Introduction: leadership in a crises-constructing world

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"Climate chaos, stock market panics, food scares, pandemic threats, economic crashes, congenital anxiety, existential dread… Fear and fears: individual and collective, combining and reinforcing each other (the dynamic of fear itself), are charging through our world. Infiltrating it, jolting it, deranging it" (Richard, 2012: 7).

Crises and Leadership

As Virilio (2012) has argued, fear-inducing crises and how we construe and react to them are a defining symptom of our times. Crisis can be viewed as a complex phenomenon that is both socially produced and discursively constituted in its prevalence, disruptiveness and appearance of inevitability (De Rycker and Mohd Don, 2012). From a critical discourse perspective, crises can be construed in two ways (see Table 1). On the one hand, from a strategic/managerial or instrumentalist standpoint (which is seen as characteristic of modernity (Chalozin-Dovrat, 2012)), the emphasis is on prediction and control based on making the phenomenon manageable by attempting to identify its component features from an analytical approach. On the other hand, a subjective or interpretive construal of crises sees the concept as culturally situated and abjures essentialist notions of its existence. This recognises that 'crises' are socially and discursively constructed, grounded in and arising from the narratives of the powerful in the process of crisis identification, definition and constitution, which are in turn subject to socio-political theorisation.

Due to this transforming construal (the representation of a state of affairs) and construction (the sedimentation of a construal into an ongoing socio-material process or institution) of crises (Sayer 2000), socially real institutions have resulted, including the credit crisis in the banking sector and the political crisis of the Eurozone (Kutter, 2012). These construed and constructed formations of crises, which we understand as a crucial point or situation that leads to an abrupt or decisive change, means that taken-for-granted or relied-upon processes are threatened or can breakdown, presenting an opportunity to question existing knowledge, understanding and practices (Mabey and Morrell, 2011). Crises, in other words, are interesting because "they often produce profound cognitive, strategic, and practical disorientation by disrupting actors' sedimented views of the world. They disturb prevailing meta-narratives, theoretical frameworks, policy paradigms and/ or everyday life and open the space for proliferation (*variation*) in crises interpretations, only some of which get *selected* as the basis for 'imagined recoveries' that are translated into economic strategies and policies – and, of these, only some prove effective and are *retained*" (Jessop, 2013: 238).

Given that contradictions, tensions and paradoxes lie at the heart of 'crisis' it has been argued that we need to develop a deeper, non-reductionist understanding of the disruptive role it plays in society: if crisis is the struggle between one order and another as the normal and reliable is disrupted (Priestly, 2012), then this has implications for the conceptualisation and practice of leadership (Knights and McCabe, 2015). Accordingly, in this Special Issue we explore the relationship between crises and our understanding of leadership. On the basis of our reflection on the papers included, we argue that the social construction of crises has undermined calls for more collective and progressive versions of leadership, such as post-heroic, spiritual, authentic or distributed leading to a regression to the more familiar and still dominant heroic, individualistic, directive and coercive approaches based on formal positions of authority. However, we believe that there is an opportunity for scholars to challenge this

tendency and to advance alternative frameworks which move away from ideas of individual agency and control, which crises undermine or disrupt, and to take into account the power relations that shape the more emergent processes of organizing and change that unfold through the micro-interactions between multiple actors (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Introducing the Special Issue
This Special Issue presents a number of articles that explore different aspects and permutations of the relationship between crises and leadership – both in terms of the construction of leadership and the construction of different forms and types of crises. All share a social constructionist perspective – for each of them social entities and processes are not simply pre-given or directly accessible to human knowledge. Rather, social entities and processes are created and mediated through perceptual schema and social interactions, and any knowledge of them is likewise created and mediated through perceptual schema and social interactions. In other words, each article problematizes the categories of leadership and crisis, albeit in varying and contrasting manners.

The questioning of the relationship between leadership and crisis is not new, nor is the sensitivity towards social constructionism or its application to questions of leadership or questions of crisis. In a previous Special Issue of this journal Mabey and Morrell (2011) include a focus on the practice of leadership in situations of crisis and contributions that address the construction of leadership from variously morally-normative (Brookes, 2011), interpretivist (Iszatt-White, 2011; Probert and Turnbull James, 2011; Raelin, 2011) and critical (Kerr and Robinson, 2011) perspectives. The contributions in the present Special Issue in turn further the development of variously interpretivist and critical perspectives on the construction of leadership and crises, not in the development of a new field of inquiry but in the evolution of a number of intellectual questions and perspectives and their use in the investigation of different empirical conditions. These include the observation that the romance of leadership (and of the discourses of leaders and leadership) appears to hold true especially in times of constructed crises: the romanticisation of leadership represents its heroic larger-than-life quality, its sanctification as playing a key role in our phemenonological understanding of organised activities and outcomes (Meindl and Ehrlich, 1987). These questions and perspectives also include the development of intellectual and methodological means through which to build richer pictures of the processes of construal and social construction, in particular, the use of multi-perspectival lenses of analysis and intertextuality.

