Developing shared leadership to create public value

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Shared leadership development in the public sector: Individual and collective effects

Leadership in government is challenging, as agencies need to balance managing stakeholders, internal effectiveness and the authorizing environment (Benington & Moore, 2010). Tensions exist between these three corners of the public value triangle, and they are unlikely to be managed well in a system that relies on command and control (Howieson & Hodges, 2014). Since Moore’s (1995) public value theory was ‘launched’, public sector management has become increasingly complex and dynamic, with rising demand, conflicting priorities, and stakeholders requiring more customized co-produced services (Plimmer, Gill, & Norman, 2011). Public value theory, and the changes in public demands, have particular implications for individual leadership models that have traditionally characterized much public administration (O’Flynn, 2007). As public sectors seek to manage adaptively across diverse agencies, networks and stakeholders, there are calls for public organisations to encourage collective autonomy (Head & Alford, 2013). It should then follow that the approach to leadership sees a similar shift towards multi-party involvement.

Traditional, individual forms of leadership in the public sector are already well studied (Ospina, 2016). Studies on transformational leadership, for example, have identified its impact on public service motivation (Wright, Moynihan, & Pandey, 2012) and performance (Bellé, 2013). Studies of traditional hierarchical theories tell us about important leadership features generally, such as active relations and exchanges, and of fulfilling higher order needs (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway & McKee, 2007). The latter is likely to be particularly relevant in public service motivated environments (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). Overall, however, public sector leadership studies tend to focus on traditional hierarchical models, despite the case for shared leadership when the leadership sought is incremental and pluralistic (Ospina, 2016).
Outside of public administration, the limitations of unitary, top-down leadership theories are well established (Dachler, 1984; Greene, 1975). Some scholars argue that team and organisational objectives, which are often complex, cannot be accomplished by individuals working alone (Yukl, 2002). Now that many organisational decisions rely on interactions across contexts, role complementarities that exist within a collective can be more powerful than accumulated competencies within an individual leader. For example, well-informed outcomes may result when technical workers and organisational leaders combine their knowledge, seek each other’s feedback, and gain a broader understanding of other fields and the organisation (Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012). A shift toward embracing shared leadership may likely be appropriate in organisations with complex tasks and multiple stakeholders. Such leadership, however, is likely to require skill and knowledge both individually and collectively.

How to develop and sustain this is under-explored (Currie, Grubnic, & Hodges, 2011). Although shared leadership has recently gained more attention, there is still limited understanding of its development and outcomes. The present study helps address these gaps by exploring the development of shared leadership in terms of both collective as well as individual capabilities in a complex public sector environment. This approach differs from more traditional individual leader development as it focuses on “a process of development that inherently involves multiple individuals” (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014, p. 64).

This paper addresses three gaps in current knowledge, all of which concern the dynamics of shifting from a hierarchically led organisation to one that embraces shared leadership. The first is how shared leadership is developed, particularly when employees have not previously identified or acted as a leader (Pearce, 2004). The development of a leader identity, from an emergent leader’s perspective is relatively unknown and warrants further research attention (Houghton, Neck & Manz, 2003). Secondly, how these identities might further enhance collective competencies is not adequately understood, particularly in the public sector (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Although some processes, such as enhanced confidence and trust within a team are known (Drescher, Korsgaard, Welpe, Picot, & Wigand, 2014; Pearce, 2004), this list seems incomplete. These collective competencies also exist in inherent tension, or paradox, with traditional bureaucratic leadership, and between
organisational capability, accountability and public value. Such tensions are also explored in this paper.

This study therefore explores how shared leadership can be developed, how it might in turn change an organisation, and tensions inherent in its role in creating public value. This case based research in a government science institute is based on 34 interviews triangulated against observations and internal documents.

**Shared leadership and what is missing**

The idea of sharing influence is well-established, as are related theories, including shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), distributed leadership (Gronn, 2003), and collective leadership (Denis, Lamonthe & Langley, 2001). These theories have nuanced differences, reflecting their evolution from different fields, and the level at which leadership is shared. The common theme is of leadership that is the antithesis to hierarchical and individualistic models. Instead, they propose that followers can themselves be leaders in an organisation (Day & Harrison, 2007). Shared leadership is chosen here as it describes shared influence at any level in the organisation, and has become probably the most established definition from this field (Bolden, 2011). It has been described as:

> a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups

> for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organisational goals . . . . (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p.1).

