

## The Leader's Conundrum: A Paradox of Distortion

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### Introduction

It has been a notable feature of the last 30 years how 'leader' rather than 'manager' has become a preferred label, or perhaps a re-label to provide more attraction and impression in fast moving times (Alvesson and Spicer 2012). Nevertheless, before, during and after the 2007/8 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), a great deal was expected of those senior figures in organisations who were the leaders. Indeed, for much of the last 30 years, the image of an effective leader has been strongly associated with people who could create pride, respect and trust among others, the followers, who in turn would be motivated to perform beyond expectations. Such leaders matched the categorization of 'transformational' or 'charismatic-transformational' (Bass 1985), and this image was credited with a 'rejuvenation of the leadership field' (Hunt 1999, 129). Once this idea took hold, a great deal of energy was expended to show the evidence for the effectiveness of transformational leaders, providing the means to help recognize who could become transformational leaders and providing the learning and development that meant they became transformational leaders.

There are of course other images of leaders. What is most striking about these is that they tend to focus on particular individuals who can be assessed, selected and developed for senior roles where they will perform as leaders. This suggests that the leaders do the leadership. However, for us, this produces a rather important paradox. In this chapter, we will argue that the concentration on particular individuals as leaders, along with a devotion of resources to their development is also, at same time, a distortion of leadership practice that really happens. We will argue that when those appointed as the leaders seek to control the direction of events, such as during projects of change, they are also likely to suffer a loss of control, which in turn produces an ongoing cycle that seeks to

find ways for leaders to (re)assert control, as part of the myth that individual leaders can be in control. We present this as the leader's conundrum. We will begin with a brief overview of the tradition of leadership, before considering a counter-tradition. This provides the source of what we see as the leader's conundrum which lays the trap for the paradox of distortion. We will make use of the metaphor of a river and river-bank, drawn from the philosophy of Wittgenstein, in the examination of the working of leadership during projects of change.

### **Leaders .....**

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, leadership has been the holy grail for management researchers and commentators. Leadership has been the single biggest issue for discussion within management journals and a 'hot topic' or 'panacea' of our times (Bolden et al. 2011). However, for much of this time, and we suspect for most readers of this chapter, a basic identity has applied:

#### **Leaders = Leadership**

Seeing leaders *as* leadership can create a simplified perspective, attributing both success, (in terms of a link to organization performance), and failure (Kelley 1973) to the individual leader. Thus, if the performance of an organization is judged as strong, it becomes easier to make attributions about the success to individual leaders who can then justify significant rewards. In popular literature, the link of individual leader to success is the source of various leader heroes such as Jack Welch or Richard Branson. Of course, whether the opposite applies in times of failure, such as the recent GFC, is a moot point and there has been criticism of leaders and the failure to make them responsible for what went wrong (Board 2010).

Question: Who are your leader heroes? How do you explain your choices in terms of what they have done?

That individual leaders are central to leadership can be seen in the search for the particular features that make for good leaders, including the link to performance

and success. Initially, the search focused on generic explanations of the concept and the possession of particular traits, even though it was not always possible to specify which of a large number of traits were appropriate. However the view of leaders as special people who could be studied objectively to reveal an 'essence' of leadership was sustained and has continued into current times (Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 1999). Thus, post-war explanations focused on behaviours or styles of leadership, which could be varied according to the situation including the task and the capabilities of others, 'the followers'

So from the late 1980's, the main preoccupation has been with the transformational qualities of leaders, those who can change an organisation, often in radical ways in order to adjust to competitive pressures brought about by such things as rapidly changing technologies and globalisation (Burns 1978; Bennis 1989). The transformational leader, we were led to believe, seeks to generate commitment and motivation and empower others with a vision. Often imbued with great charisma, these leaders served to transform 'others' who in turn followed this vision and wider organizational goals sometimes against their immediate self-interest (Kreitner et al. 2002). More recently the qualities of emotional intelligence and ethical behaviour such as integrity and authenticity have been added to the list of competencies specified as desirable behaviour for leaders of organisations (Goleman et al., 2002; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Gardner et al., 2005).