The structure of the Special Issue is as follows. In the remainder of the Introduction we review the key themes and issues highlighted in the call for papers after which we present an introductory overview of each of the articles. After this, we include an editors' review in which we analyse the key themes and divergences across the articles and from the call for papers. This includes consideration of whether crises are associated with uni-directional leadership practices, the role of those in power in the construal and construction of crises, whether there is a legitimation crisis of leadership studies and what this might imply for the potential of critical leadership studies. These discussions lead on to a specification of some questions and avenues for further research.

Reviewing the call for papers - key themes and issues

The call for papers for this Special Issue was the result of a confluence of influences. One of us had recently attended a conference on the cultural political economy of the North Atlantic Financial Crisis (CPERC, 2012), where the varying and contested representations of this crisis by different social actors and the evolving changes in the nature of the crisis across different regions were analysed in relation to the cultural, political and economic forms of crisis management that were constructed and enacted by policy-making elites. This raised questions about the role of leadership processes in the construal and then the ensuing construction (Sayer, 2000) and enactment of crises in general. This chimed with Grint's (2005b) critical analysis of the role of those in positions of authority in the construction of 'problems' of various kinds – whether critical, tame or wicked – and how these related to the legitimation of specific forms of response – command, management or leadership – and ensuing modes of power – coercive, calculative or socio-normative. As such, the impetus for this Special Issue was the general absence in management and organisation studies, certainly in the mainstream journals, of discussion of, reflection on and engagement with the issues raised by the post-2007 financial crisis, by climate change and major geopolitical shifts (Tourish, 2015; Starkey, 2015). Our starting point, thus, was the question: "Where was management during the crisis?" particularly, "Where was leadership during the crisis?". This question has since been echoed by Starkey's (2015: 14) recent lament: "the gap in our research of both theoretical and empirical papers should surely concern us as a community of management scholars. If management is a discipline committed to promoting scholarship engaging with the world's most pressing management issues and with inspiring a better world through our scholarship surely we should be addressing the big issues and seeking to understand and offer explanations of the crisis in terms of management and organization theory." As he makes clear, accounts of causality and responsibility in the global financial crisis emphasize systems not individuals: the agency of managers and leaders is excised from the narrative.

Our specific concern arising from this is with the role of those with formal leadership power in the construal and construction of both crises and of resolutions to crises. As such, it led us to reconsider the relationship between leadership and context. For example, Iszatt-White (2011) argues for the need to view leadership and context as inextricably linked – that what is meant or understood by leadership only makes sense in relation to the context in which it is interpreted or enacted. In other words, when we question leadership, we have to ask 'what is leadership *in this context?* and what *is* this context?'. Interestingly, crisis is often portrayed as simply a particular *type* of context, to be contrasted with others (for example, see Osborn et al., 2002). In this simplistic formulation, the type of leadership to be adopted is read from the type of context. It was precisely this overly simplistic view of the relation between context (or situation) and leadership that was problematized by Grint (2005b).

These considerations raised a number of issues that we discussed in the call for articles. In particular, we were concerned with how to account for not only the discursive and semiotic elements of construal in perception and the proffering of representations, but also in the institutionally- and materially- constructed systemic structures and mechanisms that produce the unforeseeable consequences to which agents are variably forced to react. We were also concerned with exploring whether crises did actually entail the generation of new forms or processes of leadership, and if the increasing appreciation of emergent processes of organizing and change that unfold through the micro-interactions between actors (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005), or within groups, would be fruitful for problematizing or elucidating the roles of followers, leaders and contexts in the social construction of crises.

