The social construction of leadership studies: Representations of rigour and relevance in textbooks

Brigid Carroll, University of Auckland Business School,

b.carroll@auckland.ac.nz

Joshua Firth, New Zealand Leadership Institute, University of Auckland,

j.firth@auckland.ac.nz

Jackie Ford, University of Bradford School of Management,

J.M.Ford@bradford.ac.uk

Scott Taylor, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham,

s.taylor@bham.ac.uk (corresponding author)

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Abstract

Considerations of rigour and relevance rarely acknowledge students, learning, or the textbooks many of the academic community use to frame education. Here we explore the construction of meaning around rigour and relevance in four leadership studies textbooks – the two most globally popular leadership textbooks and two recent additions to the field – to explore how these ideas are represented. We read the four texts narratively for structure, purpose, style, and application. We further embed the analysis by considering the cultural positioning of the textbook-as-genre within leadership studies as a field more generally. This exploration of the textbook raises critical questions about rigour, relevance and the relationship constructed between them. From this, we argue for a re-commitment to the genuine 'text-book' written to engage students in understanding leadership as a continuing conversation between practices, theories, and contexts, rather than as a repository of rigorous and/or relevant content that lays claim to represent an objective science of leadership studies.

Keywords: leadership, textbooks, rigour, relevance, narrative, critique

Introduction: Why don't textbook theories work?

One of us was teaching an MBA group in Saudi Arabia recently. While the group considered motivation theories, a student asked 'what's wrong with us and our organizations? The theories we read about in our [North American] textbooks don't seem to work here'. She explained she felt like a failure as a manager, because the people she worked with and took responsibility for didn't 'fit the theory' that she was taught on the MBA programme and expected to implement. The response - 'the theories in those textbooks don't really work anywhere else either, so don't worry about it' – made the student happy for a moment. It seemed to be a relief that the theories are at fault, not her - then she looked less happy, because she then wanted an answer to the supplementary question that articulates the other issue present here: 'then why don't the textbooks tell us that the theory doesn't really work?'.

Textbooks are power-full artefacts in their representation of the relationship between theory and practice. As an educational and cultural marker, they are central to the construction and maintenance of all research fields in the educational process. They describe and proscribe, define what is legitimate as knowledge, and frame a discipline's pedagogy (Bell and Taylor, 2013; Dehler et al., 2001; Foster et al., 2014; Harding, 2003; Stambaugh and Trank, 2010; Sturdy, 2004), as authors actively select which pieces of research to communicate and how to communicate them (Stambaugh and Trank, 2010). Even if educators use textbooks creatively, avoiding the 'textbook determinism' (Friedman, 1991) that is encouraged by the PowerPoint slides available through many publishers' companion websites, the printed content remains influential to students. However, despite the multiple significances of textbooks for research fields and the associated education, those of us involved in management and organization studies rarely address their content, style, or effects (Stambaugh and Trank, 2010). As far as we can tell, the leadership studies community has not reflected at all on this topic in published form.

The term textbook is a relatively recent English language coinage. It was originally hyphenated as *text-book*, introduced in the mid-18th century to describe the editions of classical Greek or Roman texts that were printed with enough space between

the lines for students to make notes. Initially these students wrote notes on the critical interpretations their educators dictated to them, but they could also make their own notes during lectures and for further reading. Thus the printed material provided the -*book*, while educators and students between them provided the critical *text-*. During the 20th century the term came to denote a rather large, usually expensive, often proverbially dull book that sought to summarise a research field.

In this paper we explore the semantic movement of creative critical 'text-book' writing to a much more prescriptive 'textbook' writing and reading, as a way of understanding how rigour and relevance are represented in leadership studies. Textbooks might not seem an intuitive entry into this debate, but every time we as academics choose, recommend or use one we contribute to, subconsciously or otherwise, judgements on rigour and relevance within the research community, and in the educational process that students are engaged in. We are approaching textbooks as culturally important statements of generally accepted truth and knowledge. Although sales are often said to be declining, textbooks can still sell large numbers of copies, are a prominent presence in libraries, on student and educator bookshelves, and form the basis for course outlines. Textbooks therefore provide a point of visibility for what is considered central in any endeavour to define, transmit and shape leadership studies between scholars and students, including what is seen as legitimate research or appropriate means of communicating it. Such a close analysis of textbooks helps raise and explore critical questions and issues about the research field, including the perspectives on rigour and relevance that are accepted within it.

The paper is structured into three parts. First we outline key strands in the rigour/relevance debate in organization and management studies. Through this we argue that leadership studies could be actively positioned as a field based on 'engaged scholarship' (Tushman and O'Reilly, 2007) that brings together specific notions of rigour and relevance. We then review existing analyses of business school textbooks and describe the methods used here to analyse leadership studies texts, before presenting our four-part analysis of structure, purpose, style and application. Finally, we draw conclusions from the analysis to propose that textbook writing be reconsidered, as

a means of presenting research that invites dialogue and encourages a different pedagogy of engaged development. This alternative educational approach has implications for the research field and our understandings of rigour and relevance.

