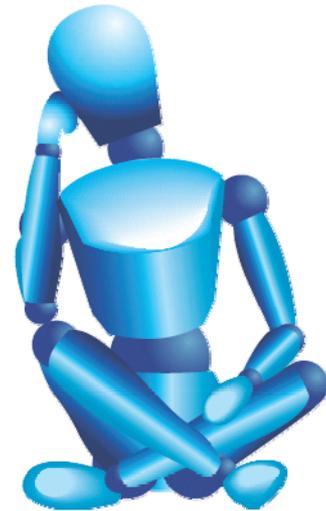


CEL Research Programme 2006-07



Research Report

Diversity, Identity and Leadership

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Leadership for the Learning and Skills Sector



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We hope this Paper provides a further opportunity to reflect on how organizational policy and practice can continue to build diversity and equality.

The Research Team

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Introduction

This paper is one of several drawn from the findings of a research project entitled *Integrating Leadership and Diversity in Leadership in Further Education* funded by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) and conducted by Jacky Lumby, Kalwant Bhopal, Martin Dyke, and Felix Maringe at the University of Southampton and Marlene Morrison at Oxford Brookes University. In this section we introduce the aims, purposes, and parameters of the research, and identify those aspects with which this paper is primarily concerned. The Full Report is available at:

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Further Education has an historic commitment to providing inclusive education and training opportunities. In consequence, it has sustained an enduring engagement with issues of diversity and inclusion related to learners. The Green Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES, 2006) notes what has been achieved: 'Many colleges are exemplars in the diversity of their students and staff, serving as a resource that is available to, and valued by, all sections of their community' (*op cit*, para. 2.35). However, the paper also suggests that 'there is more to be done to address the current lack of diversity within the workforce. Too many minority groups continue to be under-represented, especially at senior levels, and face barriers to progression in the sector' (DfES, 2006, para. 4.34).

The sector is increasingly seeking means to address these and other issues related to a diverse workforce. Within this context, diverse leadership is emphasised as key to achieving organizational effectiveness and to modelling values of equity for learners and the wider community (DfES, 2005). However, previous research by Lumby *et al* (2005) suggests that achieving diversity in leadership presents formidable challenges, not least because it raises questions about what is meant by diversity, and whether assumptions about its meaning are shared. As importantly, it raised concerns about whether there is, as yet, universal support for seeking a more diverse and inclusive leadership, what this might 'look like', and whether it would, in itself, lead to more effective leadership.

The research reported here builds on previous work and explores whether and how a diverse leadership could work productively. A definition for diverse leadership refers to that which:

integrates leaders with a wide range of characteristics in a way which cherishes rather than deletes difference, and fully utilises the potential benefits of a more heterogeneous leadership (Lumby *et al*, 2007: 3).

Characteristics encompass age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, values, ethnic culture, national origin, education, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance, social class, economic status, and gender (Norton & Fox, 1997). We recognise that some characteristics would seem more 'visible' or 'obvious' than others, and that there are different degrees of disadvantage with which some characteristics are met. The study also foregrounds research into ethical issues, in particular the nature and presence of an ethical orientation to people (or its absence). Moreover, we recognise 'leadership' as highly contested in meaning and understanding, selecting the following definition as our yardstick for the interrogation of evidence:

Leadership is the conduct of emotions, thoughts, and actions which are designed to influence others in a chosen direction, and is evident when the influence is effective to the extent of being discernible by others (Lumby with Coleman, 2007:2).

Considered together, the premises underpinning the research were fivefold:

1. Equality and diversity are crucial and powerful elements in raising the quality of leadership in the sector and, therefore, its performance.
2. Diversity is understood to encompass the very many characteristics which differentiate leaders.
3. Leadership is assumed to be relevant to many staff and not just those with formally designated leadership roles.
4. Diverse leadership has the potential to perform effectively but only if there is integration.
5. Understanding the nature of integration and discovering the mechanism by which integration can be achieved is a critical task for research in the sector.

(Lumby *et al*, 2007:4)

A Focus on Identity

Understanding how people *identify* themselves and their relations with others, especially through leadership at work, is a crucial element of this study with its interests in identifying how individuals assess their inclusion in leadership, and its impact upon their engagement with, and effectiveness of leadership. It is the core theme of this paper. Recognising leadership as an intellectual, ethical, and emotional activity, the study explored leadership from the perspectives of *self-identity* and *group membership identity*, considering their impact upon group participation; the explicit and implicit rules of working in leadership groups, and how these were agreed or evolved; and the extent to which individual staff felt able to communicate as they intended. Such questions led us to consider the extent to which identities might be viewed as static or fluid, single or multiple over time and according to contingency, and how and why different aspects of identities might be highlighted (or ignored) as the basis of power and influence at work (Goffman, 1986; Gurin & Nagda, 2006; Stone & Colella, 1996). The paper aims to stimulate reflection on action to support the ability of all staff to contribute to leadership in a way which they value and which is productive.

An outline of the research methods is summarised in the next section.

Research Methods in Outline

The study was concerned to understand the identity of leaders, both as it is self-created and imposed by others, and how identity is related to inclusion or exclusion from leadership. It was therefore important to explore the perceptions of college leaders about themselves and others, and how leadership functioned in their college. The organisational and community context was an important factor in unravelling the interconnections of perception and action. Consequently the methodology adopted was to construct five case studies. This allowed a detailed picture to be created of differing perceptions of interactions and outcomes within a complex and specific organisational environment.

Cases were identified purposively. The sampling frame assumed that the presence of selected characteristics was likely to indicate diversity across a wider range of characteristics. Using the most recent staff individual record data available, colleges which employ over 250 full-time permanent staff and displayed diversity across age (an atypical distribution), minority ethnicity and disability (higher than the national population) provided a long list. The characteristics were a limited selection of the full range of attributes that are of interest but stand as proxy for the wider range. The short list reflected two further selection criteria: range of location and to include general further education and sixth form colleges. The five cases colleges included four further education and one sixth form college. They were located in the Greater London, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside and West Midlands regions, in metropolitan and urban areas. They ranged in size from under to considerably over the median size of student numbers for college type. The colleges were in areas of average, high and very high deprivation.

The nature of the diversity to be explored was problematic to specify. You-ta (2004:26), for example, distinguishes between 'readily detectable' and 'underlying' characteristics. 'Readily detectable' refers to characteristics which can be determined quickly and with a high degree of consistency; 'underlying characteristics are not so easily or quickly determined by others such as skills, abilities, knowledge, attitudes and values' (*ibid*). The impact of both types of characteristics was of interest. However, an important focus was the integration of those with attributes which might be considered different to an unstated norm or majority. Assuring the inclusion of a diverse range of characteristics within the sample was therefore problematic in definitional terms, but also ethically. The team did not wish to embed further notions of 'difference' from the norm by spotlighting particular characteristics or staff.

Consequently, having secured five sites with a diverse workforce, the within–case selection of staff and meetings was at the colleges’ discretion to indicate the range of leaders within the organisation. The range of data collected in each case included:

- Observation of meetings at three different levels of seniority;
- Individual interviews with members of staff from the groups observed;
- Individual interviews with further individuals who are minorities within their leadership groups in terms of their gender, age, disability, religion, ethnicity, function, education/professional background.

Observation of group meetings generated three kinds of data: first, recordings of the meetings allowed analysis of the use of language; second, a structured record of patterns of interaction allowed analysis of the inclusion or otherwise of group members; thirdly, post hoc notes by the observer noted the provenance of goals/objectives, and agreement/disagreement/conflict.

Working within sensitive areas, issues of anonymity are important. As for the Research Report, we have made every effort in this Working Paper to protect the anonymity of individuals and of colleges. Consequently, data is not presented as cases, and individual quotations, shown in italics in the Findings section, are used in such a way as to prioritise anonymity, indicating only the role of the speaker.

