There is widespread agreement that this needs to be done strongly and quickly, so the key question is not 'whether' but 'how'. This brief review suggests that innovative ideas and pilot programmes for cross-service collaboration in leadership development are already being explored and tested by a number of organisations. Proposition 6 above proposes a number of practical programmes and initiatives which could be taken to push this along nationally. The critical success factor will be strong championship of a whole system, multi-level, cross-service approach to leadership development at the highest level within government, and a funding regime to incentivise this rapidly.

Whole Systems Go!

The Main Report

Aims and background

This report has been commissioned by the The National School of Government and the Public Service Leaders Alliance as part of a wider review by the Government's Cabinet Office of the contribution which the various public service leadership academies might make to leadership and capacity development for 'joined up' government and cross-service working.

This report addresses the question: *'What would it take to create more effective leadership of the whole governmental and public service system?'*

This question is not new, and has been the focus of much discussion in many parts of the public service system over many years. However, a variety of factors means that this may be an important moment of opportunity – a tipping point with the chance to turn talking into action.

The current economic crisis provides a significant catalyst for this review because the pressure to be 'doing more with less' will become stronger as Public Sector spending comes under radical scrutiny and is expected to decline sharply in real terms over the next few years. More effective leadership across the whole public service system is increasingly seen as one of the most powerful ways of reducing transaction costs between organisations, and of improving efficiency, performance and productivity across the whole Public Sector. During times of financial cutback, therefore, it is imperative that innovative programmes are developed which measurably improve leadership skills, capabilities and outcomes across the whole system.

Previous experience, in both the private and the Public Sectors, of managing periods of deep recession suggests (perhaps paradoxically) that this is a crucial moment to invest in the human resource in new ways that add value to the core business for the changed conditions – strengthening leadership and management skills not only at the corporate strategic centre but also crucially at the front-line of the workforce, where up-skilling and

re-skilling, combined with lean operations management, can lead to measurably improved outcomes for users, citizens and communities.

However, the need for more effective leadership across the whole public service system does not derive solely from the current economic crisis, far-reaching though this is in its own terms. We are in the throes of an even more fundamental and far-reaching global restructuring of the ecological, political, economic, technological and social context, which, we argue, requires a 'Copernican revolution' in the basic paradigms for governance and public service. This requires a 'whole systems' approach to thinking about government and public services, and to a radical re-design of provision for leadership and management development, in order to add public value and to create improved outcomes for users, citizens and communities.

The Warwick Theses: Seven Propositions To Stimulate Debate:

We have decided that the most useful way to tackle our brief is to put forward a series of bold propositions to stimulate thought and action. However, like Luther in Wittenberg, the Warwick theses are based on long-standing research and thinking and experience!

Our propositions are informed by over 20 years of applied research on public leadership and active engagement with leadership development programmes at all levels of government and across the whole of the public service system. (See Appendix 2 for a summary of IGPM's research and writing on leadership and leadership development, and Appendix 1 for our fuller analysis of the issues for leadership development).

In addition, in drafting these propositions we have carried out a series of telephone or face to face interviews with leaders within the public service system, including:

Michael Bichard, Institute for Government
Rod Clark, Chief Executive, National School of Government

Keith Grint, then at the Defence Leadership Academy

Sue Hopgood, Fire and Rescue Service College

Chris Hume, Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)

Steve Munby, National College for School Leadership

Gerry McSorley, NHS Institute of Innovation and Improvement

Angela O'Connor, National Policing Improvement Agency

Adrian Pulham, CIPFA

Sue Richards, David Sweeney and Rob Worrall, National School of Government

Joe Simpson, Local Government Leadership Centre

John Sinnott, Chief Executive, Leicestershire County Council

Andrew Thompson, Further Education Quality Improvement Agency (QIA)

Ewart Wooldridge, Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

An earlier version of this report was presented by us at a workshop hosted by the National School of Government in the Cabinet Office on 24 November 2008. The following people attended and contributed to the workshop discussion, with some also giving written comments on the earlier draft of the report.

These were:

Guests

Stephen Taylor, Leadership Centre for Local Government

David Evans, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

Peter Hawkins, Bath Consultancy Group

Lynne Sedgmore, Centre for Excellence in Leadership

Toby Salt, National College of School Leadership

Bob Garratt, CASS Business School

Chris Hume, Improvement and Development Agency

Garry Forsyth, Leicestershire Police

Jane McLachlan, Cabinet Office

Andy Harris, National Policing Improvement Agency,

National School of Government

Sue Richards

Rob Worrall

David Sweeney

Geoff Mead

Helen Bumford

Gary O'Hara

Sunningdale Institute Fellows

Jean Hartley

John Benington

The draft report was also distributed to the Public Sector Leadership Alliance for discussion at their December 2008 meeting, and will also feed into thinking for the Cabinet Secretary and for the Permanent Secretaries Group.

Proposition 1:

The need for new paradigms of governance as a complex adaptive system, and more effective political, managerial and civic leadership across the whole public service system.

The complex cross-cutting problems facing citizens and communities require governments to develop new paradigms of whole systems thinking, and new patterns of inter-organisational working for outcomes.

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

Government policies also push public managers to address cross-cutting issues in a joined-up way, and from the point of view of citizens and communities – recent examples include Every Child Matters; Community Area Assessments; and Public Service Agreements.

- These complex, and often contested, issues have been described by John Stewart as 'wicked' problems, and by Ron Heifetz as 'adaptive' problems. 'Wicked' or 'adaptive' problems of this kind are increasingly seen to require a qualitatively different kind of response from governments from 'tame' or 'technical' problems *(Grint, 2005; Heifetz, 1994)*:

- First, a recognition of the problems as part of a complex, polycentric, multi-causal, dynamic, inter-active and adaptive system, rather than as a simple, structured, uni-causal, mechanical chain of cause and effect *(for example, Stacey, 1996; Waldrop, 1992; Wheatley, 1992)*.

- Second, a commitment by government at all levels to work across the boundaries and silos which traditionally separate policies and programmes, in order to provide more 'joined up', citizen-centred and personalised public services.

- Third, a requirement for a qualitatively different kind of 'joined up' thinking and action by public policymakers and managers, involving a capacity to work across many different boundaries (see below).

- The profound restructuring of the ecological, political, economic, social and technological context reinforces the need for the whole public service system to work in a more coherent and co-ordinated way. For example, as the UK and its regions and localities confront the consequences of the recession and the restructuring of global financial markets, the public leadership role has to extend from 'place-shaping' to 'place-shielding' – providing a 'holding environment' within which citizens and communities can be helped to think through the risks and uncertainties they face, to confront different interests and perspectives, to debate difficult choices, to engage in deliberative democratic forums to develop their identity as a local public, and to find a common purpose and direction during a period of fundamental change *(Beck, 1992; Benington, 1996; Lyons, 2007; Quirk, 2008)*.

- This kind of deliberative democratic development is usually associated with elected politicians. Whole systems leadership development needs to pay attention to elected political leadership, and to effective working between political and managerial leaderships. Political leadership is critical to a democratic society and to effective public services. There has, over the last couple of decades, been considerable interest in using managerial leadership to improve public services, but less attention has perhaps been paid to the 'democratic deficit' and to strengthening engagement of citizens in society, for which political leadership is important. There is also increasing evidence that appropriately focused political leadership can contribute to service and organisational improvement in a number of ways *(e.g. Pandey and Moynihan, 2006; Rashman and Hartley, 2002; Hartley, 2007)*.

This report, for reasons of space, concentrates on leadership development for managers, but further analysis will need also to take into account the interface between political and managerial and community leadership.

Proposition 2:

The need for new patterns of 'adaptive leadership' to tackle tough complex, cross-cutting problems, where there may be no clear consensus about either the causes or the solutions to the problem.

Complex cross-cutting problems require not only whole systems thinking, and joined-up policymaking and service delivery, but also different patterns of leadership and action – which can address the inter-connections between issues, negotiate coalitions between different stakeholders, orchestrate inter-organisational networks and partnerships, harness disparate resources behind a common purpose, and achieve visible and measurable outcomes with and for citizens, communities and other stakeholders. This involves the exercise of leadership outside and beyond the organisation, often through

influence rather than through formal authority, in addition to leadership inside the organisation.