Rigour and relevance: A contested terrain

The debate on rigour and relevance associated with both the management discipline and business schools has woven through the last few decades (see Hodgkinson and Starkey, 2011 for one account of its historical trajectory) in a manner that has recently been assessed as ad hoc (Nyilasy and Reid, 2007) and uncritical (Kieser et al., 2015). The fact however that the debate persists and re-emerges in all sorts of literatures (including as a frame for this special issue) attests to the meaning that we invested in these terms as a community. Gulati (2007: 775) goes furthest in critiquing it, claiming that the debate is 'perpetuated' by ideological tribes within 'an incestuous, closed loop of scholarship' (Gulati, 2007, quoting Hambrick, 1994: 15). Nonetheless, even he acknowledges that the discussion gets to the very heart of what scholarship and academic endeavour mean in the contemporary world. There is of course a host of considerations (e.g. financial, institutional, publisher and author related) that drive the selection and use of textbooks, we approach it here as an implicit contribution to the debate on rigour and relevance, as authorial decisions on this area frame what is included and excluded in the knowledge base presented to the next generation of management and leadership scholars and practitioners. In this section we will therefore try to make sense of rigour and relevance specifically in the context of learning and learning resources such as textbooks.

We do not believe that these terms have been especially clearly or usefully defined through the often macho sparring that characterises the debate. Basic dictionary definitions usually point to rigour as related to exactitude, thoroughness and being careful, while relevance is often framed as practical, socially applicable and relational to the matter at hand or the needs of the user. Logically the two definitions are not opposed, but they do signal different assumptions, priorities and concerns in research and education. The terms have often been presented as dichotomous, through what Gulati (2007: 775) refers to as 'artificial polarisation' by 'compartmentalised factions'

representing very different ontological and epistemological positions on knowledge and practice and the relationship between the two. In order to give these terms more meaning in the context of textbooks, which we are reading as statements of belief, we therefore have to (warily) enter into ideological terrain. In this we follow Grey's (2001: S30) acute observation that both terms are fairly meaningless unless we ask 'relevance to whom and rigour for what?'.

One way to approach an ideological perspective of relevance and rigour is to couple discussion with descriptors that create more specificity in themselves. Relevance often becomes 'practical relevance', and rigour frequently becomes 'research rigour' (Kieser et al., 2015). These compound terms are useful because they reveal hidden assumptions that travel with the terms - that in itself is useful in relation to textbooks. Practical relevance speaks to the desire for knowledge to be used and useful by those doing the practice. Research rigour points to a care with 'fundamental analytic tools' (Kieser et al., 2015: 183), particularly those involving theory and methodology. We would predict that most social actors engaged in the learning enterprise - scholars, lecturers, students - recognise the textbook as a site where analytically respectable research and practical usefulness would ideally both be found.

This doesn't however reveal the political and ideological context that is created and maintained by or around the rigour/relevance debate. Practical relevance and research rigour are not neutral and un-emotive terms. A number of commentators (Fincham and Clark, 2009; Grey, 2001; Lee, 1999) argue that practical relevance cannot be equated to short term utility, and that the tendency to do exactly this comes out of a political imperative to suggest that business schools and their host institutions should be commercially driven, market sensitive and applied in knowledge production and learning. While one can argue that knowledge shouldn't be limited by its applicability given the complex and non-linear nature of the knowledge production and consumption process (Grey 2001), it seems obvious to us that the nature of practical relevance needs to be understood far beyond crude utility.

This argument is developed by Lee (1999), who makes the point that one of the ways universities have been practically relevant (and hopefully still are) is through

being a conscience for and critic of society. Practical here means ethical. Kieser et al. (2015) go further and outline three kinds of practical relevance. The first is instrumental, where practitioners (they specify managers) are influenced. The second is conceptual, as mindsets and how people think about or conceptualise something are influenced (close to Lee's position). The third is symbolic, where legitimacy is conferred or credentialized. It is possible that textbooks can affect all involved in education into these more expansive ways of thinking about practical relevance and in particular the critical, ethical and conceptual ways that education can stimulate learning and thinking.

The notion of research rigour repays similar scrutiny. It is difficult to imagine a textbook that doesn't pay attention to how fundamental theoretical and methodological tools used in the sub-field are presented and illustrated. However, care needs to be taken as to whether situations and problems are presented as solely or predominantly technical and thereby requiring the application of a tool. Leadership situations and issues, we know, are the opposite of technical in a mechanical sense; they are most often adaptive, complex or wicked (Heifetz, 1994; Grint, 2005), all of which requires an engagement with frames, mindsets, and existing practices and structures to recognise and change what is preventing action. Leadership is therefore a response to non-technical situations and problems. Research rigour may be better understood in terms of conceptual agility, reflexivity and innovative processes, different kinds of analytic tools to those that prescribe a solution, requiring a different learning language and approach. Benbasat and Zmud's (1999: 5) warnings against 'the trappings of rigor' are timely here, as they note that 'lengthy homages to the literature', 'too scholarly a tone' and 'elongated descriptions of a study's methodological and analytical procedures' conjure up a too narrow technicality which 'have not coped well with the dynamism of our field'.

We therefore propose that working with more expansive understandings of rigour and relevance could move us away from seeing them in necessary opposition. This would help resist seeing them as in tension or even conflict. In doing this, we could contribute to reframing the rigour-relevance debate as a means of reflecting on values and understanding reflection in use. Approaching rigour/relevance in this way could

move our field nearer to 'engaged scholarship' (Tushman and O'Reilly, 2007: 772) in which theory does not, and cannot, become decoupled from practice and experience. Tushman and O'Reilly (2007) propose a number of dimensions that would bring rigour and relevance into some degree of interdependence: linking knowing to doing, application of theory to contextual issues, testing conceptual material against experience, development of new topics driven by practice, back and forth movement between lived phenomena and abstract frameworks, and multi-theory, multi-disciplinary approaches. This is important to us here because we do not, as indicated above, want to locate rigour and relevance as inherently opposed. Instead, they argue, rigour and relevance are better understood as 'orthogonal', or related through their interaction. Tushman and O'Reilly develop their argument to propose that executive education is a key means of relating rigour to relevance as researchers and managers work together to bring knowing and doing closer together.