Conceptual Frameworks and the published literature

An Overview

Many approaches to leadership have sought to find an inner core - a self - within individuals, from which potential leaders can develop and explain themselves as leaders and their actions as leadership. The approach is prevalent in discourses about emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and descriptors for 'most effective' learning or leadership styles or competences. It is as if in discovering an inner core to self, individuals will find best ways of leading (or following). Yet views of fixed and holistic selves fly in the face of anti-essentialist explorations of human behaviour derived in one direction from radical gender and racial theorists and in the other from post-modern approaches which suggest that identities are now more fluid and mouldable than previously, and that leaders or followers might be or become what they want to be, always premised on a recognition, belated in some leadership discourses, that whether individuals 'become' leaders or not is encouraged or constrained by social structures epitomised at the micro-level in organizations. In other words, the ability or capacity of some individuals to become leaders is constrained by systemic and structural tendencies beyond some individuals' control. Structures facilitate or inhibit some kinds of leaders and leadership more than others, are related to individual and group histories, which, in combination, are inextricably linked to 'the play of specific modalities of power' (Hall, 2006:17). A crucial point is that identities are constructed, not through sameness and inclusion but through difference and exclusion. A 'disturbing' (p.17.) reality for Hall is that the identities are constructed less from sameness but 'more through...difference...; identities can function as points of ...attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected' (*ibid*, Hall's emphasis). The terms 'leader' and 'leadership' function as points of identity and identifiable practices precisely because they exclude or leave out individuals who are not 'the same' and actions other than proscribed leadership practices.

In increasingly globalized societies where multiple and fragmenting identities proliferate, understandings about diversity compound the complex relation between leadership, identity, and power. The potential is for different kinds of leadership enacted by individuals who are themselves diverse along a range of dimensions. Meanwhile, leaders are described (and/or describe themselves) as 'black leaders' or 'women leaders' or 'working class leaders' *either* to describe an identity which is different from the 'norm', with its potential to magnify the exclusionary nature of the norm, or as part of mechanisms to counter hegemonic tendencies to sameness amongst leadership

practices in which the issues which relate to specific kinds of leader – like ‘black’ or ‘visibly impaired’ or ‘female’ - are championed yet simultaneously objectified. The concept of diverse leadership and the research upon which this paper is based, therefore, is both interesting and challenging, precisely because it signals a denial of a one-size-fits-all model of leader and leadership for those who happen to possess certain characteristics and because the fragmented and multiple identities signalled by Stuart Hall and others, for example, of being a black *and* female *and* working class, are ‘played out’ in further education organizations in specific relation to internal and external links between identity, leadership, and power.

Our use of the term ‘played out’ is not accidental. As part of our conceptual framework, we draw upon the work of Erving Goffman, his view of human beings as creative and constructive, and applied to those who seek control over leader-follower situations, in which, as the evidence will suggest, respondent leaders in our research describe how and why they act and draw upon different facets of their identity, as if in a drama, by following certain leadership ‘scripts’ in some situations but not others. Such notions of ‘front’ and ‘back stage’ leadership performances, of course, raise major issues for individuals in maintaining a sense of who they are, how and why they lead or are led, and whether roles enacted at work are, in conditions of late modernity, ‘just’ a collection of changing or changeable identity tags that bring least benefit to those with least power. As a first step, we confront prevailing categorisations of diversity among individuals, as well as objectifications of leadership and identity.

Questioning Categorisation

We have already suggested that the term ‘diversity’ has been a one word ‘envelope’ to enclose various and contested meanings. To date, organizational responses to diversity and equality have revealed a kind of performance ‘showcase’ in which ‘gender conflicts, race tensions, and cultural frictions... [lie] ...in [its] shadows’ (Prasad and Mills, 1997:12). In terms of organizational analysis our conceptual starting points have their roots in post-structural theory, rejecting terms like ‘diversity’, ‘leadership’ and ‘identity’ as if their meanings were fixed, objective, or self-evident, and with a core interest in ‘selves at work’ and the various ways in which individuals are empowered (or not) to subvert, resist or re-make their identity(ies) (Collinson, 2003:527).

Historically, this approach flies in the face of strong pressures, many legislative, to compartmentalise or categorise people into identifiable groups as if according to immutable characteristics, the most common of which have been gender and ethnicity. Litvin (1997:188), for example, notes a longstanding tendency located in the traditions of essentialism and science where an emphasis has been upon the observation of:

similarities, on identifying species and sub-species, and on constructing organizational hierarchies structuring the relationships among the various species the naturalist observed.

Yet, given the increasing complexity of human beings biologically, culturally, and linguistically, she challenges whether people at work *can* be placed into easily defined groups:

The categories constructed through the discourse of workforce diversity as natural or obvious are hard-pressed to accommodate the complexity of real people (p.202).

Other writers strongly refute that people *ought to be* categorised in such ways, especially when categorisation leads to a particular definition of difference or diversity, and applied to people, organizations, cultures, and societies who/which are then assumed to be 'unusual' or 'not homogeneous' in relation to the ways that 'most' people or organizations are seen to be or to act. For example, Phillips (2000:38) refers to a 'taken-for-grantedness' about the power and influence that accrues to those who are seen as 'typical' rather than 'atypical' or 'different', especially when distinctions are accompanied by fixed or stereotypical notions of identity. Moreover, the ready categorisation of people who are seen as readily and visibly different, compounds the inequality arising from difference. In such ways, black people are racialised when white people are not, 'Bangladeshis are seen as "ethnic" when White Europeans are not' (*ibid*). For commentators like Hall, the effect of such pervasive categorisations leads to contradictions and paradoxes that are compounded by the increasingly complex reality that constitute the multiple identities of individuals - whether familial, educational, racial, socio-cultural, economic, local, regional, national and/or international - and where 'multiculturalism thrives right alongside deep and fundamental forms of racism' (2000:48). Here, Hall refers to the issues arising when diverse identities and differences between and among human groups continue to change; for him, 'differance' (he applies the French meaning) is distinguished from difference, and he describes the former as:

that horrible mixture of some similarities and differences which refuse to remain the same. If you look inside the so-called ethnic communities you will find incredible differentiation. The Asian population, for example, comes from such a variety of geographical, economic, religious, cultural and customary backgrounds as only to be recognisable as one group because *you* cannot tell the difference. (p.47, his emphasis).

A core point is that until leaders and followers in all areas of organizational life learn to negotiate the inter-relationships between individuals and groups in ever-changing cultural worlds of multiple and fluid identities, the drift is to 'sleep walk into diversity' (p.48) with attendant dangers of fissures and racism at all societal levels.

Confronting Objectification

Despite the 'incorrigible plurality of humanity' (Lumby with Coleman, 2007:20) noted above, leaders in work organizations:

have persisted in referring to [categories] as a given and acted upon the assumption of categories...Lorbiecki and Jack (2000), for example, take diversity to embrace race, culture, ethnicity, age, disability and experience at work. Others avoid categorisation and recognise that the characteristics, singly, and in combination, which could disadvantage an individual are infinite and therefore diversity cannot relate to groups but to accommodating all individuals (*ibid*).

One reason for the persistence of seemingly stable categorisations of people at work might be considered to relate to a pervasive objectification of the work place and of those who work within it that has been combined with liberal scatterings of the term 'celebrating difference' in attempts to overcome the historical legacies of prejudice and disadvantage. In combination, a view is maintained that leading for and/or with diversity can be accommodated within a:

prevailing functionalist paradigm and...economic and gender reductionism that frequently characterizes conventional organizational studies...[and] key issues like 'leadership', 'structure' and 'culture' as if their meaning were self-evident and as if workplace processes were largely determined by an abstract logic irrespective of human volition and thought (Collinson, 2003:528).