In contrast to traditional hierarchy, or command and control models of leadership, shared leadership concerns leadership as a “team sport” where individuals with the knowledge or skills to effectively contribute to the leadership of a situation can do so (Pearce & Conger, 2003).

By encouraging decentralized decision-making, mutual influence, and voice, shared leadership can empower individuals and workforces (Perry, Pearce, & Sims, 1999). It can also enhance team effectiveness, especially when members are dealing with complex tasks (Pearce & Sims, 2002). It is particularly effective where there is a high level of urgency, employee commitment, creativity and innovation are essential and the work requires interdependence and collaboration (Pearce & Manz, 2005). Knowledge workers often
operate in such contexts, and their participation in organisational leadership has been linked to enhanced autonomy, influence and meaningfulness (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007). This shared leadership can in turn lead to greater engagement with both work and the organisation, making it effective in achieving outcomes, such as job and organisational performance, engagement in job crafting and organisational citizenship behaviors, and a service climate (Saks, 2006; Tims, Bakker & Derks, 2012). As well as being motivational, there is also a cognitive pathway for effectiveness. When integration of multiple knowledge domains and capabilities are needed, shared leadership can also work better than counting on the bounded rationality of a single leader.

Although research attention has been given to understanding the value of shared leadership, such as its positive impact on team- and firm-level performance (Carte, Chidambaram, & Becker, 2006; Waldersee & Eagleson, 2002), there is still little known about its development or whether it shapes organisations beyond the team or dyad level. Shared leadership is inherently a collective phenomenon, yet studies concerning it tend not to look at its dynamics at the level of the collective.

**Leadership development**

Leadership development typically involves new knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs), which in turn allow employees to better navigate complex environments (DeRue, Sitkin, & Podolny, 2011; Khoreva, 2016). Although government, business and academia, show high levels of interest in leadership development, it is still under-researched compared to leadership studies generally (Chami-Malaeb & Garavan, 2013; Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012). For instance, a quick Google Scholar search of research since in 2016 found 12,500 titles with the word “leadership”, but only 556 articles with the phrase “leadership development”. This is surprising, as collective development of KSAs has strong theoretical linkages to organisational performance and commitment (Marathe & Pathak, 2013).

Brungardt (1997) defined the development of leaders broadly as “every form of growth or stage of development in the life cycle that promotes, encourages, and assists the expansion of knowledge and expertise required to optimize one’s leadership potential and
performance” (p.83). Since then, *leadership development* has emphasized the collective capabilities of multiple individuals and groups rather than just individual leaders (Day et al., 2014). As a shared process, it is concerned with the collective interactions between leaders as well as the dyadic relations between leaders and followers. The conditions for shared leadership’s success, and how it can be explicitly developed, is therefore of interest.

**Conditions for leadership development**

Paradoxically, formal implementation of shared leadership requires vertical leader(s) to establish appropriate conditions and encourage followers to embrace the new direction (Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003; Zhang, Waldman and Wang, 2012). Formal leaders can provide resources, help team members better understand others’ skills, capabilities, and motivations, and inspire followers to lead informally (Zhang et al., 2012; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Encouragement and support, both vertically and horizontally, help to build collective efficacy (Burke, Fiore & Salas, 2003; Carson et al., 2007). Worker voice is also supportive of shared leadership, as it encourages the exchange and ownership of ideas (Burke et al., 2003; Carson et al., 2007).

Formal leaders are also important role-models for shared leadership. Encouraging others to act similarly and share influence, as well as shaping collective purpose to unite a group, building trust, integrating ideas and supporting contributions (Binci, Cerruti, & Braganza, 2016; Pearce, 2004). There are, however, inherent tensions between shared and vertical leadership, and a risk of dysfunction and chaos. Whilst a group can develop a shared purpose, it may be ineffective if it contradicts organisational goals (Cox, Pearce & Perry, 2003). In a networked governance environment, goals may be contested and unclear (Ospina, 2016). Despite this, vertical leadership is likely to have a critical role in developing a shared approach in a bureaucratic public agency.