■ Leadership of this kind has to resist the pressure from followers to act as a god or guru who can provide magical solutions to complex problems, and instead has to persuade stakeholders to accept themselves as part of the whole system, and therefore part of the problem, and to engage in the painful process of grasping difficult nettles, working through tough problems, and adapting one's own thinking and behaviour *(Heifetz, 1994; Benington and Turbitt, 2007)*.

This kind of action-centred problem-solving leadership is being pioneered in practice by many policymakers and practitioners, as they work in inter-organisational networks and partnerships and tackle complex cross-cutting problems (e.g. crime and disorder reduction partnerships; local area agreements; cross-cutting public service agreements).

There is now an urgent need to:

■ Reflect on, analyse, evaluate and learn from this experience, to assess the conditions under which leadership leads to practical improvement, innovation and measurable outcomes.

■ Develop conceptual frameworks to help to make better sense of it *(Benington and Moore, in press; Benington and Turbitt, 2007; Heifetz, 1994; Moore, 1995; Hartley and Fletcher, 2007; Grint, 2005)*.

■ Develop ways of sharing, comparing, disseminating and transplanting this emerging knowledge and experience more widely across the whole public service system *(Hartley and Rashman, 2007; Hartley and Benington, 2006)*.

■ Develop leadership theories and models which reflect the complexities of working across sectoral and organisational boundaries, with varied groups with varied interests.

■ Identify the skills, mindsets and capabilities which underpin effective leadership across the whole system, including emotional intelligence, political

acumen, the capacity to negotiate between different interests, overcome inertia, and foster and mobilise coalitions between disparate organisations.

■ Think about leadership not just as about individuals but also about 'leadership constellations' *(Denis, Langley and Rouleau, 2005)* which consist of a team, a partnership group or other stakeholders who can work in a whole systems way.

Proposition 3:

Whole systems thinking and action requires the capacity to analyse and understand the inter-connections, inter-dependencies and inter-actions between complex issues, across multiple boundaries – between different sectors, services, and levels of government.

Whole systems thinking and action includes the capacity to analyse and understand the inter-connections, inter-dependencies and inter-actions between complex issues, across multiple boundaries:

■ between different sectors (public, private, voluntary and informal community)

■ between different levels of government (local, regional, national, supranational)

■ between different services (e.g. education, health, housing, policing; social security)

■ between different professions involved in tackling a common problem (e.g. within the Academy for Sustainable Communities, or the Homes and Communities Agency)

■ between political and managerial leaderships and processes

■ between strategic management, operational management and front-line delivery

■ between producers and users of services (in new patterns of co-creation between producers, users and other stakeholders outside the governmental system.

Leadership across the whole public service system will therefore require strengthened capabilities to think and to work along several different dimensions, often simultaneously:

■ horizontally, between different sectors, organisations, disciplines, professions stakeholders, and partners

■ vertically, along all the links in the value chain, from policy design in Westminster and Whitehall right through to service 'delivery' or intervention at the front-line in local neighbourhood communities – with movement in both directions, from top to bottom, bottom to top, and middle up-down

■ diagonally, across the decision-making networks, linking together political leaderships, strategic managers, operational managers, front-line delivery staff, users and communities.

This requires a more sophisticated analysis of the changing external context – not just the policy context provided by central government but also the wider ecological, political, economic, technological, social and organisational context. It may also require a different approach to policy analysis and development, and the need to link policy to implementation in an end to end process, which delivers practical action on the ground, at the front-line with communities.

Proposition 4:

Leadership development programmes need to join up to address whole system challenges, and Whitehall needs to support this with new organisational and financial architecture.

Leadership development programmes in the public and voluntary sectors increasingly therefore need to cultivate the knowledge and capabilities necessary to work effectively across the boundaries and networks of the whole public service system, in order to tackle the complex cross-cutting issues which concern citizens and communities.

Of course, in addition, there will always continue to be a need for specialist knowledge and skills in many areas of public service – the fire service, the health service, the police and schools still need to be led by people with expert mastery of the technical skills appropriate for their specific area of activity. Indeed it is arguable that this kind of specialist knowledge is even more necessary as a pre-condition for being able to engage effectively in cross-cutting work.

Whole systems working is not a playground for generalists or network groupies! Our research suggests that inter-organisational networks and partnerships are strongest when they are formed by organisations and actors who are clear about their own specific roles and bodies of knowledge and expertise; but who have managed to negotiate a coalition across their different interests and a common purpose which draws on their different specialisms *(Geddes and Benington, 2001)*.

It was suggested at the workshop that it might be helpful in analytical terms to consider a continuum from, on the one hand, a single public service with a single leadership development approach (cf. The Ecole National (ENA) in France) to, on the other hand, specialist leadership bodies and leadership development for particular services (the current UK system). In using this continuum, the key question is what aspects of leadership require joint or generic development across the whole public service system, and which aspects require separate development because of their specialist technical bodies of knowledge.

However, there are many areas where greater collaboration in leadership development between different public services makes good common sense, and is already beginning to be explored.

Five main forms of cross-cutting public leadership programmes seem to be emerging in practice:

■ Where there is overlapping expertise or specialism between services. For example, the police, fire, ambulance, local authority and army are developing joint leadership training for civil emergencies.

- Where leaders within a particular profession which has members in different sectors, services, and levels of government come together to discuss and develop their contribution to corporate strategic leadership (e.g. CIPFA courses for Leaders in Finance).

- Where leaders from different sectors, services and levels of government are brought together on leadership development programmes specifically within whole system aims and perspectives (e.g. Warwick University's MPA and Diploma in Public Leadership and Management, and the Modern Leaders programme run by the National School of Government, both of which draw in managers from across the whole public service system, and consciously explore leadership of inter-organisational relationships and networks across different sectors, levels and services).

- Where leaders from different services come together to share, compare and develop their knowledge and expertise so that they can respond in more holistic ways to the needs of a particular group within the population (e.g. children or old people). The National College for School Leadership runs a Multi Agency Team Development programme to address the challenges of joint working posed by the Every Child Matters agenda (see Box 1 below).

- Where leaders from across the whole system in a particular place (neighbourhood, local authority area, region or sub-region) come together for joint leadership development programmes. Whole system, inter-organisational, cross-service leadership in a particular locality is increasingly not an option but a necessity, as agencies are required to respond both to the complex fast-changing needs of their communities, and also to the need at local and regional to somehow 'join up' the wide range of disparate national government policies and programmes. (The Leicestershire Leadership In Partnership Programme, run jointly with Warwick Business School, is an imaginative and innovative

example of whole system leadership development generated from below, bringing together the county and district local authorities, the health, police and fire and rescue services, and voluntary organisations for joint leadership development (see Box 2 below).

The Need for Whitehall To Support Such Initiatives With New Organisational and Financial Architecture. In the workshop we held in November 2008, there was a concern to learn what supported or inhibited leadership development across the whole system, by reflecting on initiatives which had gone well and those which had gone less well, including the need to review the lessons from two major previous attempts; the Public Service Leaders Scheme and Leaders UK.

Two features were highlighted by several commentators. The first was the need for 'organisational and financial architecture' that was fit for the new purposes, and an incentive structure which supported whole system rather than silo-based leadership development – whole systems action and cross-service leadership programmes were undermined by funding streams which came down through vertical stovepipes.

The second was the need for strong, high-level corporate championship (e.g. by the Cabinet Secretary and the Permanent Secretaries group, in the same way that the Capability Review process had been led successfully from the corporate centre of the civil service) since this both created commitment to, and ownership of, a whole systems approach and also created a potential 'holding environment' (Heifetz, 1994) in which tough questions and tensions between siloed services could be explored and addressed.

Proposition 5:

Leadership development programmes need to translate individual learning into organisational and inter-organisational action and improvement. This requires completely different starting points from traditional leadership development programmes (see diagram 1 below).

One of the biggest challenges facing Public Sector leadership academies and programmes is how to ensure that their investment in learning by individuals is translated into improvement in the performance of their parent organisations. This is even more challenging when the unit of analysis is not a single organisation but an inter-organisational network or a complex inter-connected system like a neighbourhood, or particular group within the population (e.g. children, or older people).

There is little research into, or evidence about, the impact of leadership development programmes upon either individual or organisational performance. Most research in this field has been based upon self-reporting by participants of their own individual learning, rather than assessment by their employers or peers (though 360 degree assessments can go some way towards this). There are very few studies of the impact of leadership development programmes on organisational performance, let alone upon the whole public service system.