A particular concern that we drew from Mabey and Morrell (2011) was the implication that leadership studies were in their own form of crisis. They argue that the proliferation and frequent recurrence of crises suggests the limited success of leadership studies, and that this crisis of leadership studies is borne of a number of factors: first, the loss of consideration of the individual as a result of the (over)-reaction of leadership studies to previously overly-individualist conceptions of leadership; second, the fragmentation of leadership studies into competing and self-isolating practices and conceptions of leadership research; and third, the limited usefulness of leadership studies for understanding well-worn vices in the practice of leadership such as corruption, arrogance, narcissism and conflict, and its seemingly concomitant failure to affect the presence of these vices in leadership practice. In short, Mabey and Morrell's view of a crisis in leadership studies is analogous to Habermas' view of the 'legitimation crisis' of modern polities. For Habermas (1975) the legitimation crisis in the modern polity refers to the tendency that the political order is unable to evoke sufficient commitment or consent to properly govern. The reason that modern governments are no longer seen as legitimate is because the differentiation of modern societies means that the political order is not able to deal with different economic and moral claims, partly because there is not a shared intellectual or value base that justifies both the differentiation of society and the prerogative of the political order. Seen from this perspective, Mabey and Morrell's depiction of a crisis in leadership studies can be read as a type of legitimation crisis in that any apparent or self-evident rationale that may have been assumed for leadership studies now appears in need of justification. In addition, its potential justifications or legitimations also appear questionable.

Introducing the articles

The first article by Case et al is a critical analysis of environmental science's construction and mobilization of leadership discourse in the context of the 'crisis' of the governance of the Earth's ecology. They use a pluralist perspective for understanding leadership (drawn from Grint, 2005a and Case, 2013) to critically dissect the representations of leadership (and of crisis) that are present in environmental science. They find that environmental science is as prone to conceptions of leadership that focus on the person and the position of the leader, and the assumed importance and positive value of leadership, as many other fields. Further, only a small collection of environmental scientists utilise more analytically sophisticated lenses for tracing the effects of leadership. They recognise that leadership is not necessarily socially progressive, and that plural forms of leadership do not always exist in harmony. They also note that within the environmental science literature there are warnings about environmental scientists' propensity to proclaim the imminence of ecological crisis and that doing so naively in the name of 'science' can result in an emphasis on conservation which can contribute to processes that disempower indigenous populations.

Building on these analyses Case et al cogently argue that more critically orientated leadership research aligned with an understanding of environmental crises should entail a political ecology perspective in order to enhance understandings of both environmental leadership phenomena and contested social objectives. They argue that such a political ecology perspective would involve interrogating how leadership practices reflect culturally complex and plural contexts (or utilize, deploy, re-interpret and evolve these contexts) and result in different types of outcome, which are interpreted from different normative perspectives.

The second article, by Liu, contributes an analytical comparison of the intertextuality between media representations of Australian banking leaders in the midst of a 'global financial crisis' with a selection of the leaders' retrospective accounts of this 'crisis' and their

actions. One striking finding is the difference between these representations. In the media accounts the 'crisis' is forcefully and ontologically represented, as are the personalised accounts of the leaders' actions and reactions to the 'crisis'. By contrast, the retrospective accounts represent the Australian banking experience not as a crisis at all, but as a relatively routine and expected event, of only moderate significance. Likewise the leaders' retrospective accounts of their actions are of relatively routine risk management and impression management. This contrast in the media and banking leaders' retrospective representations of the 'crisis' and of themselves points to the dramaturgical nature of banking leadership, with frontstage and backstage performances apparent. Liu's analysis also brings to the fore contextual features that are bound up in the media narratives and representations: first, the cultural constructions of followers as requiring reassurance and being dependent on leaders; second, the specific history of the sector in question (in this case Australian banks); and third, the gendered representation of leader behaviours designated as appropriate, including both masculine tropes (sports and war metaphors) and, interestingly, also feminine tropes (caring and listening metaphors). The only behaviours apparently represented as inappropriate were those characterised as indecision and inaction.

Liu's findings raise a number of interesting reflections, not least of which is that leaders can potentially benefit from the construction of societal crises even when their organisations are relatively unaffected – in this case, because many other stakeholders were involved in the discursive construction of the global financial crisis. Liu also critically suggests that dramaturgically constructing crises in relatively stable contexts enables the production and dissemination of romanticised leadership narratives, which potentially serves to maintain the status quo and elide questions about reform, thus serving to buttress those in positions of power.