As a consequence of this initial pre-occupation, it became necessary within organisations, to acquire the tools to identify those who could become the leaders, and thus developed a focus on toolkits. There is of course a vast library of such resources available in a well-developed industry of leadership development suppliers. Most offer their versions of the 'essence' of leadership – the core factors or attributes distilled from research - and how particular approaches and sets of attributes, skills and knowledge are necessary for leaders. Within organisations, these have frequently been presented as frameworks of competences, which for nearly 30 years have been valued for

their simple and clear purpose; they can provide a way of describing the behaviour of leaders that is needed for effective performance and provide the criteria for judgements about the achievement for purposes such as remuneration, development and the identification of talent and 'outstanding performers' (Boyatzis 2008, 11). Competences therefore provide a simple argument which serves organization performance. Competences specify attributes, skills and abilities which a job holder needs to possess in order to carry out a particular role effectively (Miller et al 2001). Bolden and Gosling (2002, 4) give more detail in that a job competency can be defined as:

“an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job” (Boyatzis, 1982: 21). Boyatzis identified 19 generic behavioural competencies associated with above average managerial performance, grouped into five clusters (goal and action management, leadership, human resource management, focus on others and directing subordinates).

Question: Who makes the argument for the use of competences for leaders in your organization? Do competences work?

There are some very well documented and long-standing problems with competences for leaders (See Gold et al, 2010). One of the most searing critiques is the normative nature of competences that become an expression of an organisation's ideology, which has to be religiously observed (Finch-Lees et al. 2005). Like other frameworks and typologies that are employed with reference to leader performance and development, competences can be seen as serving the function of an organisation's objectives, which are presented as neutral and objective. Further, Human Resource Management/Development (HRM/HRD) professionals could use the language of competences to show how their work aligned with organisation strategy. However, it is argued that a leader's work is more complex and changing than is implied by the 'simple representation' of competences (Bolden and Gosling, 2006, 160). Recently it has been suggested that an uncritical acceptance of senior leaders values which find expression in competences, was also a feature of the failure by HRM/HRD professionals to

provide a counter to short-term and risky decisions that created the GFC (MacKenzie et al. 2012).

Competences have also been used to in relation to the idea of transformational leadership and one of the most well known frameworks is the Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), based on the work of Avolio and Bass (2004). The questionnaire seeks to measure a leader against four dimensions: transformational, transactional, non transactional (avoidant) and outcomes (effectiveness). A leader is rated against the elements of each dimension by up to 24 others who provide 360-degree feedback. It is interesting to note that the MLQ and the ideas of transformational or charismatic-transformational leadership have remained very popular in practice and research. For example, a recent review of academic papers on leadership theories showed that transformational and charismatic leadership theories represented 'the dominant forms of interest' (Dinh et al. 2014, 39). However, also recently, Knippenberg et al. (2013) completed an assessment of the evidence for transformational leaders, and in particular, the link to organisation performance. They found so many problems with the basic understanding of the idea of charismatic transformation leadership, its measure and use, that they suggested abandoning the approach and starting again.

#### **.....and Leadership**

So much of the attention to leaders seems to assume a 'heroic' and 'great man' status that binds us to the Leader = Leadership identity. However, for quite some time this identity has been challenged. For example, as long ago as 1978, Burns argued that 'If we know all too much about our leaders, we know far too little about leadership. We fail to grasp the essence of leadership that is relevant to the modern age' (1). In 1999, Senge suggested, 'There's a snowball's chance in hell of redefining leadership in this day and age' (81). Since these comments were made, there have been doubts about the view that an 'essence of leadership' can be identified (Lawler 2005). To appreciate this quandary, try the following question, posed in Kelly (2014, 913):

Question: Based on your knowledge of your own or any other organisation, if you walked in the front entrance - 'where is the leadership?'

The question might be confusing but stay with it for a moment, ask some colleagues and you might find some interesting responses (We would be happy to hear these, so send them to us).

Commentators like Kelly argue that the word 'leadership' is open to so many views and definitions, that 'it becomes increasingly difficult to find any essential meaning in the term leadership at all' (ibid, 918). Our own view is that if you know where to look and how to look, you can find leadership but it will be different from the static one-person notion and requires an understanding of what is happening in practice, as it happens. This reveals what we call the Leader's Conundrum.

Try the following exercise:

1. Place a sheet of A4 paper on a table, landscaped.
2. Place yourself as matchstick person in the centre of the page – this is where you are in your work practice situation
3. Find at least one other person who depends on your work to do theirs; you try to influence their performance, but they depend on you. (Only one other person needs to be identified – there are likely to be others that you influence). Draw that person to the right of you, with an arrow to show the flow of influence
4. Now repeat the process to the left of you, but identifying one other person on whom you depend to do your work, thus influencing you. Draw an arrow to show this flow of influence. (Of course, there may be others on whom you depend).
5. You have now identified a sequential view of leadership based on influence and dependence. It may be working well or not, but that is for you to judge.
6. Now, find a person who depends on you but you also depend on them. Draw this person below you with arrows going in both directions. There is a shared leadership practice here, and it is based on interdependence because it could

not be completed without recognition of the mutuality and the need for collaboration. Again, you might have several such relationships, and the quality of the collaboration may vary between them.