Instead of starting with individuals as the unit of analysis for leadership development programmes, and then attempting to translate their individual learning into changes in performance within their parent organisations, it may be more effective to start with an organisational or inter-organisational network as the unit of analysis, and to aim to develop the whole leadership team as a working unit (Day, 2001).

Similarly, instead of starting leadership development with theory and then trying to apply it back into practice, it may be more effective to start with the practical challenges facing an organisation or network and then search for leadership theories and concepts which help the practitioners to make better sense of the complexity of the specific whole system in which they are working – and therefore be able to offer clearer leadership and strategic direction.

Similarly, instead of running leadership development programmes away from the workplace, and then trying to apply the learning back into practice in the parent organisations, it may be more effective to start leadership development at the workplace or in the community, and to move continuously between the battlefield and the balcony – as they do in medical education, with student doctors spending the morning doing ward rounds at the hospital with the consultant, and then spending the afternoon at the medical school, studying the cases they have observed in the morning. This is in tune with the 'learning by doing' and 'dynamic capability' approach espoused by the Cabinet Office Capability Building team (see Box 3 below).

Diagram 1: The Warwick Model for Whole System Leadership Development

	A traditional model for leadership development	An alternative "whole systems" model for leadership development
Unit of Analysis	The Individual	The Workgroup/Team
Starting Point	Theory	Practice/Problem
Location	The Retreat	The Front-Line

Proposition 6:

Strengthening leadership skills and capabilities for working across the whole public service system will require radical innovations in practice at three levels and in two main arenas – plus a new requirement for all members of the senior civil service to have spent at least three months working at the front–line.

The Public Sector leadership academies and the other main providers of public leadership education and development appear to do a good job in their own service sectors. Some of them have relatively new chief executives and/or leadership teams in place (e.g. IDeA, NCSL, NPIA, NSG), who are reviewing and refreshing their offerings. A number of them are developing bi-lateral or tri-lateral discussions with other leadership academies about the possibilities for collaboration in leadership development between their services (e.g. FRS, IDeA, NCSL, NHSI, NPIA). However, we doubt whether these relatively small-scale incremental initiatives (worthwhile as they undoubtedly are) are going to develop sufficient momentum or critical mass to match the scale or urgency of the need for more effective leadership across the whole public service system.

We therefore propose for debate a more radical set of innovations, based upon intervention via:

- Three key stages in leadership career paths (at fast track graduate entry level; at top management level; and crucially among mid-career movers and shakers at middle-management level).

- Two main arenas ('leadership of place' partnership teams; and multi-agency teams focused on the needs of a key group like Every Child Matters).

- One distinctive form of leadership immersion ('the plunge').

Each is discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs:

Fast Track Graduate Entry: Rapidly review each of the main fast track graduate entry schemes (e.g. into the civil service, local government, the health service, the police) and design in a requirement for some cross-service education and training (e.g. through some shared cross-over modules, and through 10-week placements in other services).

Top Teams: Similarly review each of the main top leadership and management schemes in the public service sector (e.g. the Civil Service Top Managers Programme; the Local Government Leadership Centre's Leeds Castle programme; the NPIA's Senior Command Course; the NCSL's NPQH programme for School Heads) and design in some cross-service education and training, shoulder to shoulder working exchanges in other organisations, joint multi-agency project work, and stretching university-based thinking. It is critical that leadership across the whole public service system is led from the top, and modelled by early visible changes in leadership development behaviour and practice at this level.

Mid-Career Movers and Shakers: Develop a major national leadership programme for mid-career movers and shakers from among middle-managers across the whole public service. Create a strong sense of this group being the leadership cadre for the next generation of top leaders for the whole of the public service – with a status equivalent to the top 200 in the civil service, but drawn from across the whole public service system. Organise rigorous national competition and tough selection for this programme which must be highly innovative in its leadership development and learning methods and university-accredited at the highest level. This is the group most likely to rapidly transform mindsets and practices across the public service system

Multi-Agency Teams and Leadership of Place: Launch a national programme of local pilot projects (perhaps 10 to 20) in leadership development for cross-service partnership teams working at the front-line. Examples include the Leicestershire Leadership in Partnership project (Box 2) and NCSL's Multi-Agency Team Development (Box 1).

The pilot projects might be selected through open national competition, with the successful projects offered government seed money or match funding of their own local investment. The programme and the pilots should be monitored and formatively evaluated so that their learning can be captured and disseminated. The national programme might be linked into some kind of national Beacon scheme to disseminate learning through sharing, comparing and transplanting of experience.

Taking The Plunge: Deep Immersion for Top Civil Servants: Several of the people we consulted for this project say that they see the civil service as the main laggards in terms of joined up government and leadership across the whole public service system. The civil service, it is alleged, does not practice what it preaches about joined up government, and continues to channel policies and funding streams down vertical stove-pipes, with little understanding of the horizontal connections to (or incompatibility with) the policies of other departments and agencies, or the vertical connections with other parts of the value and delivery chains. The senior civil service has also been criticised by other public service managers for being far too insulated from the complex realities of local communities, and for the fact that it is still too easy to get promoted within the civil service without any substantial experience of front-line work outside Westminster and Whitehall.

This is contrasted with the pattern in other key public services where, for example, all chief constables are expected to have served time on the beat at neighbourhood level; head teachers are expected to have gained a good deal of classroom teaching experience; local authority chief executives are expected to have operational experience and/or front-line service delivery, as well as strategic management.

A bold high-profile way of correcting this impression, (which undermines the leadership credibility and effectiveness of the civil service in some multi-agency situations), might be to start a deep immersion scheme which would require all potential senior civil servants, before admission to the SCS, to have spent at least three months working (not observing) at the front-line outside London – in a night shelter for homeless people; as an orderly in an accident and emergency ward of a hospital; on the counter of a benefits agency office; as a classroom teaching assistant; in a neighbourhood team.

Proposition 7:

The above commitment to action-oriented leadership development to encourage working across the whole public service system needs to be counter-balanced by an equally strong commitment to critical analysis of the changing context, and rigorous reflection on the experience of leadership in practice (both success and failure).

There is a crucial role for good universities with experience of engaged research, development and teaching, to work in partnership with the leadership academies and other leadership programmes to provide:

- theories and concepts that help to make sense of the complex experience of leadership challenges in practice
- evidence from research and from both formative and summative evaluations to help establish what kinds of leadership development make the maximum impact on individual, organisational and inter-organisational performance (and which have little impact)
- a safe but stretching 'holding environment' in which difficult questions and issues can be asked and grappled with, and in which the insights of both theory and experience can be brought to bear on leadership practice
- rigorous independent accreditation of leadership thinking and practice.

The rationale for such an approach is noted by Glatter (2008): *'Raw experience is not a sufficient guide to*

learning: leaders may need help in structuring and analysing experience to be able to use it as a resource for learning. For example, visits included in programmes need to be carefully prepared, clearly structured and purposeful to maximise their value.' (p. 6)

The workshop contributors varied as to how central they saw university accreditation as critical to helping ensure a blend of theory and practice, and to providing the theoretical and conceptual base to make sense of experience. Many sponsors of leadership development are increasingly relying on university- accredited schemes both because of the demand from leaders to have rigorous independent assessment of their learning, and a high quality and portable qualification, and also to ensure critical reflection on experience. Where university accreditation is pursued, it needs to draw on and engage with practical experience, to challenge established thinking and practice, and also use practice to develop and extend theory.

Conclusion

Our judgement is that the time is now ripe for a major new initiative to promote and cultivate leadership capabilities for working across the public service system. There is widespread agreement that this needs to be done strongly and quickly, so the key question is not 'whether' but 'how'. This brief review suggests that innovative ideas and pilot programmes for cross-service collaboration in leadership development are already being explored and tested by a number of organisations. Proposition 6 above proposes a number of practical programmes and initiatives which could be taken to push this along nationally. The critical success factor will be strong championship of a whole system, multi-level, cross-service approach to leadership development at the highest level within government, and a funding regime to incentivise this rapidly.

Carpe Diem!

John Benington and Jean Hartley

Box 1: National College for School Leadership MATD

The Multi Agency Team Development (MATD) programme has been designed to address the challenges faced by multi-agency teams in the delivery of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and the development of extended schools. The programme provides multi-disciplinary professionals, alongside their locality teams, with the space to develop different ways of working and to establish themselves as communities of practice. They will share knowledge, ideas and information that will ensure a more coherent service provision within their communities.