Following Collinson and others (for example, Samier, 1997), our approach rejects the separation of the so-called 'objective' forms of organizational life - its formal rules, job descriptions, human and physical resource allocations - as if they were somehow separate from 'the cultural, the symbolic or [the] emotional' (*ibid*, p.417) aspects of leadership as work. Not surprisingly, therefore, our research applied a subjectivist approach to how people 'saw' themselves and others in the work place, whether this was in terms of individuals experiencing leadership with and over others, the subjective

power relations between leaders and led, and the strategies for career enhancement or 'survival' (Collinson, 2003) that such perceptions of experience invoked. What mattered for the purposes of our research was both how and why respondents' categorizations as individuals and as group members affected the ways others interacted with them and their interactions with others, and also the degree to which these differentially advantaged or disadvantaged some potential or actual leaders more than others. In a similar vein, DiTomaso and Hooijberg (1996:164-165) have described these social interactions of leadership as:

the attitudes, values, beliefs, and hence, behaviours of individuals...that people [within the context of group and inter-group relations within organizations] create, embed, and reproduce the inequality among people we call diversity. Diversity is then acted out in the practices of everyday life and interpreted through lenses of moral and practical reasoning that, when unexamined, legitimate both unearned privilege and unearned disadvantage.

In summary, what the above writers share is a thesis that the categorisations of *ourself* and *others* act have the potential to act as a kind of 'mirage' (Lumby with Coleman, 2007:21) which is also part of the 'power play of relations' at work in which 'the hidden aspect of diversity is that people are not only perceived as "different"; some ...are seen as lesser than others' (*ibid*).

Countering Commonality

Critiques of prevailing educational leadership theories abound but, until recently, even the most stringent of them lacked fundamental re-assessments of an overarching disposition towards the needs for leaders to secure alignment and commonality rather than diversity as key imperatives to organizational improvement. An exception is Lumby with Coleman (2007) who refer to psychological and political theories about how and why 'working with people perceived as more like oneself is more instantly satisfying and easier' (p.79) and, following Milliken and Martins (1996), the negative effects that diversity in observable attributes has upon affective outcomes at both the individual and group levels of organizational analysis (*ibid*). Moreover, there is the major issue of why organizational leaders would *wish* to relinquish or change power relations. Notwithstanding the rhetoric of ethical leadership for diversity, previous research demonstrates a resistance to change among leaders especially if it disturbs what is seen to favour the personal and professional interests of existing leaders in organizations that, in addition, are already deemed to be 'effective' from the perspectives of external inspection and accountability frameworks (Lumby *et al*, 2005) and supported by prevailing leadership theory which values such leaders as 'successful'.

In the face of prevailing conditions and tensions, therefore, a key interest lies in the various ways in which leadership for diversity occurs especially when, as Collinson (2003:534) (following Nkomo & Cox, 1996) asserts 'we *simultaneously* occupy many subjective positions, identities, and allegiances' at work and leaders have persistently preferred, at least in policy terms, to iron out the disruptions that diversity might evoke in favour of a commonality or consensus that has, to date, secured 'power asymmetries' (*ibid*, authors' emphasis) yet presents to external audiences a vision of unity and shared vision so favoured for purposes of external accountability. Locating an analytical framework for understanding diversity as an element of productive leadership, required us to locate published research in sectors other than further education, predominantly but not exclusively outside the UK. In the following sections we expand upon the concepts considered useful as tools for engaging iteratively with respondents' perspectives, as discussed in interview or observed in meetings, and used to identify emerging themes, primarily as they pertain to diversity, identity, and their relation to power.

Leadership and the presentation of Self

Among senior leaders, a commonly held view about diversity and equality is that the change required to bring both about is either external to themselves as individuals or irrelevant to the organization being led (Lumby *et al* 2005; Morrison, 2007). Such views might be interpreted in a number of ways; a not uncommon view is that leaders perceive themselves as relatively powerless to confront the wider constraints of structures that exist beyond the boundaries of the organizations in which they work. For successful leaders this call to one conceptual 'hook', the controlling influence of societal structures, lets them off another, namely that some individuals have much more agency over the direction of their working lives than others (New, 1993), specifically in terms of prospects for promotion to leadership. Where leaders have understood this, and their relation to others in organizations, it has been referred to as a kind of identity awareness, acumen to see one's self in relation to others, including the potential impact of words and actions upon the pursuit of diverse leadership. Gudykunst (1995:16) refers to this as a 'mindfulness'; crucially, this is linked to recognition of the need to accept and facilitate change within oneself as well as others.

For other individuals who experience the asymmetries of organizational power by having least of it, 'survival strategies' may be imperative if they are 'to secure themselves in a physical, economic, or symbolic sense within disciplinary regimes' (Collinson, 2003: 536) of surveillance and accountability. Specifically, Collinson focuses upon 'conformist', 'dramaturgical' and 'resistant' selves at work and their relation to identities sustained there. Applied to leaders, questions arise about how and to what extent would-be leaders are successful in 'manipulating' their worth by developing notable impression management skills so conducive to 'performativity' (Ball, 2001), or alternatively, given the insecurity engendered through the omnipresent demands of such strategies, make conscious

decisions to disaggregate their sense of worth, even their identities, by 'splitting' self into a specific kind of leader at work and the 'real me' at home (*op cit*, p.537). 'Dramaturgical' approaches take impression management to new heights (or depths) in which actual and would-be leaders might become increasingly skilled manipulators of self in front of 'others' by acting out events and instances to demonstrate worth; meanwhile, other individuals draw upon 'resistant' selves, and seek alternative oppositional strategies both to 'the surveillance gaze' and to bullet-point leadership styles, namely those reduced to a set of competencies, by feigning 'indifference' to career aspirations or enhancing survival by sustaining an ongoing 'cynicism' about work or the conditions by which individuals become leaders (*ibid*).

In summary, organizational analysis to date suggests that leadership identity, linked to sense of self, may be at least as slippery a concept as diversity (see also next section) in which individuals, notably leaders or would-be leaders, implicitly and explicitly manipulate identities according to time and situation. Indeed, the dramatic presentation of various selves has been previously cited as part of the 'everyday' even 'mundane' work of successful leaders (Iszatt White *et al* (nd)).

Leadership, Diversity and Power

In much of the leadership literature the term diversity has been used unproblematically. If leaders have been required to 'know who they are', such 'knowing' has been mapped primarily in terms of commonality rather than diversity, and as part of a culture of 'knowing' in which diversity has been seen as an irrelevance, a problem, or, as a previous section suggests, a task of categorising individuals accurately for legal purposes of securing representativeness in organizations (Morrison *et al*, 2006). Most frequently, diversity has been described in terms of what postmodernists like Harris (1996) label the 'master identities' of gender, age, and ethnicity; these also feature strongly in Lumby *et al*'s (2005) findings from research in the Learning and Skills Sector. Yet, diversity, like identity, is not necessarily divisible into static main or peripheral aspects. Whether one adheres to Harris's contention that early 'master' (*sic*) identities are 'decomposing' and increasingly replaced by more ambiguous or diverse identities 'chosen' by or for individuals in order to create and sustain their selves, or we think of diversity (following Hall) in terms of multiple identities that are constantly produced, and often tense, negotiated, or conflicting, there has been a persistent preference for leadership of the 'best' or 'most effective' kind in which superior and inferior practices have been linked, by conscious and unconscious practices of power and influence, to the possession or not of specific characteristics.

Most recently, Lumby with Coleman (2007) refer to a number of stages by which diversity has been introduced to leadership discourses, from early *equal opportunities* approaches, through *diversity management* (Singh, 2002), to *capabilities approaches* (Sen, 1984; Nussbaum 1999; Gagnon &

Cornelius, 2000) and the *radical stances* of feminists and anti-racists. Each are beyond detailed consideration and critique for the purposes of this paper; all have some value and influence but, to date, have been largely captured and absorbed by existing frameworks that have had limited effects upon the *status quo* of most favoured leadership typologies. Part of our interest for this project was first to understand how current leaders perceived and positioned diversity in terms of their leadership interests, and second, to observe that positioning wherever possible in relation to leadership action, for example, in group meetings. This suggested a specific empirical orientation, introduced earlier in relation to Research Methods, towards observation and interview. This paper now turns, therefore, to the third facilitative conceptual tool to explore leadership as group work and the ways groups function.