**Developing shared leadership**

Despite the distinction between leader and leadership development, shared leadership still involves explicit development of individual capabilities. How to do this is relatively unknown despite the need for relevant training to develop shared leadership (Carson et al., 2007;
Pearce & Manz, 2005). These capabilities are more enduring when they emerge through identity development, rather than just learning new skills and behaviors (Day & Harrison, 2007).

At the individual level, identity is developed via underlying components, such as self-efficacy and self-awareness. Self-efficacy can reduce reliance on vertical leaders, and also establish an identity as a leader (Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, 2006). It also raises personal standards and competence, which can help motivate others to engage as leaders as well (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Self-awareness, and the ability to self-regulate, allows individuals to transfer between leader and follower roles, resulting in shared influence (Jackson, 2000). Self-observation and corrective feedback to identify and strengthen behaviours are seen to be ‘teachable’ aspects of self-awareness (Houghton et al., 2003) while effective techniques include: self-evaluation, 360 feedback and coaching or mentoring (Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012).

Identities can also be built through teamwork skills and learning about others’ perspectives. These help gain commitment, trust and respect from followers and stakeholders (Pearce, 2004; Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Encouraging individuals to think of themselves in relation to others increases social awareness and enables shared influence.

Collaborative, or group learning, can develop both interpersonal skills and social capital via techniques such as ‘action learning’ (Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012). These group experiences allow individuals to test and strengthen individual leader identities, and subsequently take on different roles (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). This opens up the idea of leadership as something that is dynamic, with fluctuations between roles as followers or leaders (Raelin, 2006).

As emergent leaders gain confidence and exercise voice they may then be driven by collective goals and values (Hogg & Knippenberg, 2003). The ability to critically reflect (developed at the individual and relational level) enables leaders to think about who the group is, what they represent and how to lead together rather than as individuals (Day & Harrison, 2007). Cross functional learning groups facilitate collaboration and a shared
understanding (Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012). Where these learning experiences are tied to organisational goals, identity is also tied to the organisation.

The above multi-faceted review of identity development indicates that identities can act at personal, relational and collective levels. Identity at one level, however, can be activated in different contexts and can reinforce or undermine identity at another (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge & Scabini, 2006). Leadership problems can therefore be viewed as tensions between identity levels - a struggling leader lacking the confidence to take the lead, the relational leader who lacks follower support, or the leader who only operates within the confines of their group, perhaps to the detriment of the collective. The effective turning off and on, and reinforcement of leader identities, such as between leader and follower roles, likely characterizes effective shared leadership.

**Research questions**

While some authors have explored shared leadership development, very few empirical studies have concerned both its explicit development (i.e. through a training program), and how it operates at an organisational level- particularly in a bureaucratic public organisation. Thus, this case study aims to answer the following research questions:

Research question 1: How and through what underlying processes are shared leadership identities developed?

Research question 2: How does shared leadership development change an organisation, and how does it co-exist with the vertical leadership of public organisations?

**Method**

**Organisational setting**

Resorg, a Crown-owned Research and Development Institute (CRI), was mandated to undertake research for the public good, whilst remaining financially viable. Its employees, predominantly scientists, performed non–routine and uncertain work that benefited from creativity and collaboration: a context well suited to shared leadership (Gupta & Singh,
In recent years Resorg’s business strategy focussed on creating commercial ‘spin-offs’, which were losing market relevance and money. Stakeholders had criticised this strategy for only benefitting Resorg’s own financial standing and the interests of its scientists, rather than the public. Following economic and financial concerns, the Government required Resorg to be more focused on the R&D needs of local businesses, and to partner and co-produce commercial research with industry. The Government subsequently altered public funding requirements (two thirds of Resorg’s revenue), giving preference to projects tied to industry.

With these significant changes, Resorg lost many previously secure contracts. A staff survey found that over 50% of staff were disengaged. A new CEO, tasked with building closer ties with industry, recognised that the organisation’s high calibre scientists were unskilled in business/commercial management, strategic thinking, project execution and resource management. Silos were also a problem between scientific disciplines, and also between scientists and business development staff. A leadership development program was introduced to equip staff with the shared leadership skills needed to execute the new industry engagement strategy.