This is an intriguing proposition, that we think has much to recommend it. These dimensions proposed have shaped our analysis across the four textbooks we have chosen to exemplify the field of leadership studies. However, as we argue below, there is a silence in Tushman and O'Reilly's proposal, the issue of power relations. This is especially important when considering leadership studies. In the next section, we briefly review how previous analysis of textbooks has been conducted, then set out how we approached our analysis to explain how we sought to bring power into the readings we provide.

Analysing Textbooks: Narrating disciplines

More than twenty years ago Fineman and Gabriel (1994) raised a series of questions about the representation of their research field in the introductory textbooks then available to management educators for courses in organizational behaviour (OB). They explored two important and still-relevant concerns: first, the (lack of) engagement with developments in social theory, and second, the epistemological, discursive and stylistic assumptions that textbook authors then tended to reproduce. Fineman and Gabriel were especially keen to explore representation of then-new perspectives on organization. They suggested that these perspectives (social constructionist, feminist

and post-structural) had achieved little currency, such that organizations for most authors (and therefore students) were still presented as 'square, solid, structured, objective and imposing' (1994: 376). A citation search on Fineman & Gabriel's paper suggests the implications for management education (Sturdy, 2004) and pedagogy (Dehler et al., 2001) have been considered, but much less so for its core arguments about the textbook itself (although see Foster et al. [2014] and Bell & Taylor [2013] recently).

In a much wider argument relating to management identities, Harding (2003) picks up on Fineman and Gabriel's argument. She draws on Judith Butler's writings to explore the performative nature of textbooks in which the subject position of management is constructed. The textbook becomes 'a space in which the identity of manager is achieved' (Harding, 2003: 197). In Harding's reading of the social construction of management, textbooks serve as patterns through which readers (qua managers) can construct and thus control managerial selves. Drawing parallels with leadership textbooks, there is an obvious risk that leadership textbooks may also produce such a performative function, in providing a normative or archetypal version of the leader that learners should attempt to reproduce in their selves. As Collinson and Tourish (2015) note, mainstream leadership pedagogy tends to be overly focussed on heroic perspectives of leaders. This may result in simplistic prescriptions in textbooks, which in turn leads students to identify leadership as a 'stable construct that is amenable to observation with the correct tools, which in turn will provide leaders with the techniques they need to reliably influence others' (Collinson and Tourish, 2015: 578).

There were, however, changes happening in the world of OB textbook writing in the 1990s, to better reflect the wider range of epistemological and social theoretical resources available to researchers. Fineman and Gabriel identified two important challenges to the functionalist hegemony they observed in textbook representations. One was explicitly post-structural, hence epistemological. The other was subtly different, a stylistic challenge that better represented organizational experiences to disrupt functionalist perspectives. Both changes indicate departure from the conventional OB textbook structure of topics and representation of the field. Either

approach is, Fineman and Gabriel suggest, a decision that also carries significant pedagogical implications.

These key issues, pedagogy, style and epistemology, all point to intriguing ways of thinking about tensions between rigour and relevance in leadership studies as articulated through textbooks. Scholars in other social science disciplines such as geography (Barnes, 2001) and economics (Madsen, 2013) pay careful attention to the history and present of their textbooks. Barnes (2001) draws on insights from post-structural science and technology studies, to argue that disciplines develop in unpredictable, messy, politicised ways. This challenges the assumption that academic disciplines progress in a linear, rational, inevitable way, moving from darkness (ignorance or conflict) to light (agreed knowledge).As Barnes argues, these histories can be read off from textbooks, by taking them seriously as historical artefacts open to interpretation for their content and meaning. Madsen (2013) provides a contemporary example of this, showing how economics textbook authors have incorporated the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath in passing, as addenda to existing theory or examples. In other words, the most significant economic upset in the last century hasn't affected the basic principles of economics as presented to learners.

Scholars in other areas of management studies, such as international business/management (IB and IM), have also begun to read their textbooks more closely and think about the wider context of their production or consumption. Tipton (2008) explains some of the inadequacies of IB and IM textbooks by pointing to the political economy of publishing for business school academics and audiences. If a book is successful in its first edition, authors are likely to be pressured into revising it rapidly, signing up to a triennial edition cycle. Tipton argues that if book authors are busy with other research and educational work, as many will be, then it is likely that errors will be written into the text, narrative will lose touch with original research and rely more on journalism, and less imagination will be applied in creating examples to illustrate theory. Tipton also suggests in passing that publishers may assume that business school student populations are inherently conservative, and that the values promoted through textbooks should reflect this. IB and IM textbooks therefore tend to close down

possibilities of critical thinking, as they suggest that globalization, capitalism, and North American hegemony are all inevitable and ethically superior to any alternative.