Leadership, Leadership Groups, and Meetings

There is limited evidence that diverse leadership teams may improve educational performance but may also make it worse (Maznevski, 1994:5). Understanding how individuals are perceived in groups, and the ways in which group membership functions, are, therefore, particularly significant. Despite this, there is very little research which enables us to understand the relation between being perceived as 'the other' or different, and integration within groups. Gurin and Nagda (2006), drawing on socio-psychological theories, examine the way in which participation in groups is 'manipulated' in order to 'manage' the relations between traditionally powerful in-group members and those who are currently out-group members. Based on research findings, they refer to three strategies evidenced among groups. The first is described as *decategorisation*; here, in-groupers relate to out-groupers as individuals rather than members of a group. The intention is to avoid stereotyping. In contrast, *recategorisation* refers to group relations in which difference is minimised as much as possible through common tasks, a shared work culture, and a set of common identities. A third approach is called *intra-group solidarity*; here, difference is accepted and celebrated, and the intention is also to support external groups which find strength through shared characteristics, for example, through membership of black staff or student associations.

None of the above approaches are mutually exclusive; furthermore, Gurin and Nagda contend that the 'cost' of each strategy is more likely to be borne by the out-groupers than the in-groupers whose hold on power remains relatively unchanged. It is also worth noting that each strategy is underpinned by a rather static and, perhaps, uni-dimensional view of identity and power as an out- or in-group member. One aspect of our research was to explore whether and to what extent particular facets of multiple identities came to the fore in some situations rather than others, rather like trump cards, and what was gained and lost by individuals when such 'trumping' occurred.

We have suggested that there is little previous published evidence about how diverse teams operate. What exists suggests that those perceived as 'different' or the 'other' experience stress; one outcome is for 'others' to limit or reduce their contribution (Milliken & Martins, 1996) much like a safety mechanism, in the face of a 'choice' to conform or be marginalised (Reynolds & Trehan, 2003). Role tension and ambiguity have been cited among the reasons why individuals do not work well together in diverse teams; some writers (Wallace & Hall, 1994; Iles and Kaur Hayers, 1997) have demonstrated how team members often link the stress generated to the characteristics associated with individual members. In such ways, 'attributions tend to favour the in-group...The high performance of women and black males attributed to luck or task easiness; that of white males to effort or ability' (pp108-109).

The ability to communicate within and among teams has also emerged as a key skill associated with effective leadership. Repeatedly, successful leaders are deemed to be those who give staff 'a voice' and are willing to listen. According to Gudykunst (1995) and Maznevski (1994), these are separate skills requiring competences at a level that is frequently understated, in part because leaders' 'talk' and 'listening' can be used as much to sustain leaders' sense of self-power as to contribute towards the kinds of organizational changes that productive forms of diverse leadership require. Such listen-and-talk is also accompanied by assumptions about consensus and integration, referred to above, especially of diverse perspectives. Lumby with Coleman (2007:118) sound important warnings about integration when they contend that it:

cannot imply consensus about goals or ways of working if it [integration] is to be inclusive...An accommodation of difference is achieved if agreement on action is framed by explicit knowledge of who is advantaged by the decision. An integrated diverse team would therefore be one where differences and accommodations are openly acknowledged, within a framework of appreciation.

For the research team, the three emergent conceptual tools described above, and derived from a review of the literature, provided important frameworks for interrogating the data, in particular participants' understandings about their individual identities, and how these, in combination, were linked to the characterisation of their group membership, their motivations and engagements with leadership and leadership groups, and how such interactions related to power flows, the language of interaction, and preferred ways of working. These are now considered in relation to the rich and varied narratives emerging from interviews and observations.

Research Findings

Diversity

Diversity is the mosaic pattern of equality through difference

(Singh, 2002:28)

A core argument proposed by protagonists of diversity and diversity management (Morrison *et al* 2006) is that it represents a discourse that is distinct from previous legislation and action under Equal Opportunities (EO) banners. Of key interest, therefore, was our initial engagement with research participants in order to gauge their understanding of diversity. More than this, their deliberations on the term also led to a discussion of identities – perceptions of their own as well as others'. We begin by summarising their definitions of and orientations towards diversity, especially as they relate to the characteristics of diversity, before considering their relation to complex notions of single and multiple identities and its impact upon individuals' sense of their own leadership and that of others.

Characteristics of Diversity

A common strand in discussion was to 'quote' diversity as being about difference and about being inclusive of differences among staff and students at college. It was also taken to include visible differences as well as more broadly acknowledging that individuals are different on a range of other grounds like experience, expertise, and skills, though less well articulated in relation to life-styles, working practices, or personalities. The most common references throughout the data were to ethnicity and gender, then to age, and to a less extent, disability. For respondents, these were the 'master (*sic*) identities' (Harris, 1996) to which respondents persistently returned.

Diversity was also, at times, distanced from leadership. Among some respondents, either questions about leadership and diversity were simply ignored or they were displaced by references to student inclusion and diversity in which further education was seen at the forefront of policy and practice towards widening student participation and educational inclusion. Other respondents described the importance of diversity by referring to staff and students together, as if concerns were inseparable, as in the following extract:

It's about embracing different religions, beliefs, attributes, and giving people [staff and students] the opportunities they wouldn't get elsewhere (senior leader).

Some respondents felt much less comfortable speaking about certain aspects of diversity than others, in particular relating to 'race', sexual orientation, or disability; the tendency to by-pass some aspects of diversity as 'non-issues' or 'not a problem here' was also evident. For some respondents there was a conscious awareness of the displacement or distancing activities of their colleagues, noted in the following comment from a first-line leader:

Staff are fairly comfortable talking about disability...start talking about race, a little less comfortable ...and then starting talking about race and sexuality and oh my god .

Other respondents felt that an over-emphasis upon certain facets of difference, like ethnicity, whilst offering some advantages in terms of positive action to those who were non-white, served *both* to restrict the opportunities of 'whites' who were minority white, working class, and the 'real' opportunities of minority ethnic and black people, who, when crudely categorised together, were considered to face attendant challenges of tokenism or, at worst, 'being set up to fail'. There were also concerns that giving a specific focus to diversity (in particular aspects which the majority might view as sensitive, like ethnicity or sexual orientation) served to undermine other equally important issues relating to the role and professional development of leaders within their organizations:

I don't think it's [diversity] an issue that should be put on a pedestal...To me, it's just part and parcel of everyday life, be it work or outside work (middle leader).

Furthermore, there was a view that partial knowledgability about diversity might lead to leaders' words being misconstrued and were therefore best avoided:

*I think people do have concerns about saying the right things [Equality and diversity] is a kind of **scary area to work in** and [leaders] are not comfortable even in this day and age and even in FE which has become a beacon of E & D...Very well educated people still hold back on issues where they think they can be challenged...people feeling they can say something which is terribly wrong. (Middle leader, our emphasis)*

Sameness and Difference

In defining diversity, there was both hesitation and confusion in discussing the relationship between sameness and difference, and between equality and diversity; some respondents struggled with the idea of treating everyone the **same**, whilst acknowledging a celebration of **difference**. A preference to consider diversity as the former without understanding the implications of so doing is apparent in the following quotation from a senior leader:

I treat everyone the same but with an understanding that they are different...I try not to adjust my behaviour on account of someone being a different gender to me, being a different colour to me, being a different religion to me.

To do so, he felt, was to be '*overly empathetic*'. This was aligned both with notions of fairness and the importance of impartiality, insights which excluded any problematisation, in this respondent's case, that being white, middle class, and male might, in combination, provide cultural filters (Adler, 1997) to affect his behaviour towards others, and equally of reciprocal or responsive behaviours.