**Program description**

The LDP was built on the CEO’s definition of shared leadership as an “activity, action or a principle that operates at all times, at all levels through the organisation.” Whilst the program was targeted to scientists, all staff could participate either voluntarily, or upon the recommendation of their manager. The program comprised of three inter-related components; a personal assessment performed by an organisational psychologist, a 3 day development center focusing on personal development and a customized 5 day academic program to develop business leadership capabilities. Participants took part in all three components over a year, graduating to “LDP alumni.” Following this, additional development courses, secondments, open strategy discussions and seminars were available for all staff.
Part one: Personal assessment

At the beginning of the LDP participants went through two psychometric tests to identify personality type, and personal style respectively. Results were then discussed with a psychologist at the development center and explored in a 90-minute workshop.

The workshop used collaborative, action-learning simulations designed to draw on these personality traits and how they influence group behavior. Following the LDP, participants had a one-on-one coaching session with the psychologist to reflect on their personality profiles and create a personal development program.

Part Two: Development centre

For 3.5 days participants stayed at a residential location, along with a coach and four trained observers from the organisation. The CEO and senior executives attended a dinner plus an afternoon session with the participants to discuss shared leadership and the new strategy.

The development centre aimed to develop personal awareness, and relevant skills and knowledge. The collaborative action learning exercises were tailored to the context of an R&D organisation, with each followed by feedback and discussion. Concluding the development centre, participants received a personalized behavioral report from observers (senior members of the organisation, or LDP alumni).

Part Three: Academic program

The 5 day academic program sought to provide frameworks and tools for organisational leadership skills. The topics that the academic program covered were operationalised through lectures, group discussions, case studies and practical examples. The CEO and senior executives also attended a social function.

The central exercise was the Dragon’s Den. On the first day, the CEO discussed a current organisational challenge with participants, who then developed a project proposal (in groups of 3-4) to address this challenge. Over the week, participants applied classroom concepts to develop a final proposal that they presented to a panel of “dragons”, on the final day. The winning team would then implement their proposal within the organisation.
Sources of Data

Data sources were organisational documents, observations and interviews of Resorg. Staff engagement surveys, both prior to and after, the observations and interviews were given particular attention. Observations took place during the academic component of the LDP, using a schedule based on two levels of evaluation: personal reactions to the learning experience (including levels of enjoyment, practicality and relevance, level of participation, and program design features), and learning (Kirkpatrick, 1975). One-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews comprise the majority of data.

Two groups of participants were interviewed for this study: participants of the LDP, and those who had not participated in the LDP. The second group of participants were sampled to get an ‘outsider’s’ view of the program’s effects. Interviews took place onsite and ranged from .5 to 1.5 hours. Questions covered changes in attitudes, behaviour and cognitions about work and the organisation, and factors that motivated or hindered change. The schedule for non-participants followed the same structure, with modified questions.

Participant selection

Interview sampling was in three stages. The first round (N= 13) was in response to a call for volunteers. In these initial interviews, participants indicated that there were three different personal outcomes of the LDP; (1) participants who changed their jobs or outlook following the program, (2) people who showed minor changes and (3) individuals were cynical of the program. Consequently, sampling was increased using a key informant who suggested individuals that fell into the above groups. Finally, a snowball sampling method was used with original participants referring colleagues in these categories.

Participant description

A total of 33 interviews were conducted, 11 with individuals who had not taken part in the LDP and 22 with individuals who had taken part in the program between 2006 and 2012. A majority of the participants were male, and most were of New Zealand, European descent. Participant age groups ranged from 20-29 through to 60-69, although a majority were aged
over 40. Most had worked in the organisation for over 6 years when the program began, and worked in a range of roles, and levels throughout the organisation. There was a bias towards scientific versus non-scientific staff, though this is reflective of the organisations composition (25% non-scientific staff vs. 75% scientists or engineers).

Data coding and analysis

Following collection, data was triangulated between the 3 sources to ensure validity. Interviews were transcribed directly after taking place and member checking was used to ensure validity and avoid bias.

Coding took place in two stages. In the first stage, observational and interview data was coded into categories that emerged from the data itself. This pointed to broad mechanisms concerning the context of the LDP, and its processes. The categories that arose at this stage indicated characteristics similar to broader facets of leadership identity models theorised by a number of authors, including Day and Harrison (2007) and Ibarra, Snook, and Guillen Ramo (2010). A second round of coding sought higher order themes that were not immediately apparent at the interview stage. These higher order themes reveal overarching paradoxes concerning: individual versus collective goals, optimistic versus cynical attitudes, and a paradox of power from horizontal versus vertical influence. The identification of codes and themes was verified by two other coders.