Textbook content can also be read through the sociology of knowledge, as Barnes (2001) demonstrates. This approach stems from Kuhn's (2012 [1962]: 1) observation, more than 50 years ago, that it is 'textbooks from which each new generation learns to practice its trade'. In this vein, Czarniawska-Joerges (1997) suggests that texts and theories in organization studies might be read hermeneutically, as knowledge narratives. This encourages reflection on detailed issues, such as language, and more structural dynamics, such as plot. Following Czarniawska's approach, we draw on narratology (Czarniawska, 2010 – see below), to interpret structure or plot, purpose (what the intent of the book is), style (how the story is told), and encouragement to application (attempts to connect to the viewpoint and practice of students).

In doing this, we bring our individual commitments to leadership research and the provision of leadership education. We also bring recent experience of co-editing and contributing to a textbook where we had to actively make choices as to the negotiation of rigour/relevance tensions, often when deciding on structure, purpose, style, and content. A basic principle of our book is that power relations are central to understanding and practising leadership. However, we also came to think that power relations are central to the formation of textbooks, including the research questions they emphasise or neglect, the analyses that are included or ignored, and the leadership and development assumptions embedded in the texts (e.g., Carroll and Nicholson, 2014; Ford et al., 2008; Bell and Taylor, 2016). This is in the context of leadership studies as a field at best neglecting power as a theoretical frame, and at worst purposively ignoring it because it threatens dominant functionalist, positivist, psychologistic approaches (Collinson, 2014). Given the centrality of power to the social sciences more generally (Lukes, 2005) this seems neglectful, and we therefore emphasise it in our analysis and discussion here too.

Methodical reading: An approach to analysing textbooks

In deciding how to approach our reading of leadership studies textbooks, and in deciding which textbooks to read, we followed scholars in other fields. Although

analyses such as this one are rare, a few basic principles do appear. First, analysis is always very selective. Barnes (2001), for example, focuses on two textbooks; Madsen (2013) selects twelve; while Tipton (2008) analyses nineteen texts in IB/IM. Second, all use or develop a methodology of some kind. For example, Madsen, befitting an economist, makes use of a quantitative positivist approach; Barnes inclines towards a hermeneutic interpretation, without ever being entirely clear about it. Third, all recognise that their studies are contingent or preliminary.

These principles are also visible in other studies. Fougère and Moulettes (2012: 6) examine IB/IM deconstructively for colonialist ideologies through interpretive reading. They are highly critical of the 'guise of neutrality' they find, arguing that it suppresses and silences. They note that neutrality is constructed through the mobilisation of 'science' as a legitimating device for Western dominance, and the representation of cultures as developed or undeveloped. In another field, Graham et al. (2008) analyse fourteen North American HRM textbooks for their engagement with diversity management theories and practices. They do this by reading the texts and counting the number of complete pages of material on diversity management, and include analysis of the definitions given. They emphasise that page counting should be supplemented with close reading of content. Stambaugh and Trank's (2010) analysis of strategic management textbooks takes those that are most widely adopted as tracked by a textbook wholesaler in the US. In our analysis, we adopt and adapt from all of these studies.

The first principle, choosing texts, is key. Our decision here is made easier by a relative lack of leadership studies textbooks compared to other fields. The paucity of textbooks in our field is notable - Tipton (2008) and Fougère and Moulettes (2012) easily identify twenty influential textbooks in IB/IM, for example. For that reason, we have chosen not to take a survey approach, but rather have pursued a greater level of qualitative detail. As publishers and authors are equally reluctant to release sales figures for textbooks, we looked at publishing history and had conversations with publishers to identify the two most prominent textbooks: *Leadership: Theory and Practice* by Peter Northouse, currently in its seventh edition (2016) , and *Leadership in Organizations* by

Gary Yukl, now in its eighth edition (2013). The British textbook market has seen some activity recently, however, so we have chosen a further two recently published textbooks: *Leadership* by Iszatt-White & Saunders (2014), and *Studying Leadership: Traditional and Critical Approaches* by Schedlitzki & Edwards (2014). While they are too recently published to gauge popularity or prominence, these two books were selected for their claims to represent contemporary theory and practice. We understand that our analysis here is indicative only. We cannot draw definitive conclusions on the population of textbooks serving leadership studies, but we can pose some questions and think about the tensions between rigour and relevance to spur interest, involvement and debate in this area.

The second principle, the analytical methodology, frames the account we can give. We chose to follow Czarniawska's version of 'narratology' (2010). We made this decision because we wanted to understand the narratives being constructed in the textbook representation of rigour and relevance. In other words, our analysis is based on the principle that authors exercise agency in choosing what to include/exclude, how to communicate, and what form of learning to enable. None of these are settled for authors before they write the textbooks that are published. We also wanted to engage with the textbooks narratologically because we believe the analysis we present here has to be reflexive. We are, or have been, at times learners, educators, researchers, textbook readers, and textbook authors, and therefore occupy a situated position.

Practically, our analysis falls into four key categories. First, the temporality and structure of the book's substantive content. These are significant because the encourage learners to think of the discipline in specific ways, especially in relation to rigour. Second, the account of the purpose of the book – its teleology, in other words, and the underlying assumptions that drive the narrative. This is key to understanding the book's position on relevance. Third, style – for example, whether they are scientific, metaphorical, grand, detailed, factual, impressionistic, canonical, vernacular, textual or visual. This has implications for both rigour and relevance. Finally, the application devices that show intent to move beyond abstract understanding of theory or conceptual material towards its practice or use. This obviously has implications for how relevance

is presented, but as we argue throughout this paper, this spills over into how rigour is represented.