7. Finally, we can repeat the interdependence idea, but with more than one other person. This is between at least three people, but there could easily be more who are all interdependent with each other. This can be your team or department. Draw this above you, but with dual-headed arrows going in all directions. Crucially, everyone you involve has a part of the practice and exerts influence on others but in return has to respond to the influence of others. It becomes a collective practice.

If you follow the stages of the exercise, you will be able to consider various units of dependent and interdependent practices that are essential for any organisation. If you use your imagination, you will also become aware of the way the pattern you identify is repeated throughout an organization of any size and location. One way of considering the patterns is by seeing leadership as part of the process of influence and dependence. You might also consider whether the working of influence is contributing to the organisation purpose, direction and achievement of outcome measures – or not. That is, leadership which is considered in this collective mode of understanding, can be more or less aligned with organizational aims. A key point starts to emerge; how can those who are appointed as leaders and who are responsible for the achievement of organizational outcomes become aware of and begin to see the patterns of dependencies and interdependencies in daily practice that form leadership in the organization? Can leaders embrace the conundrum or fall victim to the paradox of distortion?

One response is to begin to understand recent ideas and theories that consider leadership in more collective terms. For example, Raelin (2011) presents the idea of leaderful practice based on people working collectively together such that everyone has some role in influencing and leading. The group, as Raelin suggests is not 'leaderless', it is '*leaderful*' (italics in original, p. 203). This is not difficult to understand, although as Raelin highlights, it is 'based on a democratic ideology'

and requires an approach to leadership development based on co-creation and dialogue.

Another response is to see a number of varied patterns where individuals are contrasted against groups and collectives in a mix of leadership configurations (Gronn, 2009). This recognizes that numbers involved in leadership can vary from single individuals through to all those engaged in the enterprise and beyond, regardless of their position in the hierarchy. Interest moves from one person, to all kinds of practices and situations where influence is exerted. This can include pairs working together or teams and groups but also networks of practitioners. In all such work, distributed leadership is occurring, considered as the working of influence within a context, underpinned by culture and history (Spillane 2006).

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the idea and practice of distributed leadership and, we suggest, an understanding of the evidence can help leaders face the conundrum. Bolden (2011) provides a very useful overview of the various approaches but if you refer back to your diagram of dependent and interdependent practices, you might be able to see what you have found matches the patterns of distributed leadership found by Spillane (2006), shown in Table 1.

<p>Collaborated distribution: where two or more individuals work together in time and place to execute the same leadership routine.</p>
<p>Collective distribution: where two or more individuals work separately but interdependently to enact a leadership routine.</p>
<p>Coordinated distribution: where two or more individuals work in sequence in order to complete a leadership routine.</p>



### **Table 1: Patterns of Distributed Leadership**

Source: Spillane (2006, 60)

For leaders to embrace their conundrum, they need to see leadership as a social process composed of complex relationships which highlight leadership as a process that is contextualised, emergent, connected to cultural and historical influences and always in a process of change and flux (Uhl-Bien, 2006) – one that is never easy to pin down. In the next section, we will explore this further by considering one organisation during a period of intense and radical change. To help us, we will also employ Wittgenstein's (1969) metaphor of a river to illustrate the connection of culture and the leadership process. The river and the river-bed serve to highlight that amidst the daily 'flows and eddies' of life, there is a bedrock present that shapes the speed, depth and direction of thoughts and actions in the context of organisational life. The shared river-bank provides a certain degree of security of direction and this allows individuals to engage in a dialogue that at least has some bounds and direction. But nothing is absolutely fixed – the river-bed can move and in so doing, give rise to confusion and misunderstanding as a new course is set.

If we take an orthodox, individualistic view of leadership, the organisational 'heroic' leader might be seen as the grand geologist who maps out the course of the river, builds its banks and focuses on its ultimate destination – its outlet to the wider sea – before letting the sluice gates open and flooding the riverbed with staff whose direction is dictated by those banks. The geological paradox though is: - which comes first – the river or the river-banks? Arguably they are created simultaneously. We know that the course of rivers is the result of a dynamic interaction between water and earth and is influenced also by other factors, the nature of the local geology, the local climate and weather etc. At times the river may be in spate, destroying old banks and forming a new course. At other times or at other stages of the river's progress, the ground may be impervious to the water's action and the course of the river remains unaltered, the banks regulating and controlling the turbulence in the water. Wittgenstein describes this interaction or paradox in this way:

‘And the bank of the river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited’ (Wittgenstein, 1969, p.99).