Results

Results are presented in three stages. The first, discusses the context of the LDP and some high-level changes that resulted before the research commenced. The second stage covers leadership development including the causal pathways from programme features to change behaviours. These two stages mainly report successful outcomes. The third stage, discusses changes at the collective level. This is discussed in terms of paradoxes and tensions, primarily between vertical and hierarchical leadership, and is more complex than the stages that precede it.

Context for the LDP
When this research began, the organisation had around 340 employees. Descriptions of the organisational state prior to the LDP mirrored the reports of an organisation in financial crisis with high disengagement.

**Post-LDP context**

At the time research commenced, the LDP had operated for six years. Around one third of the staff had taken part. Recent engagement surveys showed increased engagement with the organisation’s purpose, and a 27% decrease in the number of disengaged staff from the earliest survey 5 years before. Support for the organisation’s leadership increased by 38.8% alongside an 8.7% increase in ratings for learning and development. A behavioral shift towards industry engagement was commonly attributed to the change in funding, although participants mentioned that some (often older and cynical) staff remained disengaged.

Overall, staff recognized that using “all the intellectual grunt” in a group was “an appropriate thing for a science organisation.” Shared leadership resonated with scientists who are “driven by thinking and implementing and being challenged” and relished the opportunity to “enrich the organisation from the ground up.” Non-LDP participants described how interactions with LDP alumni became more “positive,” “respectful”, and that managers were “less dictatorial.” Most non-LDP staff felt that the LDP alumni reflected the organisation’s new goal and viewed them as effective leaders.

**Research Question 1 – How is shared leadership developed?**

There was evidence that participants developed a number of necessary personal resources that enabled capability to lead. This positive growth story, is however, tempered in the subsequent results that discuss organisational dynamics.

**Individual skill development**

**Self-awareness and confidence**

The psychometric assessment, action learning and group exercises appeared to increase self-awareness, often in the form of discovering personal resources. Role-playing allowed
participants to test strengths and identify weaknesses in low-risk situations. Individuals consequently became more aware of their current and potential capabilities:

*I gained knowledge and skills from it but most of what I gained was this concept of leadership from below and...and an increase in that awareness of strengths and abilities to do something with it.*

*I think ... being a bench scientist and going in there and doing all the exercises, being observed and having feedback on how the observers saw my interactions, I sort of learnt a lot about myself and the business acumen that I didn’t realize I had.*

**Legitimization of new roles**

The CEO and executives legitimized of the LDP and enhanced individual capabilities. Senior involvement in, and support of, the LDP signaled to staff that they were valued. One staff member commented that “[they] recognize that we can actually play a part in what the organisation does”. This legitimization seemed particularly important for scientists who felt “discarded” under the industry engagement strategy, as it “wasn’t about what they could do in the lab anymore.” The LDP’s provision of resources and open participation policy symbolized to all staff that their leadership was encouraged and valued.

Moreover, attending the LDP legitimized the leader’s role back in the organisation. As one scientist described:

*You’re sharing yourself with the wider organisation. So if you then are perceived to have a strength in a certain area then people are aware of it and they’re more likely to get you to contribute in that area.*

Shared leadership helped legitimize the relational identity, as the leaders were prototypical of their followers (particularly as scientists). External staff described having “more trust” in their colleagues as leaders as they had “come through the ranks” and had the “interests of the company at heart.”