Four textbooks: An exegesis

Table One: Textbook comparisions

	STRUCTURE & CHRONOLOGY	PURPOSE	STYLE	APPLICATION
Northouse (2016)	Diachronic evolution of theory	Aims to depict the historical progression of leadership research	Uses objective voice with little use of pronouns. Language of 'increasingly' indicating progression, linearity.	Every chapter has an 'application' section and case study with questions. The application section comments on the ways a theory has or could be applied in practice. However, as with the case studies, the relationship of theory and practice is positioned as the unidirectional 'application' of theoretical lenses to life. Each chapter then finishes with a 'Leadership Instrument' which provides a questionnaire that readers can use to measure themselves against the construct in question.
Yukl (2013)	Clustering into 3 leadership variables: leader;	Aims to answer the question of leadership	Uses objective, and at times	Features learning objectives which all begin with the

			highly technical language. Holds strongly to notions of evaluating the validity and utility of theoretical perspectives	phrase 'Understand...', suggesting that the primary response as a reader is cognitive. Also offers 'Review and Discussion Questions' at the end of each chapter, which test the reader's understanding, but do not invite the reader's own voice into the 'discussion'.
Iszatt-White & Saunders (2014)	Two part structure 1) key themes and 2) hot topics	Aims to support the systematic study of leadership by all manner of students and progress the transition from theory to practice	Uses first person single 'I' and plural 'we' pronouns. Explanatory and argument driven text which makes an attempt to engage reader throughout.	Uses extensive boxes and inserts to provide discussion points, case in points, blog boxes, research in focus inserts, leadership in media inserts which all provide places for reflective and contextual application
Schedlitzki & Edwards (2014)	A mapping terrain motif with three clusters of chapters: traditional, current and critical.	Aims to provide a comprehensive and critical overview of leadership studies and exposure to epistemological, methodological and geographical issues	Uses plural 'we' pronouns. Largely teacher/ lecturer instructional style	Has 'tour' features including extended case studies and questions, vignettes, critical thinking boxes, in-house and end of chapter reflective questions

Structure and chronology

As our table here shows, on the surface all four books have a different structure and temporality. Northouse's introduction could not be clearer about the linearity of the field. His book begins with a box summarising the 'evolution of leadership definitions', from 1900 to the 21st century. The rest of the text then unfolds following this scheme: chapter two introduces the 'Trait approach' as 'one of the first systematic attempts to study leadership' (2016: 19), and the plot continues through the 20th century via path-goal theory and leader-member exchange theory, into the 1980s with transformational leadership, and then into the 21st century with authentic leadership, servant leadership. Leadership studies is represented as a (chrono)logical and linear progression here, with increasing rigour helping us move towards greater understanding and relevance.

The two more recent British books are not driven by the same tight chronology of theory, but nor do they escape assumptions of evolution and progression. Both the Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014) and Iszatt-White and Saunders (2014) books reflect a de facto form of linear chronology that locates 'earlier' theoretical schools such as trait theory and transformational theory in the first part of the text, with more recent theories such as critical and ethical perspectives in the second halves. These two textbooks also provide an explicit discursive set of distinctions, with longer-established theories termed 'approaches', in contrast with contemporary and critical 'issues' (Schedlitzki & Edwards), or 'key themes' versus 'hot topics' (Iszatt-White & Saunders). We could understand 'approaches' and 'themes' as discursive indicators of rigour, while 'topics' and 'issues' seem to point to relevance. We also notice an intermingling of topics, issues, questions and provocations with the theoretical schools or camps in these two textbooks, indicating a broader canvasing of topics than the traditional canon represented in the North American books.

Yukl's book is however something of outlier here with its opening statement that the diversity and complexity of research literature on leadership provides a challenge to organizing his book. The primary basis for organizing chapters is then linked to three 'variables': leader, follower and situation. The research themes are further classified into behaviour (chapters 2, 3 and 4); trait (chapter 6); situation approach (chapter 7);

and power influence (chapter 9). Research that cuts across these classifications (so-called integrative topics) is treated in separate chapters such as participative leadership (chapter 5), charismatic/transformational leadership (chapter 12), contingency theories (chapter 7), strategic leadership (chapter 11), and future directions (chapter 16). Notwithstanding this more complex design, the underlying movement seems to us still to be chronologically linear.

Where more established and more recent textbooks really differ is, firstly, where they 'cut' the leadership story. Northouse and Yukl reach transformational and distributed theories but don't include anything resembling constructionist, critical and post-structuralist perspectives, which gives their texts a shorter and more homogenous paradigm span than the other two. Second, the separation of theory and the relative paucity of issues and provocations in the North American textbooks is striking, as compared to the comfortable mingling of theory and presentation of contentious issues in the British textbooks. We see both these differences as significant to the rigour/relevance debate. The dominance of discrete theory seems to privilege understanding which refers only to rigour and the interplay of theoretical topics, while issue-led discussion points towards rich, complex context and lived phenomena which move the text towards relevance.