Different reactions to issues of sameness and difference and about 'E & D' being '*a scary area to work in*' tended to generate a range of strategic and operational responses from leaders at different levels within the organizational hierarchy. Prasad and Mills' (1997) use of the terms 'showcase' and 'shadows' to describe organizational responsiveness to managing work-place diversity is apposite here, policy 'showcasing' more predominant in the upper echelons of management, and a range of alternative perceptions about the operationalisation of policy in 'the shadows' of the lower levels.

'Showcasing'

Most senior leaders presented very positive views about diversity. Indeed, the 'showcasing' of organizations' responsiveness to equality and diversity issues, was increasingly recognised by themselves and others as integral to the ways in which organizational policies and practice are subject to external scrutiny and inspection. Less unanimity in perceptions of practice was revealed among leaders at lower levels, or in Prasad and Mills' terms, the 'shadows' of the 'showcase'. This is not to underestimate the extent to which opening definitions of diversity among some senior leaders provided sensitive pointers about their awareness of the challenges of diverse leadership, and of the need to translate intent into practice. Some senior leaders spoke passionately about diversity; for other senior leaders, diversity interests were in the future – they would be '*the next big push*'.

We have to ensure that diversity here is at the centre of the college to what we do, it's important to us. It's about everything; it's the culture of the organization. It's what we breathe, speak, say, and the way we do business (senior leader).

However, it is also apparent that the use of the word 'we' disguised a range of understandings among senior leaders, and at other levels of the management hierarchy. Some senior leaders quoted inspection reports about diversity and equality as if, in process and outcomes, reports represented an incontrovertible rather than manufactured 'truth' for external readers; others still preferred to refer to diversity in terms of equal opportunities and representativeness:

The college places diversity high on its agenda and in line with our equalities and equal opportunities agenda: we always seek to ensure that there is a balanced representation of people from different backgrounds in the leadership teams...it is not always easy to have equal representation (senior leader).

In the 'Shadows'

At other leadership levels we interviewed leaders with responsibilities for the operationalisation of the Equality and Diversity brief. The link between strategic and operational direction and actions pertaining to equality and diversity were not always clear. Where recommendations were passed upwards, commonly from lower levels to a senior manager with multiple responsibilities that included equality and diversity, senior claims were that recommendations passed via 'equality and diversity' staff and their committee(s) were acted upon. Such perceptions were not shared unanimously, several staff expressing caution about expressing deep-seated concerns about equality and diversity for fear of '*being seen as confrontational*'. Elsewhere, a middle leader with responsibilities for equality and diversity considered that:

Colleagues like myself are just sort of tapping way at the surface really, trying to chip away at trying to say my voice should be heard, saying 'what about equality and diversity issues?' and are often doing that in very isolated and unsupported environments.

A first-line manager with responsibilities for equality and diversity (his formal position in the lower echelons of the college hierarchy, evidence, in his view, of the low priority given to the same) declared that in his college '*promoting equality is easy...practice is difficult...action plans are meaningless unless they're actioned*'. His point was that action was mostly absent. Even where, for example, pro-active steps were being taken to ensure and maintain the professional development of non-majority staff to leadership positions, a publicly recorded point by a principal was that enhanced career progression for staff into organizations *other than* in the college led by that principal was a positive outcome of such developments.

This opening evidence, framed by the researchers' intention to understand how leaders defined and understood diversity, point to a number of key issues:

Firstly, a gap between the policies espoused (Argyris & Schon, 1978:11) by some senior leaders and the support given to those with responsibilities for enacting them;

Secondly, evidence that discussions about equality and diversity could evoke fierce emotions, including fear of being confrontational and/or reluctance to be seen as prejudiced along a range of discriminatory dimensions, or partial in relation to positive action;

Thirdly, issues of equality and diversity were closely linked to how people perceived themselves and their actions and how they perceived others to regard and treat them.

These three points remind us of earlier discussions about the socially constructed embeddedness of responsiveness to difference, linked, in turn, to understandings about leaders and the various facets of identity that individuals brought to the practices of leadership. Identity is considered next.

Identity

Identity as a concept is fully as elusive as is everyone's sense of his (sic) own personal identity. But whatever else it may be, identity is connected to the fateful appraisals made of oneself – by oneself and others (Strauss, 1969:9).

For respondents, the issue of identities was complex. Individuals spoke of *single* identities such as ethnicity, gender, age, class, expertise, length of service and disabilities and they spoke of *multiple* identities like 'white, male, and middle class'. In his seminal work on Stigma (1968), Erving Goffman

qualifies the use of identity by reference to three adjectival descriptors. These are useful in thinking about the ways in which the individuals in this research referred to their identity (ies) and were described by Goffman as 'personal identity', 'social identity' and 'ego or "felt" identity'. In the first, one's identity is as seen in a photograph or on a passport – it is both a legal identity and a unique 'identity peg', in which the uniqueness of any single individual is seen as a result of historical and biological antecedents. In the second, social identity refers to the means of categorising persons as members of groups sharing the same characteristics. Social identities function (sometimes mistakenly, frequently stereotypically) as available 'templates' in our everyday understandings of what we expect of people in those categories and in certain situations, in particular where the emphasis is upon shared cultural attributes, especially but not exclusively visible. The third usage – ego or 'felt' identity – is that which individuals consider to constitute themselves. It is intensely subjective and seems to relate to what an individual comes to believe *is* herself/himself. As Williams (2000:7) interprets:

Most important... [ego or felt identity] seems to be the capacity of individuals to choose among a set of available attributes, and a concern with the coherence and consistency discernible within the variety of characterisations accepted by individuals to be true of themselves.

An attraction of the term identity and its various descriptors, therefore, is the sense in which it can be used in separate and overlapping senses, in the singular and the multiple, and with a potential for certain aspects of identity to come to the fore according to time and contingency.

Visible Identities

In our study most leaders were considered to be white, male, and middle class. In this sense, they signify collectively a socio-cultural identity 'brand' that stood proxy as leader prototypes (Foti & Miner, 2003) for would-be or existing leaders. Referring to senior leaders at one college, a middle leader commented:

I would like to think we would have diversity in management but there isn't...everyone is White British, everyone is from a similar background, and everyone has a similar education. Everybody does the same thing at weekends...There is very little diversity.

Interestingly, those who held the Equality and Diversity brief were frequently 'alike' to the extent that their visible difference from those in senior leadership positions was a feature they held in common. This raises interesting questions about the extent to which those in senior leadership positions were able to subjugate those 'unlike' themselves by providing comparatively 'safe' or low-level gateways to marginal rather than senior positions of power and influence in the organisations. Unsurprisingly, among self-styled 'ambitious' respondents were those who wished to deny any relationship between their visible identity and their occupational roles as leaders. Cutting short any discussion of her self-categorisation as a woman of African Caribbean background, one respondent considered: *'my role has got nothing to do with being African Caribbean or a woman, it is to do with my ability to do the job.'* Here, there is a 're-categorisation' (Gurin & Nagda, 2006) of the self in which difference from other leaders was minimised in order to emphasise common tasks, a shared FE work culture, and professional identity.

However, this was not a common reflection. The issue arises as to how and to what extent other would-be leaders, especially those who felt outside the majority leadership profile, were able to break into what most senior leaders suggested (and inspection reports confirmed to be) mostly productive leadership environments. Positively, for some respondents, a single visible identity shared with a super-ordinate, like gender, could be a positive source of power and inclusion:

My immediate line manager is female and I welcome that. The respect feels more of a two way process (middle leader).

For others, a single identity was seen as problematic and had to be handled very carefully or suppressed altogether. In the following quotation, a recently appointed female leader who defines herself as black, talks through those aspects of identity she felt she needed to be 'careful' about:

I'm not sure if it's a black thing or a female thing... You have to be courteous, respectful, and diplomatic about expressing concern. It impacts more on me because I don't want to be stereotyped as being black and being aggressive and discontent. But this doesn't stop me challenging or questioning...