The MATD programme was designed by NCSL working with consultants from a mix of agencies associated with delivering the ECM agenda, and was piloted successfully with 19 multi-agency teams between April 2004 and September 2006. The programme is experiential with learning primarily taking place through reflection and dialogue. The facilitation process of the programme is led by facilitators from multi-agency backgrounds.

Multi-agency teams at any stage of formation who are committed to their development can apply. Teams should consist of about eight or ten members and may be focused on one school or drawn from across a locality. Teams should include representatives from at least three statutory government agencies, plus one extended school. Voluntary and community sector members can also take part.

Box 2: Leadership in Partnership in Leicestershire

Background

There is significant overlap in the provision of leadership development opportunities across the Public Sector organisations of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. In many cases we are using the same academic providers to address the same generic management and leadership skills often by sending managers on the same courses. By doing so we are not necessarily making the best use of our resources, nor are we harnessing the significant added value that could be achieved if we managed those individuals together as a local cohort with a shared agenda, shared objectives and the opportunity to network together locally and build relationships.

It is clear that many of the gaps in leadership, business and management skills are the same across our Public Sector agencies and that tackling under-representation in terms of gender and ethnicity among senior managers is also a shared local priority. Tackling these issues jointly by a leadership development programme aimed at talented middle-managers drawn from across Leicestershire's Public Sector has been proposed as an innovative and pragmatic way forward.

Introduction

Leicestershire County, Leicester City, health, police and fire and rescue colleagues have agreed to come together to devise a joint leadership development programme which incorporates: high quality academic input; an accredited and marketable qualification; added value in terms of lasting relationships built between local cohort members; personal development opportunities; executive coaching and mentoring across each agency and further added value by the completion of local project work targeted at agreed local priorities.

Following consultation with City, County, fire, health, police and district colleagues, an outline proposal is emerging which includes: an assessed academic programme developed in partnership with Warwick Business School; personal development opportunities; relationship building between local partners and the delivery of agreed pieces of work on behalf of the partnership.

Partners have each nominated an executive lead to join a 'Leadership in Partnership Board' to shape this work and agree a final proposal. Further work is underway to try to secure national or regional funding which may make such a programme more affordable and accessible to colleagues within the smaller local authority and criminal justice agencies.

Proposal

It is envisaged that between 25 and 30 managers, recommended by the participating organisations, will be selected to join this programme in June 2009.

The target group will be talented 'middle-managers' with the ability to step up to a senior management role with potential for further advancement to chief officer. Positive action to address under-representation will be encouraged.

Mentors will be appointed from each agency and across agencies along with executive coaching support.

The participants will form 'action learning sets' for the duration of the programme to network locally and jointly tackle pieces if work set for them by the Leadership in Partnership Board.

The Community Safety Programme Board is well placed to advise on local priorities for the cohort to address but the projects are by no means confined to community safety themes. Sponsors for the project work will be agreed by the Leadership in Partnership Board.

The programme will be formally reviewed after 18 months with the option to discontinue or select a further cohort(s).

Individual agencies will ensure alignment between this local programme and their own existing mainstream talent management or leadership development initiatives within their own organisation whether at a national or local level.

Box 3: Capability and Improvement, The New Capability Building Programme

Tristan Chapman, Cabinet Office, Civil Service Capability Group

This new Capability Building programme was commissioned following recommendations from the Sunningdale Institute report, 'Take off or Tail off?' proposing the Cabinet Office move into a new role supporting departments' build capability. In response to this challenge the Cabinet Office has designed an innovative approach to build individuals' capability by convening teams to deliver improvement projects in other departments, while capturing learning for further benefit.

SI evaluation
"We need to go further if the Civil Service is to build dynamic capability and a self sustaining culture of improvement."

WHAT DOES DYNAMIC CAPABILITY LOOK LIKE?

- Leadership at all levels, not just the top – socially distibuted
- Problems spotted early and dealt with at the right level, not buried
- Change is everyone's business
- Improvement is continuous, not spasmodic: everyone has two jobs – doing their job and improving it
- Attention to good practice, having learned how to learn
- Learning from elsewhere – private sector, wider public and voluntary sector, international equivalents
- Openness and mutual respect
- Not just what we espouse, but what we do

Gus O'Donnell
"Reviewing capability is important but not an end in itself. We need a sustained focus on building capability."

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APPENDIX 1

PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

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November 2008

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Introduction

There is an interesting paradox about leadership and management development (LMD) in the Public Sector. It is a large sector of the economy and society and also contributes in myriad ways to a nation's competitiveness and wellbeing – yet it is also a neglected sector in terms of leadership and management development, both in terms of expenditure and also in terms of attention from academics. This chapter will explore the opportunities for conceptual development and practices in this field. This is of interest not only to those practitioners who work inside the Public Sector, but also for those who provide contracted services for the Public Sector or whose organisations work in partnership with Public Sector bodies. There are also wider implications for LMD across all sectors.

The Public Sector as 'big business'

Hartley and Skelcher[1] note that globally, public services have emerged from a period of considerable criticism and devaluing. This period of challenge to public services and the role of government generally was generated by the rise of neo-liberal ideologies in the 1980s and 1990s. These ideologies promoted 'free' market solutions at the expense of state provision and so this period witnessed substantial privatisation and disinvestments in public services. Now, in the early years of the twenty-first century, a new settlement between state and society has emerged. This more refined version of neo-liberalism recognises the role of government and public services in creating stable social and economic conditions, but in a new coalition with business and civil society actors. In addition, the 'credit crunch' in western societies has shown very vividly the limitations of an unfettered market approach. It is the

Public Sector which has stepped in to try to sort out market turmoil through nationalising banks and other institutions, through regulatory activities and through fiscal adjustments. Some commentators are now suggesting that the new settlement between state and market will be reinforced as a result of the financial crisis of 2008.

Public services are important in a number of ways. First, they matter because of their scale. Public services consume a major part of GDP. Jackson[2], using OECD data, notes that the ratio of government spending to GDP across the OECD countries in 2000 was 37%, just over a third of GDP. In recent years there has been a substantial increase in UK public expenditure, particularly for health and school education services, reaching 43.4% in April 2008 (ONS[3]).

Public services are therefore 'big business' when it comes to expenditure. They are also substantial in terms of employment, organisation size, investment, and the production of goods and services. For example, over 5.8 million employees, or 20.2% of total employment in the UK, worked in some part of the Public Sector in 2006. Of these, 2.9 million worked in local government[4]. The National Health Service is also a substantial employer, with over a million employees across the UK. While the civil service was 'downsized' in the early 1980s, there still remain 558,000 direct employees[5]. The criminal justice system, the armed services and other parts of the public service also employ substantial numbers.

This analysis of employment is based on direct employees. However it is also necessary to include the workforce providing public services in contracted-out services, such as some street cleaning and prisons; in privatised services such as water, electricity and railways and in hybrid organisations which are a mixture of

1. Hartley J and Skelcher C (2008) The agenda for public service improvement. In J, Donaldson C, Skelcher C and Wallace M (eds) Managing to improve public services Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp1-21.
2. Jackson P (2003) The size and scope of the Public Sector: An international comparison. In Bovaird T and Löffler E (eds) Public management and governance. London: Routledge.
3. Office of National Statistics (2008)
4. As above.
5. National Statistics (2006). www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/pse1206.pdf. Accessed February 2007.

public support and private services, such as universities and some museums and art galleries. Ferlie et al[6] and Benington[7], among others, have pointed to the increasing inter-relationships between the public, private and voluntary sectors in the design and provision of public services. Public Sector and public services are no longer co-terminous.

Public services are critical to the competitiveness of a nation. The welfare state is an important part of the public services; but so too is the role they play in building the conditions and infrastructure for an entrepreneurial and prosperous private sector, and for the integrity of the nation state. At a local level, Public Sector organisations (such as the health service and the local authority) may be the largest employers and have a significant impact on the local economy and on regeneration (Geddes[8]). On a larger, national scale, governments provide 'positive freedom goods' such as education, health, pensions and unemployment benefits which enable a country to develop economically (Jackson[9]). Governments also provide other infrastructure to support manufacturing and commercial development such as roads and transport, business development, labour market training, trading regulations and inspections and so forth. It is not surprising that global institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme see 'good governance' as central to effective economic and social progress in developing countries (UNDP[10]). Marquand[11] also notes the crucial role of the public sphere in producing collective rules by which a society agrees to be governed (including the rules that govern markets, trading and aspects of international relations).