**Empowerment and job crafting**
Throughout the LDP and subsequent open strategy discussions, the CEO emphasized ‘leading from within’. This helped overcome preconceived notions of hierarchical leadership, motivated participants to lead, and encouraged ‘ownership’ and proactivity:

*I realize that I can be a leader and have a lot of influence without necessarily being a line manager. That’s is important for me... because I’ve always been in this operational, supporting role.*

For a number of participants, a sense of empowerment and greater autonomy enabled job crafting. Heightened self-awareness, and knowledge of personal strengths, helped individuals craft roles to increase meaningfulness:

*I guess [the LDP] empowered me to think that I was a scientist that was interested in the business side of things and I should pursue that. Now I’m finally actually taking advantage of that and moving into a business role...So now, it feels like, you know the sky’s the limit.*

**Relationship building and collaboration**

**Social awareness and support**

The collaborative learning environment, particularly during the Dragons Den, appeared to make individuals more aware of their roles in a group. Identifying and discussing different personality types helped support for others’ efforts to lead:

*One of the kind of aspects was that everybody kind of works in a different way ...but there is a logic to it and there is a value to the way they look at things, as well as there is value to the way you look at things.*

**Contagion**

After returning from the LDP, participants initiated organisation wide industry engagement projects that involved non-LDP staff, and encouraged their colleagues to be more proactive. Non-LDP staff described their colleagues’ enthusiasm as having “rubbed off” on them. Moreover, as more staff participated in the LDP, the number of individuals holding this collective identity began to outweigh the more cynical, resistant staff:
If they’re all happy and you’re the one that’s miserable you’re going to end up having to be happy because they will say bugger off or change your attitude. I think it’s quite infectious really.

**Working across boundaries**

**Role fluctuations**

A number of participants described how their position as followers made them more effective leaders. There was also an enhanced understanding of how different experiences and expertise can work together complementarily. Individuals noted how they felt comfortable switching between leader-follower roles. A senior scientist gave the following example:

> I can choose. If I need to lead some change in my area and I can say yes ok I need to do it. There are other things where I can say well someone else is leading that and I can support them in that process and be a follower.

**Collective empowerment**

Executive involvement, and behavior modeling by senior managers encouraged a shared purpose and collective empowerment across the organisation. The LDP reinforced the organisation’s purpose as a government science institution by communicating the common goal of industry engagement. Participants reported a more unified and stronger identification with the organisation’s mandate to create public value:

> It wasn’t just about the technical people vs. the administrative people. There was very much a common ground about what the potential could be and should be. And a real genuine civil service attitude, you know? We wanted this to be good for the country. Not just your narrow personal goals.
The preceding analysis of the mechanisms through which the LDP influenced behaviours and wider organisation broadly correspond to Day and Harrison’s levels of identity development. These new behaviors were practiced and developed in the simulations and the Dragon’s Den project, and were transferred to the workplace with new, collectively reinforcing behaviours that were encouraged by senior managers. These collective identity dynamics are outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership conceptualisations and levels of identity development</th>
<th>Leadership is developed through...</th>
<th>Contributing LDP component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First level - Individual and Uni-directional</td>
<td>Individual skill development</td>
<td>Personality assessment and interactive program components such as action learning and simulations contributed to greater self-awareness and self-confidence. Observer feedback provided a non-biased perspective on ones’ personality traits, helping to identify strengths and weakness, both within and outside technical roles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second level - Relational - Reciprocal and dyadic</td>
<td>Individual skill development</td>
<td>Group exercises developed heightened sensitivity to others’ perspectives and ideas. Simulations allowed scientists to ‘try on’ the leadership role, normalising role fluctuations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third level - Multi-level - Individual Relational - Collective - A shared process</td>
<td>Individual skill development Relationship building Empowerment Working across boundaries and collaboration</td>
<td>Industry engagement aim of the LDP signalled a change toward collective orientation, as individuals began to associate with the purpose of the organisation. Dragon’s Den projects explicitly developed collective empowerment and purpose and encouraged collaboration. Individuals felt proud when developing ideas of strategic organisational relevance, and receiving meaningful feedback from peers. Presentation of such projects helped legitimize roles as leaders in the wider organisation.</td>
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*Table 1: Individual, relational and collective identity development from the LDP*
Adapted from Day and Harrison (2007)
Research Question 2 – How does shared leadership development change an organisation?

Although the program positively developed and promoted shared leadership, tensions or paradoxes emerged from data at the organisational level. These tensions were between shared leadership, and the requirements (often shorter term) of public sector bureaucratic accountability.

Whilst, the LDP facilitated a shift from individual to collective goals, tensions arose between discretionary job crafting and task performance. There were also conflicting descriptions of shared influence in the collective pursuit of the new mission versus the strength of individual empowerment. Cynicism about the LDP initiative, concurrent with doubts about “paying lip service” to employee empowerment added to this, whereas LDP alumni challenged this cynicism. Lastly, tensions existed in the nature of leadership - shared versus hierarchical - including the reluctance to challenge managers, despite rhetorical encouragement of upward influence and voice. Results evidencing these ideas are presented below.