Purpose

All four textbooks espouse a different purpose and make clear, if implicit, reference to positions on rigour and relevance. We could characterise the Northouse and Schedlitzki and Edwards textbooks as academically focused, while the Yukl and Iszatt-White and Saunders books are more oriented towards practitioners. As noted above, Northouse's textbook is firmly evolutionary and thus relates a meta-narrative of a progressive understanding of leadership. The chapter on gender, for example, starts:

> While academic researchers ignored issues related to gender and leadership until the 1970s… the increasing number of women in leadership positions and women in academia brought about by dramatic changes in American society have fuelled the now robust scholarly interest in the study of leadership and gender. (2016: 397)

The book is peppered with terms such as 'increasingly', which imply long-term development and improvement. In addition, leadership studies is represented as a field that has developed alongside this book over the last two decades, locating the book as an active agent. Throughout, leadership is depicted as a rare, valuable commodity that adheres to an individual. Schedlitzki and Edwards, on the other hand, are interested in introducing students to what they call 'the wider field of leadership studies' characterised by 'wider epistemological, philosophical and geographical debates' (2014: 1). They see changing landscapes, debates rooted in differences between psychological and sociological assumptions, and recent moves into territory such as aesthetics and identity as important features of an overall narrative that is contested, non-linear, increasingly expansive and interdisciplinary. This is not a narrative of predictable progression towards perfect understanding, but a conversation framed by multiple perspectives and the excitement of difference.

Yukl claims a focus on effective leadership rather than simply providing an exploration of historical transitions in leadership thinking. His subject matter relates to 'the determinants of leadership effectiveness and how leadership can be improved' (Yukl, 2013: 15). He suggests that, given practitioners' preferences for prescriptions and solutions, academics need to 'think more about how their theories and research can be used to improve the practice of management' (p. 15). The text claims to strike a balance between theory and practical application, albeit with audiences of scientists and managers in management and industrial-organizational psychology particularly in mind. Yukl's narrative repeatedly returns to the idea that what practising managers need is detailed representations of complex theory. Iszatt-White and Saunders' starting point is a contrast, that readers are both interested and committed to the study of leadership *and* its practice. After all, they argue, we are all consumers and at least 'would-be practitioners' (2014: 2). They state early on that 'the ultimate goal of most potential readers of this book' is 'to become a better practitioner' (2014: 3). In order to achieve this they propose a need for both theory and 'first-hand observation' to build common languages, benchmarks and repertoires of thinking. Interestingly they affirm both rigour and relevance explicitly: the former because it tells us theories are 'robustly tested' and

'based on sound evidence' (2014: 3), the latter because it gives us the opportunity 'to examine our own practice' and develop 'more consistent success' (2014: 2). They therefore pose the possibility of balancing and integrating the two.

Thus the Northouse and Schedlitzki and Edwards textbooks offer us very different notions of 'understanding': the former as linear and progressive and the latter as divergent and contested. The Yukl and Iszatt-White and Saunders textbooks offer us very different notions of practice: the former on effectiveness for those in certain positions and the latter on the assumption that all do and will play some kind of role in the leadership world. Rigour and relevance at this point are beginning to hold more complex meanings as represented in these books.

Style

Style, unsurprisingly, closely relates to the purpose of each textbook. Northouse's book might be read as a classic of the textbook genre that Czarniawska (2003) pointedly terms 'mundane summary'. It is characterised by complete lack of first person pronouns, passive constructions, definitive statements, rational and scientific discursive markers, and an objective, learned tone. The Schedlitzki and Edwards textbook uses first person pronouns, which brings the authors directly into the book. They succeed in being clear more than scientific, instructional more than objective, and considered in how they present theories and counter-theories. Their book could perhaps best be described as offering a sustained, multi-dimensional platform of critique on the research field. While both styles are orientated to understanding, each facilitates understanding of a quite different object.

Yukl's textbook is considerably more technical than the others. Theories, variables and models are presented in great detail through specialised and complex language. Managers are addressed directly in the form of imperatives or directives, to clarify what should be done in practice. The author thereby presents as an authority on the topic of leadership with the right to both explain theory and tell managers what to do. This is all done in a tone of complete certainty, as if leadership is a series of undisputed 'know-how's'. The Iszatt-White and Saunders book makes interesting use of the authorial collaboration, using both singular and plural first-person pronouns, and is

comfortable with both authors and readers being directly addressed in their book. Their approach could also be described as instructional, but it is the kind of instruction that seeks to draw readers/learners/practitioners into the main ideas and debates of the topic by conveying that they have an active part to play in their construction. In this way they come across more as a 'guide on the side' than a 'sage on the stage'.

At stake in what we are labelling as style are a host of positionings or identities: experts/learners, knowledge leaders/knowledge acquirers, facilitators/participants, and narrators/readers, for example. These play out through a repertoire of rigour/relevance dynamics embedded in the style of narration and representation, suggesting that this tension has identity dimensions for us as educators as well as for learners and practitioners (cf. Harding, 2003).

Application

The last category we consider describes the spaces that invite the reader or student into the book. Northouse does not present chapter learning objectives or guiding questions, presumably on the assumption that all information is equally important to know or that knowing it all is the self-evident purpose. There are no inserts at all in the text to provide definitions, additional information, or reflective questions. Each chapter ends with a 'criticism', application, case study, leadership instrument, and summary section. It is important to note that there is no significant change to the style or author voice in the chapters, even those written by other contributors in more recent editions - they also read as wholly consistent with the scientific and rational style used throughout. Yukl's book has learning objectives at the start of each chapter; each and every one begins with the term 'understand'. Like Northouse's book, this one contains no inserts, although there are many diagrams, models and tables. Yukl does present what he calls 'review and discussion' questions at the end of each chapter. These are purely content questions; many chapters also contain a concluding case study. Given his book is explicitly for managers it is perhaps puzzling that there is no offer of an explicit practice dimension.