To the naïve observer’s eye, the course of river is permanent, to the geologist’s eye, it is evidencing one stage of development. To the fish in the river or the kayaker, it demonstrates an element of permanence but both experience the river’s inconsistencies, its turbulent and wild spots, its areas of calm. And indeed there is much that goes on beneath the surface of the river which is not visible to the external observer.

Arnswald’s (2002) view of this metaphor is that systems of forces operate through a particular structure and influence our understanding of the world. The riverbed provides this structure but the forces which operate on, in and through it are complex and dynamic. The riverbed and riverbanks both affect the river’s inhabitants directly and indirectly. We will now go on to consider one particular, anonymised organization using our river-ranks metaphor. Whilst reading this, you might find it fruitful to think about your own organisational experience and to consider questions such as:

- How would you describe the ‘river’ of your own organization?
- How immutable are its banks: how often does it overflow its course (or dry up?); who causes the major ‘splashes’ and what is the result?
- To what extent do people shape the river and to what extent are they carried along or swept away by it?
- How would different people describe their experience of the river?

## **The Case**

We studied a large commercial organisation to consider a radical change by senior managers and the establishment of a 'new organisation' with a key element of its new strategy becoming more innovative in order to improve competitiveness. However evidence from the quarterly survey of employees indicated that some dissonance between the declaration of the 'new organisation' and employees' experience of it! There were indications of alienation and detachment both from the change process and from the resultant 'new organisation'. This was evidenced by the expression of cynicism regarding future success, which matched experiences of previous change initiatives. The river as charted on the new organisational map did not feel to be running in the declared direction. Indeed employees felt it was following a different course from that charted and were sceptical about the actual destination.

As part of our exploration of the impact of this change, we organised two workshops, involving twenty-four participants from different parts of the UK. Our aim was to examine their views on the 'new organisation' and their interpretations of how leadership was operating. One of the interesting features of our workshop process was that it allowed those attending to reflect on the sources of influence where they worked. Paradoxically, while they were expecting this influence to belong to those in higher positions as appointed leaders, they were failing to acknowledge their own potential for exerting influence with others.

Our findings revealed some key themes that suggested misalignment between strategic intention and actual experience. People were not confused about where they were on the river but felt distant and detached from the river's geological foundations. Leaders were faced with the conundrum in three particular ways:

Firstly, there was evidence of both trust and distrust in leaders at all levels. These particular features of trust were highlighted:

- trust was seen as a two-way process but in practice led to diverse results – positive where there were high levels of trust but negative where distrust occurred. Following our metaphor, where the banks of the river

were not solid, the river diverged and minor backwaters developed, or stronger subsidiary flows developed in other directions.

- where participants had confidence both in their leaders and their own ability to influence they could experience a feeling of mutual trust, with a belief that the words of leaders matched their deeds. Metaphorically, the riverbanks were robust and the flow was directed and purposeful.
- distrust, unease and scepticism occurred where there was a mismatch between leaders' words and actions: a variety of divergent flows and eddies developed.

Secondly, because of the uncertainty resulting from the initiation of the 'new organization' employees paid close attention to the words and actions of their leaders. While participants were broadly positive about the new strategy and wanted it to work, doubts and scepticism were still apparent and evidence of any significant impact of the change was still felt to be lacking. Again, such feelings were reinforced by previous experiences they had had of organisational changes. In such situations, staff used the 'track record' of past changes as a guide to expectations. The river-bank as history was asserting itself and strongly countering any efforts to change course.

Thirdly, participants pointed to the length of time the process took to get new ideas accepted- broad, mid-stream pools developed, where the river's pace appeared to be sluggish. Decision-making was slow, risk aversion increased, contrary to the stated aim of being more innovative, and employees became passive followers rather than leaders. The culture reinforced cost reduction and short-termism, in turn affecting decision-making. There was little sign of innovation and participants felt that local leaders remained within their personal 'comfort zones' preventing any significant progress being made.