From the last sentence, readers get a sense of the extent to which she considered her 'felt identity' to be sufficiently strong and coherent to allow her to continue to challenge and question, viewing both as central to her leadership role. Yet, in doing so, there is also recognition of walking a kind of

identity 'tight-rope'. Alongside Goffman's social identity template of the cultural attributes associated with being black, she worked within an organization in which there were cultural perceptions that promoted black staff '*were not quite up to the job*' (middle leader) and less likely to challenge senior staff:

Some of the black people feel grateful that they are here. Some of those people become 'yes' people because they do not want to rock the boat. I think the exec have made some black appointments that are not the right ones and those people are grateful and don't challenge the organization (middle leader).

One reaction to 'black appointments' might be to vehemently deny its credence or existence as official or unofficial organizational policy, and for some respondents, the potential to denigrate expertise on the grounds of a single or 'main' identity was averted by denying it as a facet of self or relations with others, as when a woman of minority ethnic origin believed that:

It's strange really. I have never felt that staff see me as (a member of an ethnic minority group). I'm just another member of staff really.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were respondents who were acutely conscious of the potential effects of their visible difference upon prospects for promotion to leadership positions. For such respondents the choices presented to them seem stark: accentuate and capitalise upon difference as a route to promotion by seeking solidarity and support with others who were similarly excluded, persist in individualistic approaches towards advancement, and/or keep sense of self in tact by sustaining a 'cynical' view (see also Collinson, 2003) of existing patterns of promotion. In the following extract, a first-line leader draws, in particular, upon the last two of these strategies:

I went to a black managers' thing and they said "oh you have to network" and I had to smile and I said "I'm not kissing no butt" and they said "you have to if you want to get on" ...and I said "I don't want to get on then. I want ability [as the basis of my career promotion] ...and then I stopped going to those meetings.

As this paper suggests, identity is not static and aspects of personal, social, and 'felt' identities foregrounded in some organizational contexts may not be prioritised at other times or in other settings. For leaders who fall outside the majority profile, 'switching', or in Collinson's (2003) terms, 'splitting' identities may be used as much as a 'survival' strategy as it is to penetrate the 'in-group'. Senior leaders who are part of the majority profile may split aspects of their identity in different ways, for example, expressing with sincerity their support for equality and diversity on grounds of human rights and/or altruism. But, as Lumby with Coleman (2007:35) suggest:

To act in certain ways is to be 'politically correct', and therefore to be approved by society, or more specifically to be favoured by...those offering quality marks...One's identity is confirmed as laudable in meeting social justice demands. Equally, hard-nosed financial or commercial gain is to result.

The fluidity of identity therefore becomes integral to the power play and business of working relations in FE. Our research provides insufficient data to reach generalisable conclusions but the evidence suggests that identity characteristics which are least common among college leaders are more likely to be suppressed (or alternatively exaggerated) when entry is most desired to prized positions. In other words if staff wish to be leaders, then either their minority characteristics are suppressed according to their own perceptions and in the view of others. Or, one or more of those characteristics is exaggerated when they make more pronounced a favoured leadership trait ('as a local woman I know I have a strong following').

Sustaining Identity

The maintenance of leadership identity is hard work especially when the need to counter stereotypical views is uppermost. For example, in this research, whilst women and men in the most senior positions were greatly admired, women at middle and first-line levels frequently felt that their performance was being judged more harshly than that of men or more senior women, particularly if they were working in a male-dominated area:

It can be very frustrating at times...you give 110 per cent or 115 per cent instead of a 100 per cent because you know that to an extent you have to prove yourself...as many times as you think you should not have to prove yourself (middle leader).

When visible difference was always 'on show', identities could become tarnished. As another female leader commented:

I've generally been different...I've stood out because I've been in a male-dominated world...This means you're remembered for the good things and for the mistakes...and sometimes people remember mistakes rather than who you are.

Among identities to impact upon leadership identity, 'age' was regarded with ambivalence. It was noted that experience and age brought with it a perceived wisdom and influence, but it was also considered that maturity, especially when unaccompanied by career advancement, led to an assumed reduced capacity to respond to change or new ideas:

There is an old guard about this place. Age can be important; they often talk about the kindergarten part of the staff room where young staff sit...Age is very significant (first-line leader).

You are ticking along...going along to retirement...if you're not seen as having ambition, then you're not seen as important (a middle leader).

Just as ethnicity and gender provoke complex responses, age then might also support and inhibit leadership ambition, inclusion, and integration into leadership teams. One respondent talked about maturity among senior leaders as an opportunity for them to be continually '*indulged*'; another referred to mature staff at the lower end of the management hierarchy being viewed as '*stick in the mud, not going anywhere*'.

Not all characteristics of disability fall into the category of readily visible. In this research, the disabilities that seemed of most interest to staff were physical disabilities, and staff were more comfortable about discussing these than other characteristics like sexual orientation, for example. Elsewhere, Stone and Colella (1996:36) have suggested that the more unattractive, self-induced, disruptive, or dangerous a disability is perceived to be, the more negative the reaction from others. Those with disabilities sometimes experienced the same manipulation of their identity by others as minority ethnic staff. A respondent recalled being made to feel '*invisible*' within leadership group meetings and '*ignored*' outside. An example is illustrative. In one college, a respondent recalled a recent invitation to a meeting in which his presence could only be productive if an aide/assistant was also present. Making that point to the meeting organisers, the respondent met with various

responses: that *'it did not matter'* as long as the respondent was seen to be present; various degrees of confusion and embarrassment among those asked to explain; and eventual agreement to allow both to attend. The discomfort and anger caused led this respondent to conclude that regardless of that organization's mission statement, *'lip-service'* was being paid to issues of equality and diversity by leaders who, in his terms, did not understand the actions necessary to translate policy into practice. The paradox was its occurrence in an environment where, for students, resource allocations to enable physical access to all parts of the college had been notable.

So far, our discussion of identities has centred on identities like gender, ethnicity, age, and disability. These are mostly but not entirely visible characteristics that matter in relation to inclusion or exclusion from leadership. It is possible to conceive of identities as a pack of cards where each element holds a value. In the power play of leadership some cards trump others, and in the hand of identity cards with which individuals are dealt, some cards are hidden, or split, or switched, or ignored, sometimes consciously and at other times unconsciously. Single identities, therefore, are distorted, exaggerated, appear and disappear. The relevance to leadership is the degree to which the perception of identity leads to assumptions about fitness for leadership and the appropriateness of performance. The process is aptly summarised in the following extract from a middle manager:

There is an element of where perhaps you conform to what is seen as being the norm to be seen as acceptable. If you brought your true diverse self – if you felt I could really be myself, then it does not fit the norm... So I suppose that is something that sticks in my mind, can you bring your diverse self to work? I'd say no you can't.

One reaction was for individuals to try and negotiate a career pathway in which identities foregrounded in some situations might be minimised in others. Such navigations are now discussed.

Multiple Identities and Navigation

The evidence from the study has suggested that single identities such as those identified in anti-discrimination legislation, and mainly but not exclusively visible, are a source of potential disadvantage and exclusion from leadership (or advantage and inclusion depending on the characteristic). In the following extract, a first-line leader describes how advantage is invoked:

You need to be connected socially. A lot of people have said to me "...the reason you're not a manager is because of racism". I personally don't believe this to be the case...I believe the case is relationships. If I had worked for you for years and built a relationship and a job was to come up, it is a high possibility you would look after my interests. Now that can be done very subtly and intelligently because legally it's not allowed, but what's to stop you coming to my house and having a glass of wine, we chat over the job, and your profile. "We'll ask you about your qualifications"...and you're in...If I have a good relationship with you, and we become friends, it's natural that a friend wants to help a friend. It's understandable.