Paradox of goals

Task performance versus job crafting and short term versus long term goals

Whilst job crafting and the added public value of industry engagement resulted in more meaningful work for some, others found it unproductive, diverting efforts away from traditional role expectations and requirements. Moreover, participants reported that engaging with industry distracted from research and science objectives and “[blurred] the line between researcher and the person who does engagement.” Two participants were challenged by colleagues engaging outside of the traditional expectations of their role:

If a lot of people want to stop working at the bench and start working in business development, well I say … I have the money for the bench scientists. I actually suggest that you stay at the fucking bench, [and] make some more compounds ….

That [manager] became too involved in other stuff…you know with all good intention but he inadvertently took a huge workload upon himself, that person became
basically um, a last port of call in the case of whatever...there could be a negative effect because of not knowing what was going on.

In a conflict of higher-level goals, some scientists continued to struggle balancing scientific aims with public value. Compartmentalized funding was one barrier to cross-disciplinary collaboration, even if it would benefit public value. An operations manager described dealing with the tension between profitability and public value:

Should we be profitable or should we be pertinent to NZ? ...So pertinence to NZ means basically you can forget positive [cashflow] on our financials but we will get nice letters of support.

Fatigue and revitalisation

Although many found new roles invigorating, extra role behaviors could also be exhausting when trying to balance the demands of daily work with the extra tasks arising from the LDP. Examples below portray this contrasting effect:

With the dragons den...another guy who was also on my team he got another project lumped on top of him from the dragons den and his science productivity just went to zero. So that’s why he said he really wanted to get back into science.

In terms of my day to day job...its given me a lot of energy to do the ordinary things. Not just the ordinary things, there was a challenge in terms of going from this big global company promotion thing to the nitty gritty of what I did...but it didn’t make the details less [fun]...I probably did them better if anything.

Paradox of attitude

LDP cynicism versus evangelism

Cynicism was high when the LDP was introduced. Many viewed it as a waste of time and money, and a superficial attempt to improve employee engagement. Most however, understood the organisation’s need to “adjust and change.” As one science team leader
described, “the LDP was part of that broadening of the skillset outside of science and ... attitude towards industry.”

Cynicism from colleagues was a barrier to development. One participant described how colleagues “like to make fun of the LDP which brought you back down.” Over time, this cynicism diminished. At the time of the interviews, most participants and a number of managers praised the program, particularly the industry focussed, dragons den projects. LDP alumni were described as “evangelists” and the “fresh identity of the organisation”. One scientist metaphorically described the LDPs impact on cynicism:

In an organisation like this, it’s de-energized by cynicism and skepticism. [Cynicism is] a cancer in the place. And if [the LDP] cytotoxic then I think it’s the sort of thing the organisation should do.

Paradox of power

Vertical barriers versus dispersed networks of influence

Although shared leadership (and thus distributed power) was encouraged, informal leaders still found that a lack of positional power limited effective influence. Some senior, more cynical staff chose not to participate in the program, which decreased morale in younger scientists who wished to make use of the LDP:

All the grumpy old men, quite senior guys just point blank refused. And that’s quite frustrating for the people that report to them that...come back all hopeful that they can do this ...and life’s going to change and it doesn’t.

Despite this, the LDP alumni provided a ‘bypass’ around traditional, bureaucratic chains of command. Participants viewed the alumni as a collaborative, open network of like-minded leaders who could enable shared influence:

I think the idea that you could contact anybody within any sphere...and suggest something that you thought of...that’s the idea of forming networks across the
company ...and not always channeling things through your boss ...quite often you get bottlenecks with bad managers ...[if] you’re always doing things through the chain of command, that hasn’t really worked very well.

Discussion

Our data confirms that shared leadership, and many of its purported effects, did in fact occur as a result of the LDP. In particular, it revealed that a multi-level identity emerged whilst developing and engaging in shared leadership, in a mutually reinforcing manner. Psychometric testing and feedback, simulations, and group exercises helped build individual and relational identities. The Dragon’s Den and involvement of executives scaffolded from this to a common collective identity. These identities and skills for shared leadership were effectively ‘transferred’ to the workplace.