The two more recent textbooks, in contrast, are filled with a wide variety of in-chapter and end-of-chapter features, boxes, inserts and reader/student activities. Both

have prominent tour-guide pages before the substantive chapters even start, which also introduce and invite students into the accompanying website. Schedlitzki and Edwards offer chapter aims, commonly headed by words such as 'introduce', 'critically discuss' and 'explore'; Iszatt-White and Saunders present learning outcomes with terms such as 'understand', 'be aware', and 'be familiar with'. Both texts have inserts or boxes on virtually every page: reflective questions, blog boxes, vignettes, cases-in-point, discussion points, and critical thinking boxes. Chapters end in either an integrated set of questions directing attention to the different case studies presented within a chapter, or an extended case study with a set of questions. Each of these devices tends to come with its own discursive markers to indicate distinctiveness from the surrounding text, and offers reflective, critical, personal or narrative possibilities. The end result is an overall text frequently broken by activities and invitations to think in different ways.

It is perhaps this category that shows the differences between the textbooks most. The more recent textbooks reflect a contemporary trend for 'montage-like' interruptions to the core narrative, which bring in additional features to the primary textual and conceptual flow. Additionally they exhibit some degree of polysemy where different voices, tones and author/reader positions are evoked. They do so on the assumption that textbooks need to engage variously and more directly with readers. The older two textbooks seem by and large to eschew such directness and engagement with their readers, to focus on the expert articulation of theory. We read this difference as another manifestation of difference in presentation of theory and practice, or rigour and relevance.

Discussion: Neutral Science and Engaged Bricolage

Our reading of these four leadership textbooks suggests there is a distinction in representations of the field with regard to the notions of rigour and relevance. For some authors, the textbook is a neutral scientistic project with predictable narratives, teleological development towards an agreed goal, with clear guidelines and directives for human behaviour. For others, it is a more bricolaged and textually self-conscious product that contains multiple theories and spaces, and celebrates difference. These perspectives invite the reader/student into a very different form of engagement and even

excitement in terms of subject. The continued global popularity of the Northouse and Yukl textbooks must reflect either loyalty, or what they espouse on the part of course co-ordinators, or a degree of alignment and fit with how leadership studies is predominantly taught and what learners demand. We know of many courses that require either the Northouse or Yukl book, and have taught courses through them ourselves. There is perhaps something about the unashamed orientation towards rigour and a specific form of relevance in these books which keeps them in front of students still. Nonetheless we also read the feedback and judgements of these two books from learners, for example on course assessment pages and class blogs, which tell of failure to kindle student/reader interest, passion or connection to leadership studies. This, for us, points to a lack of relevance (a point which is also affirmed by Collinson and Tourish, 2015).

What we have presented here is a relatively specific analysis. We have engaged with a small selection of textbooks in order to catalyse conversation, reflexivity and debate, rather than make judgements. Our purpose is specifically to animate debate around the rigour/relevance tension in the context of a key artefact that informs an activity that most of us spend the majority of our time engaged in – education and development. We think there is considerably more to be done in understanding what is being represented to students as knowledge and practice about leadership and leadership development in this respect. For example, many of our undergraduate students arrive at university with confidence that they already know what leadership is, can recite many of its variants, and are familiar with some of their problematics. It seems to us this confidence has been inculcated through media that actively encourage certainty and closure, such as news media and secondary education textbooks. In higher education, these students may be presented with more of the same if they are reliant on textbooks in which there is no space for active learning – no space between the text- and the -book. However, research, textbooks, and learning experiences may also suggest exactly the opposite – that leadership is a topic that resists intellectual or practical closure, is characterised by ambiguity or ambivalence, and may be subject to conflicting interpretations that cannot easily be resolved. We know from experience that this can be

frustrating for educators, and equally it must also be intensely frustrating for the students, if we appear to tell them that the knowledge and learning they have brought to university is, at best, a simplification. However, many of the learners we work with will surely have experienced, and will further experience, practice worlds where ambiguity, ambivalence, conflict and multiple interpretations are the very fabric of interactions and predicaments. Textbooks can either sit outside or speak to such worlds.

Our intention in this analysis is definitely not to be critical of specific aspects of textbook production in leadership studies. We are not being critical of individual authors – we are in awe of the people, as individuals or co-authors, who take on the production of an entire textbook to represent a field. Writing a textbook can be a brave, even rash, decision. It is perhaps the most structurally conditioned of all the forms of writing that we engage in. Publishers have strong views about content and form, and draw up surprisingly worded contracts to hold authors to commitments (sometimes even post-mortem – one of us works with a colleague whose textbook contract includes a section on what will happen to the book after death). Colleagues can be critical of both content and activity, suggesting that such writing is less demanding than writing for peer-reviewed journals and lower status in terms of community recognition and career progression. One of us experienced this very directly at a promotion panel interview - one of the four wise men [sic] sitting in judgment pointedly asked 'why are you bothering to write a textbook?', in a somewhat dismissive tone. The question was given an additional layer of irony by the fact that the questioner was the school's director of education, with oversight of all under- and post-graduate teaching programmes in the school he worked in. Notwithstanding, we have all found textbooks invaluable supports in higher education, and many students seem to like them, at least as a foundation for learning. There are strong arguments in favour of teaching with (rather than from) a textbook. The higher education context that many of us work within is extremely demanding, we have a responsibility to prepare students to be able to survive 'leadership conversations' that their present or future colleagues involve them in, and they deserve familiarity with 'the canon'.