At the core of the extract is not its truthfulness or otherwise, but the extent to which for 'out-group' (Gurin & Nagda, 2006) members, leaders in Further Education are seen to comprise a club of like-minded members, mostly but not entirely white, male, and middle class, and where navigation to promoted positions is seen as more obstacle strewn for some. One reaction to this dilemma is to draw, sometimes unconsciously, on a range of identities. Whether or not individuals view their identities in Goffmanesque terms, they are rarely seen in terms of single attributes. Many respondents in this study used multiple as well as single descriptors to describe attributes they believed most or least excluded them from leadership. This is apparent in a response from a black woman who felt it was her class rather than ethnicity or gender which excluded her:

I am a black woman who is new to post and so I find it hard to say things. There is a middle class ethos in the group where there is an expected behaviour and I am not part of. There are lots of white, middle class men and women and so I don't say anything because I may be judged.

Our evidence also suggests that an informal, less visible hierarchy of characteristics has at least as much influence as the visible and more widely publicized aspects of identity; these include those which derive from expertise, length of service, personal relationships, the status of the college area or curriculum. Such factors are not simply cumulative, they interact, and stereotypifications are sometimes stacked, one on top of the other, as in the following example where a male member of a leadership team, sought to explain his own position and identity by reference to claims about 'a feminization of culture' within his place of work. He perceived that the promotion of women in FE (presumably at the cost of men) was part of a national FE agenda that had resulted in an accelerating acquiescence among leaders to external accountability pressures, in which there were:

Constructions of certain types of women, who will not ask questions, but just make it work, will conform to the national agenda or whatever needs to be done. They simply won't ask why we are doing this or go back to first principles, or look for better ways of doing things.

Again, the truthfulness of such assertions is not an issue for this paper. Rather, it is to note a stereotypification of women as passive and acquiescent, attributions to safeguard the dominance of men as 'best' kind of leaders, and of women as promoted for the possession of talents least commonly associated with leadership, namely obeisance rather than a pro-active capacity to influence the practice of others.

The data also suggests that, for some respondents, 'main' identity attributes were similarly associated with personal qualities, such as volume of voice, or physical size that were refracted through stereotypical assumptions. Bauman (1996) has suggested that the task for individuals in the twenty-first century is not to choose an identity and persuade others to see this identity as desired but the necessity to navigate multiple and fluid identities to best effect. Our study shows staff in FE undertaking such navigation as a means of entry to or persistence in leadership. At one level, colleges were deeply committed to equality and diversity. At another level there is a range of assigned values to identities which privileged some leaders and disadvantaged others. The implication for colleges is that staff need to become much more aware of how they navigate a route to leadership. Nowhere is this more evident than in relation to working in leadership teams and groups, and it is to this aspect of leadership work and its relation to identity that this paper finally turns.

Leadership Groups

Individuals achieve a sense of who they are through internal reflection on the range of recurrent [and group] actions and events in which they are involved ...or that are ascribed to them by others (Williams, 2000: 9)

Previous sections have focused on the ways in which being demarcated as 'different' or the 'other' differentially disadvantage some leaders and would-be leaders. An important means by which leaders' identities are confirmed is in their interactions with others in groups and teams, a specific

interest for this study. A proliferation of meetings is frequently held to be a central part of organisational work and 'doing leadership' (Kelly *et al*, 2006:4). It might also be the arena in which one would expect the 'doing' of *distributed* leadership to manifest itself most overtly, providing opportunities for established and novice leaders to work collaboratively. Yet, there is limited evidence of diverse teams working together, and what exists is not entirely encouraging. For example, in relation to ethnicity, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) suggest that white educators will work to support black and minority ethnic colleagues only when their interest co-incide. Clues about why this might be so link not only to previous research (Argyris, 1991) about the challenges of engaging as a group in collaborative forms of learning but, as importantly, to research which suggests that meetings serve as much to demonstrate and reinforce existing forms of organizational power and influence, specifically that possessed by senior leaders, as they are to demonstrate leadership in dispersed or diverse forms. With regard to professional learning, evidence points to how and why professionals become adept at resisting change, often to remain in control, to maximise the opportunity to 'win' and retain power and influence, and resist the challenges arising from divergent perspectives. In relation to leadership meetings, these might also be considered to function as forms of 'ritual' and 'ceremony' in which some leadership identities purported to be real may, in practice, be 'symbolic'; whilst demonstrating a formal ethic or value of distributed leadership, group meetings function in 'mythical' rather than 'real' terms (Samier, 1997). This paper's primary concern is not with the processes of decision-making in diverse groups other than to consider the way in which group interactions affect individuals' sense of leadership identity, whether through reinforcement or rejection,. (For full consideration of decision-making in diverse leadership groups please see Working Paper to be submitted by Maringe, Lumby *et al*.)

In relation to our study, how group functioning affected leadership identity was articulated in different ways. Observation and interview data were illustrative of trends observed in previous research by Kelly *et al* (2006) where, as aspects of progressively sophisticated attempts to achieve consistency in FE policy, practice, and a standardisation of presentation for internal and external audiences, a commonality in approaches to leadership meetings was similarly discernible, albeit with more variation at lower than senior levels. Samier's work (1997:426) is again apposite, since, from her perspective, 'ritualisation' also governs the operational aspects of interactions within such groups and affects or is reflected in identities acquired and/or resisted, for example:

whether all communication is taken down in writing, whether superficial solicitation of others' opinion is required, whether weekly or monthly meetings are held during which the façade of democratic support is produced. Ritualised forms extends to the minutiae of organised meetings and classrooms, such as how many are held, selection of setting, the table's

shape, seating arrangements, composition of attendees, presentation formats and tones, and food and beverage accompaniments. McLaren identifies such activities...as rituals of revitalisation and intensification (1993:82).

Applied to leadership group meetings, the following examples provide illustrative data.

Senior Meetings and Group Identity

In important respects, senior management teams epitomise the locus of power and influence in FE colleges. Such teams apply specific standards of 'normalcy', usually demonstrating 'requisite personal and social characteristics' (Samier, 1997: 424) that are also characterised by what Velez-Ibanez (1975) earlier described as 'fictive friendships', namely those which are specific to certain contexts, such as being FE leaders, rather than, for example, those based on lifelong relationships. The 'normalcy' governing relations among the senior management team in one college was based on perceptions about their 'objective' as well as umbrella-style oversight of college functioning; the perspectives generated though 'its' meetings were, therefore, paramount because members considered they were free of 'vested interests', providing self-assurance that decisions made by the SMT were impartial. This kind of group identity was viewed by them in contrast to the 'partiality' existing at other levels of the management hierarchy in which there were, it was considered, 'vested interests' and more diversity. This allowed them to make decisions on others' behalf whilst maintaining a commitment to consultation and participation in leadership at a range of levels. From such a stance it is not difficult to fathom why those who see things differently, or who are the 'other', might be assigned identities considered obstructive, naïve, or difficult (see also below).

In another college, senior leaders saw their role as strategic but also 'inclusive' of the expertise brought to senior meetings by staff leaders at lower levels, mainly middle leaders. The approach was observed by a member of the research team; individual leaders were invited into a senior management team meeting at specific points in order to present a report on a relevant agenda item and then invited to leave once the reports were given. Following report presentation, the style directed back and forth between the report presenters and individual members of the senior team was interrogative, dominated by male participants, summarised by the principal, who then directed action to specific individuals or departments. In the interview data, the process is described by a middle leader who had been required to report to previous meetings. Her contention was that senior leadership meetings operated routinely as in the meeting observed. Her description was of a process of '*grilling*' as in a '*pressure cooker*'. Her learned reaction over time to what she considered

to be *'quite bizarre'* approaches to team leadership, was to adopt a *'matter-of-fact'* tone regardless of the content of the 'interrogation':

You could go in telling them you were 10% over-budget or 10% under budget....and the reaction is more or less the same...There won't be a "goodness me" or "well done" there'll be a "how or what have you done about that?"

In the example quoted, the need to suppress specific aspects of self were both learned and prioritised as specific presentation strategies, to the extent that *'you don't tell them anything they don't ask you'*; these learned behaviours, she considered, were *'not very facilitating'* in terms of widening understanding, or in relation to different approaches to leadership. This was also noted in observation notes by a researcher, along with evidence of minimum participation by minority female members and interjections of male banter about sport. In interview, the latter was explained by a senior female participant in the following way:

There's very much a male kind of discussion...it doesn't bother me, I just let them get on with it...get it out of their system...it kind of amuses me because it's a standard kind of patter.