But the dearth of literature on public services LMD (until recently)

Despite the size and role of the Public Sector, it has been under-represented – or even misrepresented – in the leadership literature until recently. Look in any major book or review of leadership and it is unlikely that 'public' will be in the index or that the public context of some leadership is theorised[12].

Of course, much of the early work on leadership was undertaken in Public Sector organisations – with the armed services (army, air force and navy) in both the UK and USA – but this was not theorised in terms of the Public Sector context of the military. Another example is the emphasis on 'great leaders' such as Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher or Nelson Mandela, all of whom exercised a particular form of public leadership known as political leadership. Yet, the political, policy and public context of their work is rarely acknowledged or the institutional channels for their relationship with their followers analysed. A third example comes from the work of Burns[13] who coined the terms 'transformational' and 'transactional' leadership in relation to politicians, but whose work was stripped of its context (and often origins) as it was relocated to the sphere of (private sector) business. These examples show that public leadership is present throughout the leadership literature but has not been theorised as such and there has been relatively little interest in how the institutional context has an impact on the constraints and opportunities of leadership – with implications for LMD.

For their part, Public Sector academics have been slow to theorise leadership (as opposed to administration or

6.   Ferlie E, Hartley J and Martin S (2003) *Changing public service organisations: current perspectives and future prospects.* British Journal of Management, 14, S1- S14
7.   Benington, J. (2000). The modernization and improvement of government and public services. *Public Money and Management,* 20, (2), 3-8
8.   Geddes M (2001) What about the workers? Best value, employment and work in local public services. Policy and politics, 29, 497-508
9.   Jackson, see footnote 2.
10. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2002) *Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*. New York: University of Oxford Press.
11. Marquand, D. (2004) Decline of the public Oxford: Polity
12. See, for example:Avolio B (1999) *Full leadership development* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
13. Burns J M (1978) *Transformational leadership* New York: Harper and Row Yukl, G. (2006). *Leadership in organisations (6th edition).* Upper Saddle River NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, pp6-7 Parry, K. and A. Bryman (2006). Leadership in organisations. In Clegg, S. Hardy, C, Lawrence T and Nord W. (eds). *The Sage Handbook of Organisation Studies*. London: Sage

management) although this is now changing (Terry[14]), with an explosion of interest in leadership in the Public Sector and a huge hike in the provision of leadership development over the last decade. But until recently, in the field of public administration, the traditional political science view that politicians (national and local) make policy and managers (civil servants and local government officers) execute policy left little room for leadership. For politicians, leadership and leadership development were not countenanced because they saw themselves as mandated by their political party, their election manifesto and the electorate so that leadership and particularly leadership development were irrelevant (that is now changing as the chapter will explore). At the same time, public managers, working within the organisational form of large bureaucracies, acted either as 'clerks' (impassive officials implementing political will) or 'martyrs' (holding private views about the wisdom or necessity of action but continuing to implement political decisions without comment) (Moore[15]). Thus, leadership was not much discussed in relation either to politicians or to managers.

More recently, there has been a greater interest in 'entrepreneurial government' which includes a role for leadership. Initially, this came about under the rubric of 'new public management' (Hood[16]) which articulated a role for managerial leadership, though interestingly it continued to fail to articulate a role of leadership by politicians. The emphasis in managerial (but not political) leadership was based on the importing of private sector management practices and ideologies

into the Public Sector (Hartley and Skelcher[17]). The worldwide interest in Public Sector reform (Pollitt and Bouckaert[18]) was accompanied by a language more receptive to the idea of leadership.

The interest in leadership was given a further boost by the recognition of an approach to public policy and public management which went beyond 'new public management' and focused on the more recent paradigm shift to 'networked governance' (Benington[19], Stoker[20], Newman[21]). In a networked governance approach, it is widely recognised that Public Sector renewal has resulted in a weakening of the hierarchically organised state in favour of more differentiated partnership arrangements that cut across the boundaries of public, private and thirds sector as well as across different levels of government. This means that political leadership, managerial leadership and civic leadership may all have a place (or a voice) in how democracy is conducted and public services created and produced (or co-produced). There are, of course, some countervailing tendencies. The new dynamic image of public leadership and the apparently enlarged opportunities for managerial discretion seem to be counter-balanced by a strengthening of central interventions and control, and explicit and rigorous standards and performance regimes. Managing the tensions and paradoxes of these governance regimes has become the order of the day for politicians and public managers, strengthening the need for leadership (Pedersen and Hartley[22]).

14. Terry L 1998) Administrative leadership, neo-managerialism and the public management movement. Public Administration Review, 58 Van Wart M (2003) Public Sector leadership theory: An assessment Public Administration Review, 63, (2), 214-228

Denis J-L, Langley A and Rouleau L (2005) Rethinking leadership in public organisations Oxford Handbook of Public Management

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15. Moore M H (1995) *Creating public value* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

16. Hood C (1991) A public management for all seasons. P*ublic Administration, 69,* (1), 3-19

17. See footnote 1.

18. Pollitt C and Bouckaert G (2004) *Public management reform: A comparative analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

19. See footnote 7.

20. Stoker G

21. Newman J (2001) *Modernising governance: New Labour, policy and society*. London: Sage

22. Pedersen D and Hartley J (2008) The changing context of public leadership and management: Implications for roles and dynamics. *International Journal of Public Sector Management, 21*, (4) 327-339

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The leadership development signals in the Public Sector

Leadership was signalled as central and critical to the reform of public services in the UK, with the policy document from the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit entitled 'Strengthening leadership in the Public Sector' (PIU[23]) symbolising a surge of interest in leadership at the beginning of the millennium. The document noted, among other things, that the Public Sector was not attracting or keeping the best leaders and that there was an increasing need for leadership across organisational boundaries (to reflect the concern of central government to be more 'joined up' and to support partnership working at local and regional levels). Other policy papers, such as White Papers and discussion documents, highlighted leadership in titles and in text. There was no escape from the prevalence of leadership in public service reform under the Labour Government from 1997 onwards.

It also noted the need for more intense development of leaders and potential leaders, including those capable of operating in a partnership or joined-up government world. Leadership development became much more prominent in the field. In England and Wales, new leadership development institutions were either set up for the first time, such as the National College of School Leadership or the National Health Service Leadership Centre (later incorporated into the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement); or were substantially revamped to reflect a clearer leadership focus, such as the National School of Government and Centrex, the National Police Leadership College (later becoming the National Police Improvement Agency). For the first time, there were eleven major national leadership colleges or virtual colleges covering all major parts of the Public Sector, and linking up with each other to 'share good practice'. These are shown in Table 1. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, there are counterpart leadership development bodies, though not on the same scale and Wales aims to create some degree of integration across

the Public Sector with Public Sector Management Wales (PSMW) while also participating in many of the English leadership development bodies (in part because England and Wales tend to come under similar legislation and legal framework).

Table 1: Members of the Public Service Leadership Alliance: National leadership bodies in England (2009)

Leadership development institution	Area of Public Sector
Defence Leadership and Management Centre, Defence Academy	Armed forces
Fire Service College	Fire and rescue service
Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government	Local government
Leadership Centre for Local Government	Local government
Leadership Foundation for Higher Education	Universities
Learning and Skills Improvement Service	Further education
National College for School Leadership	Primary and secondary education
National Health Service (NHS) Institute for Innovation and Improvement	Health
National Policing Improvement Agency	Police
National School of Government	Civil service

These leadership development bodies vary in how much they are involved in operational training (e.g. managing critical fire and rescue incidents at the Fire Service College; developing clear knowledge of Parliamentary procedures in the National School of Government) but all have substantial sections of their staff and budgets devoted to leadership development (out of the estimated £130m or so spent on learning and development across the Public Sector). Several of these bodies developed their own models of leadership, such as the Aspire leadership model in the Fire Service

23. Performance and Innovation Unit (2000) *Leadership in delivering better public services* London: Cabinet Office

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(for aspiring chief officers) or the Leadership Qualities Framework of the NHS.