This last point is, however, double-edged. We think that too many students leave our care with a good understanding of conventional perspectives on leading, but less sense of how to critique those perspectives, or even of the existence of critical approaches to our subject area. The idea of a canon gives a clue to how this happens. It is usually defined as the agreed rules, principles or accepted knowledge that a belief is judged by or narrated through. This is exemplified by the Christian Biblical canon, the books that are accepted as genuine and therefore carry sacred meaning. The canon becomes the rules by which we ought to live and understand the beliefs, excluding all other approaches and ways of thinking. Leadership studies, for all the debate over definitions and disagreements over the rigour of the research methods that shed most light on what's relevant for practice, appears to be a field with a well-established canon. If we don't want to give it up then we may have to experiment, at the very least, with representing that canon in the multiple contexts that leadership is practised.

One formal way to approach might be to re-introduce the hyphen into 'textbook'. This would signal the potential space between leadership studies as a set text- that students have to learn, and the -book that their learning and development might resemble if they are granted freedom to write and decide their own learning pathway. In this, we are proposing something similar to Fougère and Moulettes' (2012) suggestion that textbooks be written as an invitation to dialogue, rather than as a means of closing conversation. Dialogue could be understood as a process which brings both rigour in its collective scrutiny and relevance it its appeal to sharing perspective and experience. It wouldn't be easy, but it might be helpful in framing teaching, learning, and perhaps also the field we all work within.

Conclusion: Textbook futures

But is it possible to create a textbook on leadership studies that does these things? We think that textbooks can be a means of honouring as well as deconstructing established, stable understandings of a field. Our experience of working on a textbook intended to be at least slightly different to (what we think is) the conventional norm suggests that the door to writing differently, and writing of different ways to think about or practise leadership, is more open than pessimistic accounts suggest (cf. Stambaugh &

Trank, 2010, p. 674, on the constraints of the publishing market and publishers' willingness to pressure authors to conform to it). We weren't granted complete freedom in our book project - if we'd wanted that, we would have had to self-publish. However, we have experienced a great deal of publisher support for a book oriented towards students that approached leadership studies and leadership development from a) critical, b) non-normative, and c) non-performative perspectives. We were also able to work with the cover designer to make sure that it didn't have any animals, warriors, or hierarchical symbols on the front. This may seem trivial, but we think the symbolism of how leadership studies is represented is important, starting with book covers.

The process of negotiating with publishers in this way can perhaps be imagined as opening up cracks in the smooth path to understanding leadership as a practice, and contributing to leadership studies as a field. Perrow (1985) described the process of having his work reviewed at *Administrative Science Quarterly* as akin to asphalt being laid to make a road. He coined the metaphor to describe how a journal house style can homogenise what is published there – to smooth over the irregularities of the landscape and make the journey to knowledge and understanding less troublesome. If we are able to create cracks in the asphalt, perhaps seeds will get into them and break up the tarmac a little as students read and think. After all, we're not driving from A to B in a machine as quickly as possible, but learning and educating with people. If this process can start in a text-book then perhaps it can be supported and continued by different pedagogies of development, learning, and practice, and perhaps ultimately research, as some of those we work with in our under- and post-graduate classrooms go on to conduct their own research in the field and become colleagues.

For these reasons, we want to end this discussion of rigour and relevance in the textbooks we teach with and sometimes write, to raise the possibility that the textbook/text-book, flawed as it undoubtedly is, can exist in a variety of forms. We think that 'mundane summaries' can be useful, if they are understood as such. More important for us, however, is the possibility of leaving sufficient space between the lines for critical interpretation by educators or students to be developed. This is an alternative to Fineman and Gabriel's (1994) concluding proposal that the conventional textbook

structure, form, and style should simply be abandoned. We think that if authors remain at least notionally or formally within the conventional structure, or relate to it somehow, we are much better able to communicate both functionalist and alternative perspectives on leadership to do justice to the diversity, complexity and debates of the leadership terrain. We are therefore proposing a form of 'subversive functionalism' (Hartmann, 2014) that occupies the space between rigour and relevance, acknowledging and problematizing both. This allows authors to introduce the alternative perspectives that Fineman and Gabriel (1994) suggest are inevitably excluded by the conventional textbook structure, but to do so in relation or dialogue with the mainstream. In this we return to the original notion of a book with space for different texts, including one thought or written by the reader. This would, we think, also bring rigour and relevance into steadily new and generative relationships with each other, extending Tushman and O'Reilly's (2007) proposals.

In the context of the argument we have presented here, it also seems appropriate that we conclude by returning to students and learning. As the MBA student whose question began this paper implied, students are asking for (and deserve) theories that 'work' or an explanation of why theories might not work. Her question indicates that acknowledging the interdependence of rigour and relevance is a first step towards their reframing and redefinition as disputed presences in education. Presenting 'theories that work', in functionalist or other ways, is surely a challenge that scholars can't solve on their own without involvement of those practising with the theories. The construction of text-books with more space for learners to think for themselves and for learning to happen will require a different form of the 'engaged scholarship' that Tushman and O'Reilly (2007: 772) advise is at the heart of the relationship between rigour and relevance, that takes into account how and why we represent theory and practice in the writing that more people read than any other.

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