Having become accustomed, through long-term service in FE, to *'male-orientated environments'* she considered that it was *'not done to exclude'*. Over time, she had learned to adapt her presentation of self to prevalent cultural practices associated with senior leadership, in part denying their existence as ritualised instruments of power and influence (Samier, 1997:433).

Meetings at the Middle and Front-line

At other levels of leadership, the predominant view was of meetings functioning at best to consider every-day operational issues and at worst as *'rubber stamps'* to decisions made elsewhere. Observational data also suggested that that middle leader communication *styles* showed more variation than the more standardised meeting *content* which demonstrated a mainly vertical downward flow of information and one-to-one interactive flows of communication between individual group members and the Chairperson. A middle manager commented:

We are present and listening to the information which has been compiled by the leadership and communicated to managers but we are not involved in shaping agendas.

This meant that a substantial amount of time at meetings was given to passing information down, relaying operational instructions acquired either as a result of middle leaders' attendance at their line managers' meetings or through relaying the minutes of meetings to which they were given access. A middle leader described the process in terms of information transfer in which '70% comes down and 30% goes up.'

The act of talking and listening in meetings as a leadership activity, therefore, whilst giving many employees a 'voice', was not always linked to staff engagement in 'real' leadership or empowerment. What did the act of being listened to actually mean in relation to perceptions of diverse leadership? Routinely expressed among senior leaders was a firm commitment to listening and talking as central to acts of leadership. Performative aspects of listening and talking were also frequently emphasised by staff at lower leadership levels as an important feature of leadership identity, but were more likely to be viewed by them as direct and indirect means of organizational control, and conflict release or diffusion. Such leadership practices were not always perceived negatively, but rather as part-and-parcel of the enactment of leadership.

Applied to issues of diversity and equality, however, there was also a recognition that acts of listening and talking in different parts of large organizational environments might, in certain situations, allow damaging aspects of exclusionary practice to remain unchecked, and as importantly, for rather different 'diversity' narratives to persist within the same organization. In one instance, where senior leaders believed their decision-making skills were premised on impartiality and commitments to equality, alternative perspectives pointed to racism, not only directed at individuals but as embedded within the organization. When asked why black staff were less likely to be employed 'at manager level' a respondent noted:

It could be discrimination I think. We do make sure that everyone goes on diversity training...I think we have pockets or areas in the college where we have some difficulties and we have to identify which areas these are and go from there... I think there is institutional discrimination at every level. (middle leader)

In such situations it was not surprising that some people who were seen as 'different' (or saw themselves as different) preferred to limit their contribution to leadership discussions in meetings or,

as previous sections demonstrate, adjust aspects of their identity. More generally, there was often a gap between what senior managers perceived to be their open style of communication and the contradictory views presented in interviews and observed in groups. Moreover, fears were also expressed of being negatively labelled if a group member expressed her/his views too often or too strongly. Referring to the way in which her feminine voice and style was largely ignored, a respondent discussed the ways in which the perspectives of men were more likely to be taken on board in her leadership group:

Because they are men. Sadly, I think it is because they are more dominant. They have more authoritative voices and they speak more... They dominate time because they are louder and have more presence regardless of what the issue might be .

Referring to senior management team meetings a respondent in another college made a similar point:

Men ask all the questions...and make all the decisions...and sometimes the women in the team make it clear they don't understand what's going on...it's a shame really.

What the above data seems to suggest is that leaders and members of leadership groups have different perceptions of leadership as practice. Moreover, the contribution of those perceived as the 'other' could often be seen as 'lesser' and in contradictory terms, presenting identities which were construed in a range of ways; working in groups, women leaders were perceived as too loud, too quiet, too aggressive, too acquiescentand being black was associated with being too confrontational, too unassertive, too loud, too silent, or too talkative. This suggests that beneath deeply held convictions by senior leaders that communications were democratic and open, there were processes which, in practice, privileged some leadership identities rather than others through what Reynolds and Trehan (2003) have described elsewhere as 'false notions of consensus' (p.163) which, in turn, continue to ascribe a range of identities to those 'unlike us'.

In summary, exploring identity through the lenses of group interactions in meetings allowed us to understand more fully:

- the range and depth of identity formation and development through first-hand descriptions of organizational values, belief systems, and ideologies of leadership as *demonstrated in formal group encounters*;
- the structures and functions of leadership groups and their relation to the contradictions and discrepancies of organisational life as *described by participants*;

and provided

- an additional methodological lens for understanding organizational life, *observed as leadership in practice*.

(adapted from Samier, 1997: 433).

Conclusions

In an introduction to a range of writings about identity, Du Gay *et al* (2006:2) comment on the central theoretical and substantive 'contemporary status of identity' partly because, in late modernity, 'the 'it' which constitutes our individual identity [ies] is now regarded ...in some sense as being more contingent, more fragile and incomplete, and therefore more amenable to reconstitution than was ever thought possible'. For the purposes of this paper, the term is applied hopefully in order to give further impetus to the need for radical re-assessments of leadership that takes place within organizations that seek to serve communities of growing diversity and persistent inequality. Applied to the context of leadership in Further Education, the paper highlights evidence to demonstrate how and why staff navigate a career pathway to leadership and how this disproportionately disadvantages some individuals more than others. In doing so it highlights the need for further intellectual as well as practitioner engagement with diversity in leadership and emphasises the need for a persistent alignment between the two to challenge and change the *status quo*.

'Headline' Summary

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this paper.

- The concepts of diversity, identity, and power are helpful in considering the opportunities and challenges in making diverse leadership productive.
- At every level of leadership the term diversity is understood in a variety of ways.
- Policy espousal is one of equality and diversity as core to the aims and purposes of further education. Yet the evidence presented in this Paper reveals a range of orientations in which policy espousal is sometimes viewed as peripheral or exaggerated, other than in terms of usefulness for showcasing organizational aims, purposes, and mission for accountability purposes.
- Whilst the identities of leaders are multiple, different aspects of self-identity may come to the fore according to contingency and situation.
- Individuals make complex calculations based on the interaction of visible and non-visible characteristics in order to assess the status, power, and influence of others, and how they might, in turn, influence or lead others.
- In order to access leadership, the perception of would-be leaders is that they are required to suppress, switch, combine, or split aspects of their identities in order to attain leadership. This inhibits most those individuals whose visible characteristics are least like those of the majority or those with power.
- The result of such actions, combined with various assumptions and inaccuracies in perception, is that some staff, in particular those who are outside the existing norm, feel inhibited and less empowered to bring their full identity to their leadership role.
- This is illustrated in the observation of leadership groups and the explicit and implicit rituals and rules underpinning inter-action and communication. Whilst open communication is valued, both formal and informal procedures interact to constrain some staff with minority characteristics.

- Talking, listening and leading in groups, as in meetings, are seen as central to 'doing leadership'. Such practices are perceived to control and diffuse conflict, and also to disadvantage those whose styles of leading are seen as different from the majority. A combination of survivalist and adaptive behaviours in groups reinforces rather than challenges the *status quo*.
- Communication is made more complex by a general uneasiness in talking about and taking action on diversity.
- 'Managing' diversity is still seen mainly in terms of the problem of 'diversity' and about 'diverse' or 'different' individuals rather than existing governance and control structures in which the *status quo* remains relatively unchallenged.
- Senior leaders committed to change will need to challenge the *status quo* of which they are part. Awareness of one's self and own identity provides a starting point.

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We recognise that there are many innovative and effective leaders and leadership practices in the Sector that warrant investigation, analysis and wider dissemination of best practice. We would like to engage with existing networks within the Sector and develop a wider practice-led research community contributing to current debates on leadership and other related issues.

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