There are varied views about whether 'management' and 'leadership' are different or not. For example, Kotter[24] argues that organisations need both leadership and management but that they are different: leadership is concerned with setting a direction for change, developing a vision for the future, while management consists of implementing those goals through planning, budgeting, staffing and so on. Kotter comments that most organisations are over-managed and under-led. However, there is an alternative view which is also strongly held. Mintzberg[25] described leadership as a key managerial role and Yukl[26] argues that defining leadership and management as distinct roles, processes or relationships may obscure more than it reveals: 'Most scholars seem to agree that success as a manager or an administrator in modern organisations necessarily involves leading' (p.6-7). Glatter[27] argues that there is a danger for public leadership development if the focus is solely on leadership without the technical skills required for management.

In addition, in relation to the Public Sector it is clear that managers are not the only kinds of leaders in any case. The existence of formally elected leaders or politicians is important to recognise, as is the existence of community or civic leaders, who may hold formal leadership roles in society or who may assume informal leadership roles (e.g. in social movements and local activism). So managers are potentially leaders but they are not the only ones. Behn[28] argues that it is essential that public managers exercise leadership if they are to work on implementing policies (which are necessarily incomplete) and with communities as well as organisations (which themselves exert leadership).

The distinctive context of the Public Sector

A 'convergence' view of the public and private sectors makes the implementation of management ideas and practices as straightforward (or as problematic) as the use of management ideas and practices in the private sector, and universalises the provision of leadership development. But this convergence view is increasingly out of kilter with the prevailing approach in the UK, many European countries and around the world. The management of public services is recognised as distinct because it must operate in a complex political environment, with due regard to questions of legitimacy, accountability and social outcomes. We now explore these issues in more detail, exploring the implications for leadership development. As the boundaries between the public, private and not-for-profit organisations become increasingly permeable (Ferlie et al[29]), there will be new kinds of interchange and adaptations between leadership in the various sectors.

Leadership development for understanding and shaping context

It is generally agreed that a key prerequisite of effective leadership is the need to understand the context in which it is being exercised. Theorists have looked at this from a number of perspectives, exploring both the influence of contextual factors on leadership and the influence of leadership in shaping context. However, there is much less work than might be expected on this crucial set of interactions between leadership and context. Porter and McLaughlin[30] review the theoretical and empirical knowledge about the organisational context and leadership (across all types of organisation) and conclude that while leadership context is much

24. Kotter J (1990) *What leaders really do*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press
25. Mintzberg H (1973) *The nature of managerial work*. New York: Harper and Row
26. Yukl, G (2006) *Leadership in Organisations*.
27. Glatter R (2008) Of leadership, management and wisdom. A brief synthesis of selected reports and documents on leadership development. *Report.* Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
28. Behn R (1998) What right do public managers have to lead? *Public Administration Review, 58*
29. See footnote 6.
30. Porter L and MCLaughlin G (2006) Leadership and the organisational context: like the weather? *Leadership Quarterly, 17,* (6), 559-576.

discussed, in fact there is little research. Grint[31] classifies theories about leadership according to the degree to which they pay attention to, or ignore, context, as an aspect of leadership.

An important element of context for public service organisations is that they do not choose their 'markets', but are required, usually by legislation, to provide services to anyone meeting the eligibility criteria (e.g. anyone living in a particular defined administrative area, or anyone with particular needs). This contrasts with the market-led approach of private sector organisations, which can choose, seek or create their own markets and are free to exit from that market at any time.

Public organisations also operate in arenas of 'market failure' or where the market is thought to be unlikely to operate effectively in the short or longer term. Climate change, terrorism and the ageing of the population are examples of such complex and cross-cutting challenges, where government is often expected to play a lead role. Of course, there may be a role for private organisations in addressing part of the challenge, often in partnership with public organisations. The leadership challenge for both political and managerial leadership may then be to orchestrate the response across a range of stakeholders.

The role, or sometimes duty, of public service organisations to address broad social and economic questions means that *'there are more stakeholders with a greater variety of interests, and the stakeholders are more present. The boundaries between organisations and the external environment are more permeable...... Public management is at least as much about managing the external environment as about managing the internal organisation.'* (Feldman[32]).

The need to pay considerable attention to the external environment has substantial implications for leadership development. It means that formal programmes often need to pay considerable attention to policy analysis

and policy evidence, not only in relation to the specific area of service provision but also in relation to the evidence available about changes in the economy and society more generally. A key skill, therefore, for a Public Sector leader is to be able to 'read the context' in which leadership actions and decisions have to take place and to be able to sense and interpret trends and changes in the political, economic, social and environmental context of governance and service provision. Many Public Sector leaders gain considerable skill in interpreting the environment in relation to their own specific service area (sometimes called a silo), but many appear to be less skilled at understanding and interpreting the wider environment within which their own service is located. Is there sufficient provision for developing the skills of strategic scanning, strategic planning and strategic action across the Public Sector? The existence of the separate leadership development bodies would seem to make this more difficult. While some of the colleges welcome and engage with managers from across the Public Sector and outside (e.g. the National School of Government runs some leadership courses with participants from central government and local government, and sometimes with the private sector), the main work of the colleges is with leaders from their own service. There is scope for more cross-sector leadership development which would have substantial advantages in terms of helping to understand and interpret the external environment. Currently, the main location where analysis of the external environment with leadership development across sectors exists is in university degree and diploma courses.

In terms of informal or emergent leadership development, which can come through job experience, on-the-job mentoring, secondments and so forth, the emphasis on leadership development across the whole of the public service has been limited over the

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31 Grint K (2000) *The arts of leadership.* Oxford: Oxford University Press
32 Feldman M (2005) *Management and public management. Academy of Management Journal, 48,* (6), 958-960. Quotation on page 959.

last 20 years or so, but is starting to be recognised as an important avenue to wider understanding of the external environment, although there is still some distance to travel. This is evident in two ways.

First, there is a greater emphasis on having wider leadership experience as part of career progression to the higher echelons of public leadership. For example, the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Gus O'Donnell, has been quoted on a number of occasions as saying that to be a senior leader 'you have to get out to get on', meaning gain experience of management and leadership outside the civil service. Increasingly, senior leaders are likely to have had leadership experience in more than one sector, for example, the voluntary sector, local as well as central government, the private sector and so forth. This is now seen as career enhancing rather than career limiting, as it might have been in the past.

Second, there is a greater interest in and valuing of knowledge which is learnt in the 'field', and not just from books and policy papers. There is a recognition that tacit knowledge (hard to articulate or explain to others) as well as explicit knowledge is important in leadership. Leadership includes the 'practical wisdom' or judgement which comes from looking at actions and decisions in context not solely from theory. So, the social exclusion policy staff who visit a run-down housing estate in east London, or the health service manager who visits a prison learn from such experiences to take wider account of the environment and how it might affect their own service. It is not clear how far the leadership development bodies take such forms of peripatetic learning seriously beyond the occasional 'organisational raid'. Yet, research suggests that this can be a powerful form of learning about leadership (Hartley and Rashman[33]).

Leadership development for complex problems

There is increasing recognition that many of the issues which societies and governments are having to address are 'wicked' as opposed to 'tame' problems. Wicked problems are not exclusive to the Public Sector, but there are a substantial number which the public expect governments and public services to try to address.

Tame problems are ones which have been encountered before, for which known solutions already exist and which can be addressed by a particular unit, profession or service. Tame problems may be complicated but they are resolvable through existing practices and organisational arrangements. Wicked, or cross-cutting, problems have no definitive formulation (different people may formulate the problem differently), are incomplete and have changing requirements. Solving a wicked problem may throw up other problems because the problems are inter-related. Often, large groups of people have to contribute to solving the problem, through changing their behaviours. An example of a tame (though complicated) problem is surgery. An example of a wicked problem is tackling the health issues of childhood obesity. Grint[34] introduces a third type of problem – a critical problem where immediate and urgent action is needed (e.g. dealing with major road traffic injuries in the accident and emergency department; or stabilising and then controlling a major fire). These are different types of problems, which are likely to require different types of leadership (see Table 2).

