Is leadership and management in inter-agency settings really that different? Perspectives from the literature

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Classical organisational theory

- Rules (hierarchy), incentives (markets) and interactions (networks).

- Number and range of public sector partnerships grown considerably in England since mid-1990s.

- Despite this, hierarchical forms tend to dominate public services.
Many different forms of networks

- Discussions of inter-agency collaboration may include various forms of networks:
  - Obligatory (e.g. youth offender teams)
  - Encouraged to become new forms of hierarchies (e.g. community mental health teams)
  - Operate in a market (e.g. joint commissioning boards)
Collaboration and evidence

- Inter-agency collaboration predicated on notion that will enable public services and partners better address “wicked issues” of society.
- Yet, little evidence that collaborative efforts have unequivocally demonstrated improvements in outcomes for those who use services (Dickinson, 2008) and similar findings from commercial sector (e.g. Field & Peck, 2003).
- Failure to adequately “manage” collaborative activities often implicated in discussions of evidence.
Focus on individuals?

- Accounts of challenges of collaborative work plentiful (e.g. Cameron & Lart, 2003)
- Agencies involved in collaboration often use individual managers to glue these entities together.
- Collaboration is all too often “the action of a few individuals with vision that have created change in service delivery in relation to peoples lives and opportunities. These individuals have managed to work and lead effectively despite the maze of separate service budgets, distinct disciplines and different values” (McCray & Ward, 2003: 362)
The vast leadership literature

- Leadership possibly one of most researched organisational topics of past 50 years. Yet remains under theorised and reliant on a few popular views.

- Yet relatively sparse amount of literature which directly considers leadership and management within inter-agency settings.

- Much theorising around leadership focused on “traditional” organisational settings.
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<th>Perspective dimensions</th>
<th>‘Classical’ perspective</th>
<th>‘Network’ perspective</th>
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<td>Divided authority structure</td>
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<td><strong>Goal structure</strong></td>
<td>Activities are guided by clear goals and well defined problems</td>
<td>Various and challenging definitions of problems and goals</td>
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<td><strong>Role of manager</strong></td>
<td>System controller</td>
<td>Mediator, process manager, network builder</td>
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<td><strong>Management tasks</strong></td>
<td>Planning and guiding organisational processes</td>
<td>Guiding interactions and providing opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Management activities</strong></td>
<td>Planning, designing, leading</td>
<td>Guiding interactions and providing opportunities</td>
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Leadership as a social fiction?

- Collins (2001) leadership is the answer to everything is the modern equivalent of the God is the answer to everything perspective in the 1500s.
- Limited research on leading (and managing) in interagency settings yet despite this there are a number of bold claims about the role of leaders in managing sets of complex organisational, structural and cultural factors.
- Not necessarily a case of did leadership lead to successful collaboration, but how big a part does leadership play within the trajectory of successful collaboration?
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<th>Theory</th>
<th>Driving force</th>
<th>Network based on</th>
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<td>Resource exchange/financial</td>
<td>Optimising efficient use of resources (and minimise transaction costs)</td>
<td>Content – money, staff etc exchanged</td>
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<td>Securing new competencies and knowledge</td>
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<td>Personal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>Organisational interests forming clusters to exploit specific resources in particular niches</td>
<td>Content – nature of niche to be exploited</td>
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<td>Solving particular problems</td>
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<td>Macro-economic/technological determinist</td>
<td>Consequences of technology available to solve problems</td>
<td>Content - each shaped by nature of problem and potential solution</td>
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The many drivers of networks

- The influence of individual or collective approaches to leadership may vary significantly between various forms of network.

- Are “publically” espoused rationale for collaboration always indicative of full range of drivers?
Networker (relational competence)

Resource Exchange (financial)

Exploitation of Niche (ecological)

Problem-sharing and problem-solving

Competence and Knowledge (learning)

Responding to Technology (technological/procedural)

Form (driver)

Leadership Attributes

Entrepreneur

Networker (relational competence)

Commitment

Predictability/Integrity (trust)

Customer-focused

Challenges

Lack of shared framework (e.g. differences in expectations and budget cycles)

Incompatible culture and values

Asymmetrical perceptions of legitimacy (e.g. the "democratic deficit")

Asymmetrical power relations (in the context of organisational self-interest)

Divergent professional discourses.
Use of drivers, forms, attributes and challenges framework

- A network established to exchange resources would struggle with a lack of a shared framework and may prioritise predictability among its leadership.

- A network set up to exploit a specific niche may be undermined by complexity of accountability and communication and would prioritise entrepreneurialism in its leaders.
What does the literature say about these attributes? (1)

‘[I]t is important to note that nothing in the boundary spanning literature shows that there is anything particularly distinctive either about the activities or about the skill sets of boundary spanners working between organisations when compared, for example, with colleagues working between departments within an organisation. Essentially, the same processes of initiation, negotiation, diplomacy, problem-solving and strategic development - and the same tact, ability to move between accountabilities, energy to motivate others etc. - are required in both settings. Indeed, much of the literature moves seamlessly from the inter- to the intra-organisational context’ (6 et al, 2006 p. 157).
What does the literature say about these attributes? (2)

There may be nothing unique to partnerships about the leadership styles and skills that facilitate their success; rather the difference may lie in the emphasis on particular elements of a more generic leadership model and in the specific contexts – and the challenges therein within which they are deployed.
What does the literature say about these attributes?

- Evidence suggests that the five forms of network— and their associated drivers – do seem to exist as broadly distinct, if interrelated, types.

- Attributes of boundary-spanning leaders in collaboration are largely vindicated – with exception to customer driven (very little literature relating to this).

- Distinction between facilitative and advocacy approaches to boundary spanning important and should not overlook leadership styles in single organisations.

- Evidence for the partnership life-cycle which may serve to privilege certain attributes at certain times, perhaps regardless of the network form.

- There is apparent support for the suggestion that the contexts within which leadership is exercised do mean that leadership in collaboration differs in degree, if not in its fundamentals, from that within single organisations (for instance, the emphasis on commitment).
Implications (1)

- Although effective leadership and management do have a significant impact on the functioning of inter-agency collaborations, it is important that leaders’ roles are not overstated, and that we are realistic about what types of leadership and management can produce what kinds of results in what sets of circumstances.

- Although it is often suggested that leaders and managers of inter-agency collaboration need distinct skills and attributes to those operating in more traditional settings, this distinction can be overstated.

- This has clear implications for training and development of these individuals where understanding of the contexts for and nature of collaboration – and thus the sensemaking that may be most effective – may as important as the skills and attributes themselves.
Implications (2)

- There is a need to be clear about what types of drivers are present in any collaboration. These are important to establish as they influence the form which any collaboration takes and the difficulties which it may encounter.

- Different sorts of collaboration require different types of leadership and management, and it is important to consider the aims of the collaboration and the types of tasks that they have been set up to address (as both these factors will influence the nature of leadership and management which will be most effective within these settings).
Questions for discussion

☐ Is this framework useful?
☐ Do these different types of networks, characteristics and attributes ring true?
☐ Is leadership and management really that different in inter-agency settings?
☐ Is the force of hierarchy truly as prevalent as we suggest?
☐ Is the focus on individuals and accountability inevitable and necessary?