Fourthly, and again paradoxically, distrust did not extend as far as the CEO. Indeed, he was treated with a degree of reverence, seen as being able to 'define the new organisation', to have the passion to inspire staff to 'kiss the badge' and to continue the 'courageous' journey'. There was clear evidence of a significant

amount of trust present in the CEO even though some participants had not met him. Thus 'I hope you exist though I've not seen you' was followed by further expressions of faith, as it were, in the exhortation for the CEO to 'find the believers and spread the message' and that he should 'be visible and be seen'. The heroic expectations placed on the CEO were reinforced by the view that *he* was in control and the strategy and direction were defined by *him*, and that the senior managers *did not play* an active part in this – they simply had to 'go with the flow'. To this extent river-building was seen to be a singular, once and for all activity rather than a continuous, dynamic and at times iterative process.

These findings on the part played by CEO match traditional views on how those appointed to leader roles are meant to behave and what duties should be enacted. As a relatively new CEO, rather than accepting the previous course of the river, from the past, the staff were wanting to see a fresh direction to be created, one in which pride and passion are given prominence. The reverence with which staff flavoured their comments suggests a reliance on the heroic aspects of a CEO, as someone who can rescue an organisation by articulating a vision of the future together with a sense of direction whilst holding others to account for their performance. This kind of articulation resonates well with images of leaders as practical authors (Holman and Thorpe, 2003) where a meaningful landscape of possibilities becomes the message and others come into this landscape to create the new reality, or in this case, the new organisation. However, and this shows the importance of appreciating the working of the conundrum, a single articulation is insufficient, especially when participants expect their CEO to be more visible to staff in the organisation to their CEO. In some of their responses, staff noted they were unsure as to whether this persona actually existed! This is a point we will develop in our reflections section.

In contrast with the expectations for the CEO, there seemed to be a 'business as usual' approach to life and the change for the 'new organisation'. The "How" of implementation' was, from this research, being hindered by the history of the organisation in terms of the way it conducted its business – a form of organisational inertia or evidence that the traditional course and flow of the

river remained unaltered and were perceived to be unalterable and inevitable. Turbulence might be introduced but it was only temporary and did not disturb the overall flow in the longer term, in much the same way as throwing a series of rocks in the river might create a big splash but are unlikely to have any lasting impact. We can see how culture forms an important part of the river metaphor here. The organisation's history pointed to low levels of 'self-confidence' and 'self-belief' among local leaders with decision-making being a laboured process and decisions themselves often altered – perhaps seen as occasional stones cast into the river. Viewed as 'bureaucratic, slow and stifling', 'lacking in direction', with managers and leaders 'out of the same mould', the organisation was seen to have 'no champions of change' and the organisation had a history of treating staff 'as children' and so consequently, they 'behaved like children'.

These rather damning features of the organisation were very much in evidence to the staff, from their position on one side of the riverbank but appeared to be hidden from the CEO and other leaders. They, it appeared, were working on the surface of the river, whilst beneath there was considerable tumult as a consequence, the words and actions became distorted and contradiction emerged. At this point we suggest another image from Wittgenstein (1980) which relates to this notion of, the 'whole hurly-burly' (no. 629). This refers to the complex pattern of the various forms of life that form the basis and on-going energy for culture and values within an organisation. This offers for leaders the potential that whatever the certainty and accuracy achieved in the construction of plans and strategies, there is always a background to this work in the 'bustle' of everyday life (1980, no. 625) as people at work respond to the various initiatives and propositions are made. A principal component to this background is the conversations between people made where and while they work within the traditions and history of the organisation but brought to life in the present through stories told and enacted (Ford et al. 2002). It is in such circumstances from the cacophony of voices that local influence is exerted, which in turn can institutionalise an accepted understanding of change (Phillips et al. 2004). This we believe forms the basis for distributed leadership to take hold and is likely to lie beyond the grasp of many leaders (Gronn 2000).

## **Reflections on the Case**

Given the limitations on our view from the river-banks, some way downstream – 24 participants from of over 10,000 staff does not constitute a comprehensive picture or route map (intended or emerging...) of the river but we could at least discern some formations and flows. Those in formal leader positions were seen as followers rather than shapers, promotion was on the basis of having served their time and there was a general 'lack of trust' within the organisation. The history suggested being slow to respond to changes in the market and that 'self-interest would prevail', and that this constrained development. Despite reverence for the CEO and a desire for him to set the vision, there was a general lack of clarity regarding strategic direction through 'filtering', becoming 'stuck' or being 'blocked. Quite a conundrum for the leader.

Question: Imagine yourself in this position with this conundrum. How would go about dealing with it? What do you suggest?

There are no quick fixes for appointed leaders but the first move has to be to accept and embrace the conundrum and recognise they cannot know it all, even if others expect them to – another paradox.