33 Hartley J and Rashman L (2007) How is knowledge transferred between organisations involved in change? In Wallace M, Fertig M and Schneller E (eds) *Managing Change in the Public Services* Oxford: Blackwell pp173-192.
34 Grint, K. (2005). Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of 'leadership'. *Human Relations,* 58, 1467 - 1494

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Table 2: Tame, wicked and critical problems

Type or problem	Form of authority
Tame problems : Complicated but resolvable Likely to have occurred before Limited degree of uncertainty	**Manager:** Manager's role to provide the appropriate processes to solve the problem
Wicked problems: Complex and often intractable Novel with no apparent solution Often generates more problems No right or wrong answer; just better or worse alternatives High level of uncertainty	**Leader:** Leader's role is to ask the right questions rather than provide the right answers as answers may not be self-evident and require collaborative process
Critical problems: A crisis situation Urgent response needed with little time for decision-making and action Uncertainty managed through clear decisions	**Commander:** Commander's role to decisively provide an answer to the problem

Source: Adapted from Grint 2005

If these are different types of leadership, then they may require different types of leadership development. For example, the leadership development bodies are well equipped to address the technical or tame problems, as they have the knowledge, the expertise and the accumulated history, culture and wisdom to address these (there may be room for improvement, but the overall parameters of the problems are broadly known).

The work of Heifetz[35] has become particularly relevant in the UK for thinking about the leadership of complex and difficult problems, where either the outcomes or the means are not clear or are not agreed upon. Adaptive problems require a type of leadership 'which rejects the pressure from followers to provide magical solutions to complex problems, and instead works with stakeholders to take responsibility for grappling with these problems and for the changes in one's own thinking and behaviour required.' (Benington and Turbitt[36]). It is the type of leadership which asks question rather than immediately proposing solutions, because one of the tasks is to get people to recognise that they may be contributing to the problem and that therefore addressing the problem requires changing thinking and behaviour (including one's own) in order to grapple with the difficult issues.

The concept of adaptive challenges – or wicked problems – is widely talked about in public policy circles but leadership development approaches have only recently taken on board the ideas about adaptive leadership as a way to tackle these. For example, if the issues are complex and cross-cutting then it makes sense to develop leaders in programmes and situations where leaders from different services learn and develop alongside of each other. Yet, although partnership working is increasingly embedded in public service working, this has not affected leadership development to a similar extent. Much of the leadership development still takes place in the service silos and colleges rather than across those leaders who need to work together to explore and address the problem. In addition, wicked issues, requiring adaptive leadership, often requires working with and in communities, voluntary and community sector groups, informal and formal civic leaders and so on. This is complex territory to navigate yet helping leaders to develop the emotional and political skills as well as rational skills to address these issues is important.

Leadership development for critical incidents is now fairly well established. It has become better resourced in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist bombings in the USA, and there is regular cross-service simulation training and critical incident events for the 'blue light' services

35 Heifetz, R. (1994). Leadership without easy answers Cambridge, MA, Belknapp Press.
36 Benington J and Turbitt I (2007) Adaptive leadership and the policing of Drumcree demonstrations in Northern Ireland. Leadership, 3, (4), 371-395

(police, fire and rescue, and ambulance) along with the emergency planning service of the local authority. They are able to use sophisticated virtual simulations, as well as complex and varied physical 'rigs' to practice not only the operational techniques on the ground, but also the strategic challenges of 'gold command' leadership concerned with communicating to and creating meaning for local communities, the media, the nation and central government.

Leadership development to deal with diverse interests and the contested public domain

The private sector is used to thinking about its markets in terms of 'customers' but this is insufficiently complex for public service organisations. While the concept of customer, familiar in new public management, has been important in improving the quality of services to the public, it is not enough because there is a range of stakeholders who hold views about, and have legitimate interests in, the work of public service organisations. The recipients of services may not only be customers (e.g. users of services) but also some are likely to be taxpayers. They are also citizens in a democratic society, able to exercise their rights to vote and debate and try to influence the priorities of the local and central governments that they have elected. Public organisations may have to provide not only services but also remind people of duties as unwilling 'customers', because they can use state authority to require citizens to submit to obligations, such as criminal prosecutions, planning regulations or environmental health using the law or state authority to achieve outcomes for the public good.

Public services are under the formal control of politicians (either directly in the case of national or local government, or more indirectly in the case of health organisations and some other public services). Politicians themselves are elected representatives of wider constituencies and stakeholders, with a democratic mandate to represent the whole, which includes future generations as well as the current voters. The fact that services are funded primarily through the public purse means that there is the potential for a high level of debate, accountability and scrutiny – not to mention contested values and priorities – which may all affect the management of public organisations. Hoggett[37] notes that goals in the public domain are inevitably ambiguous and contested because of the different values, interests and priorities which exist among 'the public'.

Leadership development is still a fairly new idea for political leaders and there are still relatively few formal courses to help them develop their leadership skills. Many report learning through sometimes bitter experience and in the past, a number of national politicians have reported going straight from being backbenchers to a minister with only a red box thrust into their hands. Leading edge practice started with some local authorities, which have analysed, articulated and developed the leadership skills of local politicians in the mid 90s. In the year 2000, the nationally-funded Leadership Academy was established by the Improvement and Development Agency and has now provided leadership development for local politicians in England and Wales through three 2-day modules for elected members on personal, political and community leadership. Scotland has set up a similar scheme. Over 500 elected members have now taken this programme. While this is a relatively small offering in the context of the 22,000 local politicians, the Leadership Academy has been crucial in raising both the profile and the acceptability of leadership development for politicians. There is also a developing appetite for leadership development at the UK level among Westminster politicians and increasingly provision is made both for individual ministers (of all ranks) through the Ministerial team at the National School of Government.

37. Hoggett P (2006) Conflict, ambivalence and the contested purpose of public organisations. Human Relations, 59, (2), 175-194.

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It is too soon to evaluate provision or impact across both local and national politicians, but analysis of the skills of the first 201 local politicians who completed the Leadership Academy suggested that leadership development is at least partly learnt (nurture rather than nature). The study (Leach et al[38]), based on work using the Warwick Political Leadership Questionnaire for politicians, found that more senior local politicians self-reported a higher level of skill on four key dimensions of leadership. These were:

■ Personal effectiveness: self awareness, ability to work with and understand other people, and to handle difficult relationships.

■ Strategic direction: the ability to be strategic and take an overview.

■ Political intelligence: the ability to understand and work effectively with the political currents and dynamics, both within and across political parties.

■ Organisational mobilisation: the ability to mobilise others in and across organisations to bring about substantial organisational and cultural change in the local authority.

There are three possible interpretations of these findings. The first might be that senior politicians are more lenient in their ratings of themselves compared with those local politicians not in major leadership positions. However, the Warwick Political Leadership Questionnaire has 10 dimensions of skill and this effect was not found in the other six dimensions. The second possibility is that 'born leaders', or at least those with particular leadership skills, have come to take up more senior leadership positions on the council. However, the results in relation to demographic variables, leadership roles and the organisational characteristics of the local authority shows that the capabilities (skills) of strategic direction and political intelligence are improved by length of service and length of time in a senior position. This suggests that some skills at least are acquired and is an important finding for the policy and practice of

leadership development for politicians. Managers in the Public Sector are not legitimated to act as politicians – as they do not have the authority of the ballot box. But they may often need to act with political awareness – that is, with sensitivity to the diverse interests which are served by particular actions and decisions. Organisational leadership theory and research, and therefore leadership development, has tended to focus on leadership in the organisation rather than leadership of the organisation (i.e. both inside and outside) and this is a limitation. Increasingly, leadership activities and meaning-making take place not only inside the organisation but in the networks of stakeholders and other organisations that organisational leaders have to, or choose to, interact with (Hartley and Fletcher[39]). This is an issue for leadership across all sectors (private, public and voluntary) but it is particularly salient because of the contested nature of values and goals of public service organisations. Leadership outside as well as inside the organisation requires the effective use of political skills. This is because a leader needs to be able to understand and work with a range of stakeholders, who may have diverse interests, values and goals and who may sometimes collaborate but at other times compete. This is likely to happen inside the organisation as well as outside its formal boundaries. There is a need to anticipate and shape challenges arising from diverse interests and not just respond to them.