The third article by Bresnen et al critically examines the emergent culture of 'leaderism' in the English National Health Service (NHS). It looks at how discourses of leadership are applied and utilized and how these affect managerial practices and identity. The context is a public service sector experiencing significant job lay-offs as a result of the restructuring of the NHS legitimated by the Conservative-led government following the financial crisis. Their study considered the situated deployment of languages and understandings of leadership across hierarchical positions in service level organizations. Both integrative and disintegrative effects of the language of leadership were discovered. Regardless of a widespread desire for, and use of the language of, leadership, vision, strategy and creativity, reporting requirements drove the predominant experiences of the NHS managers observed.

In response to the gap between these realities and their aspirations, Bresnen et al found that, all their respondents could muster was to 'aspire to inspire' as best they could using interpersonal skills. Despite these unromantic findings, Bresnen et al argue that as well as there being a number of tensions in how the language of leadership is deployed, the interpretative flexibility of the language of leadership also has the potential to bridge managerial divides within this sector. This is because it is a language that all the managers, even across managerial and clinical divides, shared to some degree, even if their uses and understandings of it varied.

The fourth article by Eslen-Ziya and Erhart is a study of alternative, collective leadership during the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul in 2013. The authors highlight the oppositional nature of this protest movement, as the protesters directed both their anger and wit at a patriarchal order that had been encroaching upon women's bodies and minds over the

preceding years. This oppositional character of the protest is also seen in the alternative modes of consciousness, being and action that the protesters enacted: collective consciousness, public, mutual, egalitarian and connected being and non-discriminatory action. Eslen-Ziya and Erhart argue that the protestors created, for a time at least, a utopic space in which to live in a public sphere, which the patriarchal order had been diminishing over previous years.

Their study, thus, is of the oppositional, alternative and emergent constructions of the protestors that were discursively and reactively positioned against, or viewed as alternative to, the discourses and constructions of the Turkish Prime Minister. There are some pointed examples of the protestors subverting the logic and rhetoric of the official discourse, and also of the internal development of the pluralist protest group as they tried to act in a non-discriminatory and collective manner, in their attempts to enact a different mode of being. The authors thus position the article as a movement towards post-heroic leadership. In this perspective, positioned leaders are 'absent' rather than taken-for-granted, structure is emergent and horizontal rather than authoritarian and hierarchical, and as the authors term it action is 'collective individualism', i.e. collective rather than individualistic.

Conclusion

We have shown above that the papers in this Special Issue develop a number of themes from the call for papers. However, one significant element of the call that is missing is an emphasis upon authority. Originally, we specifically drew attention to Grint's formulation of leadership as but one mode of authority (as well as command and management) and invoked Weber's (1978) classic ideal-types of authority – tradition, rational-legal determination, and charisma from his sociology of domination. The purpose of this emphasis was to stimulate reflection upon, and examination of, a particular element of the context in which leadership takes place – economic, social, cultural and political power relations – and in particular the socio-normative role of authority in expressing and enabling these power relations. While these relations appear in this issue's contributions, they are not themselves objects of inquiry. In our editors' review at the end of this Special Issue, we will return to the question of the relations of authority and power with leadership and crises.

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Table 1   Definitions of Crisis

Type	Focus	Characteristics
Strategic/ Managerial	Predicting and controlling Makes the phenomenon manageable by adopting a component feature/ analytical approach to its characterization	Identify common elements – for example, significant threats, unpredictability, suddenness, uncertainty, urgency, immediacy 1. The probability that an organisation will be exposed to a crisis. 2. The impact of a specific crisis in terms of the duration and severity of damage inflicted. 3. The predictability and the degree to which a crisis can be anticipated (Wang and Lu, 2010: 3936).
Subjective	Understand and interpret crisis The culturally situated nature of the crisis concept	Questions the ontological or essentialist status of crisis itself – is crisis an objective, material or empirical reality to be perceived and experienced or is it a cognitive construal and socially-shared discursive construct? 1. Crisis is socially and discursively constructed, grounded in socio-cultural and historical contexts and meaning structures. 2. The narrative view of crisis – events need to be constructed into a crisis that requires actors and human agency (crises are not just intersubjectively shared perceptions or experiences). Crisis is not an exogeneous shock to the system but arises from processes of crisis identification, definition and constitution – these processes are usually on the part of more powerful actors. 3. More general political and social theorizations of crisis – for example, Jessop's (Jessop, 2002; Jessop, 2013) focus on crisis response, strategies and policies that determine that response. Crisis is a by-product of the contradictions, crisis tendencies and dilemmas that define social organizations. The construal of crisis involves complex processes, variation, selection and retention mediated through a changing mix of semiotic and extra-semiotic mechanisms.

(Source: developed from De Rycker and Mohd Don, 2012)