This research supports the combination of individual, relational and collective identities to both develop and sustain shared leadership in a group (Day and Harrison, 2007). In Day and Harrison’s model, individual identities concern confidence and self-efficacy. For instance, followers may have little desire to lead, perhaps due to fear of failure (Pearce, 2004). Relational identities concern what happens between the individual and others, including both leaders and followers (Day and Harrison, 2007). When novice leaders attempt shared leadership, it can be clumsy if the appropriate relational identity is undeveloped (Houghton et al., 2003). A stronger collective identity, which concerns common goals and values continues this development (Pearce and Conger, 2003).

Public sectors are already investing heavily in individual leader development (Rigg, 2006). Contrastingly this research shows that leadership development of multiple individuals, rather than the exclusive development of individual ‘stars’ may prove more effective. This is likely to result in leadership that is distributed, and more appropriate for the current public sector environment with its increasing need to share responsibility, problem solve collectively, and use complementary capabilities (Currie et al., 2011; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007; Howieson & Hodges, 2014).
There were, however, tensions between shared leadership and traditional, bureaucratic leadership concerning: task performance and short term goals versus job crafting and long term goals; fatigue and revitalization; cynicism versus optimism; and vertical power versus networked collaboration.

Shared leadership and its paradoxes fits with Moore’s public value triangle. Self-confidence, legitimization and job crafting all helped develop organisational capability. This, in turn, led to public value through a common purpose and ‘contagion’. In theory, hierarchical leadership provides a chain of command that traditionally fits authorizing environment, and accountability requirements. In the present case however, the initial vertical leadership was seen to have failed in both financial terms, and in creating public value.

Although public sector leadership studies often emphasise their unique context, this study shows that non-public leadership theories do apply to government (Ospina, 2016; Vogel and Massa, 2015). Conflict between task performance and job crafting/citizenship behaviours are also likely to occur in private sector organisations, but in government they have added hues of doubt if long term goals are altered. This conflict mirrors wider debates about the role of public sector leaders’ discretion and administrative bureaucracy. Such debates are normally confined to public sector executives, not line staff initiating or adopting a leadership roles for a project (Ospina, 2016). Moore (1995) notes that it is insufficient for individual leaders to have their own view or public value, others must agree with this conception. This research shows that shared leadership can alleviate such conflicts and help an organisation reach a shared view of public value, particularly if leaders are able to develop to the collective level of identity.

Whilst the tensions between vertical or bureaucratic leadership, and shared or distributed leadership are likely to apply to private organisations, they are particularly intense in democratically accountable public organisations. At one level it may be an unresolvable confrontation requiring much theorizing (Ospina, 2016). But at another level vertical leaders that can correctly enable shared leadership may be just a new executive competency needing better skills. Role modeling, provision of support and resources, and high involvement in shared leadership development seem important here.
Shared leadership also risks pressuring public servants to do, or be, more without added resources. This reflects a shift in the wider field of positive organisational behaviour (POB) with researchers highlighting negative outcomes of OCB’s performed at the expense of individual role performance. Findings about fatigue and overwork suggest that, from a critical perspective, shared leadership is a form of job intensification, with little tangible reward for workers and worthy of cynicism (Bolino, 2013).

Practical implications are that shared leadership is possible, and applicable in public administration. It is also developable, but requires the establishment of a multi-level leader identity and the support of skilled executives with a disposition toward shared leadership (Day & Harrison, 2006, Conger, 1996; Pearce, 2004). There are likely to be transition problems, including risks around neglect of core tasks and cynicism. Rather than selecting small groups of high performers for development, cohorts of leaders, from various levels within the organisation, can help create the critical mass necessary for change.

Limitations of this paper are that it may not apply to all public sector work, particularly where work is less complex. The sampling of interviews may have been biased through the snowball and informant method. However as explicit attempt was made to get diverse views, we see this potential weakness as limited.

In conclusion, this paper identifies that shared leadership is suitable to public sector organisations, can enhance public value, and can also be developed at scale. It does, however, require active legitimization from hierarchical leaders. The need for vertical leaders also diminishes the conflict with bureaucratic accountability and the authorizing environment.
References


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