So, there is a pressing need for managers to be able to work not only with the formal institutions and representatives of the state, but also across and with a diverse range of organisations. Many managers have to work with stakeholders who advocate or lobby on behalf of consumer, pressure and political groups. Other managers may have to understand and work in a complex and dynamic environment of legislation, regulation and policy advice. A globalising world creates a range of uncertainties about world governance, national stability or local priorities which managers

38. Leach S, Hartley J, Lowndes V, Wilson D and Downe J (2005) Local political leadership in the UK York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
39. Hartley J and Fletcher C (2008) Leadership with political awareness: Leadership across diverse interests inside and outside the organisation. In James K and Collins J (eds) Leadership perspectives: Knowledge into action London: Palgrave. pp 157-170

need to understand and take account of, and which may have unexpected or substantial repercussions which have to be addressed. The impact of politics (both formal and informal) may vary according to the sector the organisation is in, the degree to which it has a high and visible public profile, the sensitivity of some of its activities and its accountability and governance structures. Work we conducted at Warwick, in conjunction with the Chartered Management Institute, created and tested a model of the skills of political awareness for managers (Hartley et al, 2007[40]; Hartley and Fletcher[41]). This has particular (though not exclusive) salience for Public Sector managers in positions of leadership. The framework has five dimensions:

- **Personal skills** An essential foundation for being able to be effective in managing with political awareness is to have self-awareness of one's own motives and behaviours, and the ability to exercise self-control. It is also about being open to the views of others so that it is possible to listen and reflect on the views of others. It is also about having a proactive disposition, initiating rather than waiting for things to happen.

  To some extent, these are skills which are valuable in any effective manager and are not distinctively about political awareness. Yet understanding motives, interests and influence is central to leading with political awareness, and the personal skills are the bedrock on which other skills are built.

- **Interpersonal skills** Political awareness seems to require strong interpersonal skills. These concern having the inter-personal capacity to influence the thinking and behaviour of others, and getting buy-in from people over whom the person has no direct authority, and making people feel valued. These are 'tough' as well as 'soft' skills because the ability to negotiate, to stand up to pressures from other people, and to handle conflict in ways to achieve constructive outcomes are important.

Again, these skills may be viewed as core management and certainly core leadership skills, but they also constitute foundational skills for political awareness. There are some elements which go beyond direct leadership skills such as cultivating relationships which have potential rather than immediate value, and on knowing when to rely on position and authority and when to rely on less direct methods of exerting influence.

- **Reading people and situations** This dimension has a strong analytical aspect to it, and is based on thinking and intuition about the dynamics which can or might occur when stakeholders and agendas come together. There is a recognition of different interests and agendas of a variety of people and their organisations, and an interest in discerning what may be the underlying as opposed to the espoused agendas which people bring to situations. It includes thinking through the likely standpoints of varying interest groups in advance of dealing with them, and using a wider knowledge of institutions, political processes and social systems to understand what is or might happen. It also includes recognising where you may be seen as a threat to others and their interests (rightly or wrongly, because this is about the ability to view situations from other people's perspective).

  This dimension concerns the power, influence and interests of different groups. This dimension is primarily concerned with analytical rather than influencing skills (influence is particularly salient in the following dimension of building alignment and alliances).

- **Building alignment and alliances** This dimension is a crucial skill of action, which requires the previous elements of skill in order to be effective. Building alignment out of different interests, goals and motives requires a detailed understanding and

40. Hartley J, Fletcher C, Wilton P, Woodman P and Ungemach C (2007) Leading with political awareness London: Chartered Management Institute.
41. See footnote 39.

appreciation of the context, the players and the objectives of each stakeholder, as far as these can be ascertained. Building alignment and alliances is about recognising difference and plurality of interest but being able to forge these into collaborative actions even where there are substantial differences in outlook or emphasis. This dimension goes beyond much of the literature on partnerships where finding consensus and commonality is the key skill. This dimension recognises but works with difference and with conflicts of interest in order to forge new opportunities. It builds on the pro-activity of the first dimension (personal skill) in actively seeking out alliances and partnerships rather than relying on those which are already in existence or which are expected to contribute. It includes being able to bring out into the open and deal with differences between stakeholders, not conceal them or hope that if they are ignored they will somehow go away. Tough negotiation skills (from interpersonal skills) may underpin the capacity to build a realistic and useful consensus without ending up with the lowest common denominator.

- **Strategic direction and scanning** This dimension brings in the important question of purpose – what these political awareness skills are being used for. This includes two major elements. The first is a sense of strategic thinking and action in relation to organisational purpose, so that the understanding of power, interests and influence is set within a strategic aim. This includes thinking long-term and having a road map of where the manager wants to go so that he or she is not diverted by short-term pressures. But the second element is about not just a focused sense of strategy but also a skill in strategic scanning – about thinking about longer-term issues which may have the potential to have an impact on the organisation. This is about not just looking at what is on the horizon but what may be over the horizon. It requires analytical capacity to think through scenarios of possible futures, to think

about small changes which may herald bigger shifts in society and the economy, and being able to find ways to analyse and manage (as far as possible) the uncertainty which lies outside the organisation. This last includes being about to keep options open rather than reaching for a decision prematurely.

This research suggests that an effective leader in a complex set of inter-relationships across organisations will require skills in each of these dimensions in order to show astuteness, 'nous' or political awareness. While personal and interpersonal skills are the foundation of building trust and understanding the needs and interests of other people and organisations, there is also a need for the skills of building alliances across those differences and being able to sense or interpret wider changes in the external environment which may have an impact on plans and objectives.

Thus, the five dimensions of the framework outlined above are those which the research suggests are needed by individuals to achieve outcomes in complex and dynamic settings inside and outside the organisation where diverse interests are in play.

Across the Public Sector, a number of organisations have shown interest in using this framework as a diagnostic tool as part of leadership development. We are now working with two government departments (Home Office and DWP) along with the NHS nationally (Institute for Innovation and Improvement) in order to create tools to help individual managers and their organisations to identify, improve and hone their political awareness skills so that they are able to work with and across stakeholders with diverse interests. A number of organisations, such as the fire and rescue service and the health service, have developed leadership development models which include the need to acquire and enhance political awareness skills to be used for organisational purposes – a constructive view of politics in and across organisations. This is an area which may well grow in the future.

Leadership development for outcomes

The salience of the external environment is also related to purpose – while private sector organisations have principal aims of profit and market domination and development, public organisations primarily aim to produce not profit or market positioning but 'public value' (Moore[42]; Benington and Moore[43]). Public value means what is added to the public sphere and this may be social or economic, or it may be political, environmental or even more broadly about quality of the life. The unit of analysis of benefit may not therefore necessarily be the single organisation and its outputs but also extends to consideration of outcomes across an 'institutional field'. For example, schools may not be just concerned with examination results but with developing broadly educated and informed citizens capable of contributing to society. (Private sector organisations may also contribute to public value, for example, through innovation, philanthropy or service delivery but it is rarely a primary objective). In addition, a public value perspective requires examining the impact of public services on 'customers' and users but also the impact on them as citizens.

The implications for leadership development are important. It means that leadership development needs to focus on the purpose(s) of leadership rather than just on the processes or the personal characteristics which underlie leadership behaviours. All the time, leadership development has to be cognisant of 'leadership for what' – what are the outcomes to be achieved through leadership actions? This means a wider view of organisational performance than imposed (or self-imposed) inputs or activity targets, but rather to think about the values and purposes to which the talents of Public Sector managers and leaders are being put. These are larger questions than many leaders have been encouraged to think about in the recent period of performance targetry. It takes us back to leadership development implications of understanding the wider environment or context, working with others collaboratively where appropriate (sharing learning, sharing leadership and sharing good or promising practices may all potentially enhance the public sphere). The language of public value is filtering into leadership development programmes and experiences but there is still some way to go.

Conclusions

From this brief consideration of public leadership development we may conclude that there are some differences in context that either only exist in public organisations or that exist to a greater degree in public organisations. This suggests that generic leadership and management theory may not be universally applied, but rather that there are some issues which require consideration of context and circumstance (Christensen et al[44]). Pettigrew[45] supports this when he states: *'The process of public transformation cannot be explained just by appeals to managerial action and associated drives for efficiency and effectiveness. Context does matter…'*.

In this chapter, I have concentrated not on giving an overview of all the concepts, activities and outcomes from the Public Sector. As about 20% of UK employment this would be too large a task. Instead, I have concentrated on those aspects of Public Sector leadership development which either only occur in the public sphere or else occur to a greater degree. Context matters in leadership development. But there are also ideas and practices here which will be of wider interest across the private and voluntary sectors.

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42. See footnote 15.
43. Benington J and Moore M (in press) Debating and delivering public value Basingstoke: Palgrave
44. Christensen T, Laegreid P, Roness P and Røvik K (2007) Organisation Theory for the Public Sector London: Routledge.
45. Pettigrew A (2005) The character and significance of management research on the public services. Academy of Management Journal, 48, 973-977. Quotation is on page 976.

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