One starting point is nicely captured by a well-known quotation from Ludwig Wittgenstein:

"A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably."

(Wittgenstein 2001, no. 115)

In our context the picture we are using is cartographical and the image of the leader is as someone who charts the river's course. Not only does the leader need to have a clear view of the river's intended course (perhaps canal-builder might be an easier derivation of the metaphor here...) but s/he also need to know in practice, how is the course faring, is it altering or is all as intended? In our view,

one of the most challenging fearful difficulties for appointed leaders is how they come to rely on images (and metaphors) and language about the business which has been filtered and cleaned for their consumption. One notable example of this is the way US President Richard Nixon's 'advisory group' filtered and regulated information from the wider world and influenced his perspective of his own role, with 'Watergate' as the consequence (see Raven, 1998). This is not surprising since, and this depends on the size and spread of the organization as well as the outsiders who watch the business, it is the job of support staff such as finance, HR and others to ensure that messy and dirty pictures do not reach the top. We had first-hand experience of this effect when we presented our findings to the leaders of the organisation in the case above. We prepared a report from our workshops with twenty-four staff, containing their views as reported to us. Of course, there was much critique of what was happening in their 'new' organisation. We found that this would not be considered acceptable by the leaders, according to the Communications Director, so we re-wrote it and tried to present a less critical version. It was rejected again. The third version, which was accepted, was much reduced with little critique.

Appointed leaders need other images to provide a way of avoiding the conundrum and falling victim to the paradox of distortion. To help form such an image we turn to an example reported in the Guardian on 9 April 2002 which you can still find online at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2002/apr/09/localgovernment.education>.

It tells the story of how Birmingham Education Authority moved from a very poor position in the early 1990's to one of great improvement by 2002. Central to this improvement was the work of the Chief Education Officer, Tim Brighouse. At the time, Brighouse had a reputation that made him unpopular within government circles, although he was much admired in the education world. The article shows how he sought to energise everyone involved in Birmingham schools. Importantly, he attributed much of change not to himself but to the collaborative work with others. Once you have read the article, consider how his version of what happened contrasts with the 'heroic' image of the leader



presented by the report. For example, he deflects the attention on home and prefers instead to point to the collective effort – ‘We have been very, very focused’ and ‘We set out always to improve..’ . What is also important is how he dealt with the conundrum he faced by visiting both sides of the river-bank as part of the journey by building bridges between the banks. Read the story:

Questions: How many thank you notes did Brighthouse send? How much was inspiration and how much was hard work?

Whether a myth or real, what comes through to us is that as an appointed leader, Brighthouse was not held captive by a fixed and cleaned picture of life in the schools, he got out of his office, listened to others, attending to details and explaining what would happen – words and deeds synchronised. He helped plan and shape the course of the river, bearing in mind the local geology (legislative and resource framework), the current flow through existing river-banks and river bed (local organisational and political contexts) and the current depth, eddies, deposits (organisational and professional cultures). No wonder Brighthouse said it was 99% hard work but this is the energy that others needed to see so they could do it too.

Having set the intended direction of the river, and you can see, this was not a quick fix effort, but once it was set, as the author of the message, the actions of the leader allowed for continuous repetition not just for the sake of clarity but to build with others, practically, the story of what was happening and how. This allowed the spread of good stories by the leader but also many others, which celebrated success, highlighting Weick’s (1996) advice on the contribution of stories to organisational sense-making. What is also striking about the way the story is told is attention given to ‘energy’. Notice the question, ‘Are we not energy creators in this place?’

In this chapter, our argument is that because appointed leaders face a conundrum which results in a paradox of distortion caused by the way the everyday practice of leadership is distributed, it becomes incumbent on

appointed leaders to see themselves as initiators, inspirational or otherwise, who set out to work with the energy of others so that they might, in turn, add to the flow of energy. However, the flow of energy, will to a strong degree feed local self-organising leadership that is distributed, affected by interests in local settings (See Tesone 2000). Therefore an appointed leader, and hopefully others, need to argue for the direction they seek to pursue. They need to decide whether to direct the river or to go with its flow. More accurately and rather than 'either/or', they need to decide the extent to which they can direct the river and the extent to which they are directed by it. Their own potential within this dynamic, to influence its flow might be more considerable than they realise. Like the river, it is an unending process but in engaging with the organisation's dynamics – its strategy, culture and people – they will come to work with the energy of the leadership that is made meaningful through collective endeavour of people relating to one another people at work (Uhl-Bien 2006).

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