

**Political Leadership, Bureaucracies and Business Schools:
A Comfortable Union?**

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Abstract

One of the central issues in reconciling pluralistic and bureaucratic forms of organizing lies in the absence of a coherent model of leadership. The intention here is to stimulate debate about the notion of political leadership as a contribution to this analysis. This approach to political leadership prioritizes the explicit acknowledgement of power relations as being central to the reconciliation of diverse interests, and to the building of moral communities in organizational settings. In developing this idea we explore the organizational context for the emergence of political leadership and consider its distinguishing features with reference to both theory and practice. Consideration is given to its utility in building moral organizational communities and how this approach to conceptualizing leadership might be furthered through business school education.

There is now much research highlighting the increasing influence of market and stakeholder interests at work in contemporary organization forms (Caldart and Ricart, 2004; Denis et al., 2001). Views differ widely as to the consequences of this apparent shift on the business of organizing. For some (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002), this trend heralds a benevolent post-bureaucratic dawn in which employees are freed from hierarchical forms of control to engage in self-managed, networked communities where leadership is a distributed phenomena. For others (e.g. Du Gay, 2000, 2005), it signifies the erosion of bureaucracy as a moral institution in which ethical codes are no longer enshrined in collective, de-personalized rules, but are the product of individual managerial action.

However, for other commentators still, and a view we ourselves share, bureaucracy has proved to be resistant to wholesale change and appears to possess an innate capacity to realign itself to shifts in the wider institutions of society (Reed, 2005). Such is the deep influence of this rational bureaucratic 'mindset' on managerial thinking that for many organizational members, leadership legitimized through the application of technical and economic values, hierarchical forms of control and centrally imposed rules remains part of everyday experience (Hales, 2002; Thompson and Davidson, 1995). In consequence, this tension between the drive for bureaucratic control and the need for organizations to respond to a plurality of stakeholder demands might be viewed as an inevitable outcome of organizing. They will always be in tension—two sides of the same organizational coin. The issue for organizational members is thus one of considering how to mediate between them in a way that is both effective and ethical.

For Weber (1974) and his supporters, strong political leadership at all levels of society has long been viewed as a key factor in subduing the centralizing tendencies of bureaucracy (Reed, 2005). However, although Weber considered commercial organizations to be as bureaucratic as the state itself, the potential value of this insight has been under-explored in an organizational setting. Yet one of the central issues in reconciling pluralistic and bureaucratic forms of organizing lies in the absence of a coherent model of leadership (Clegg, Courpasson et al., 2006; Hendry, 2006). The intention here is therefore to stimulate debate about the notion of political leadership as a contribution to addressing this problem. The approach taken emphasizes the explicit acknowledgement of power and conflict as being central to the reconciliation of diverse interests and to the building of moral communities in organizational settings. Following the work of Watson (1994) and others, there is now ample evidence of the political nature of managing. In much of the current research (see, for example, Vigoda-Gadot and Drory, 2006), organizational politics are viewed as a managerial skill. We concur with this but start from the position that such a skill set is premised on the notion of organizational politics as a 'democratic asset', potentially distributed across many organizational members and reflecting the varying capacity of employees to influence the way they are governed (Novicevic and Harvey, 2004). In this context, the leader's task is actively to embrace the role of community architect, in which the need for civic virtue, the ability to balance individual interests with those of the social and economic interests of the wider organizational community, becomes crucial (Butcher and Clarke, 2006).

This article seeks to make two main contributions. First, it explores the organizational context that has facilitated the emergence of this form of political leadership and addresses its distinguishing features with reference to both organizational theory and practice. Second, consideration will be given to the utility of political leadership in building moral organizational communities in the face of the inherent tension with bureaucratic imperatives. In addressing this problem, the need for a starting point to encourage an alternative praxis will be examined. Specifically, we will consider how political leadership might be developed through business school education, given the business schools' traditional role in enabling managers to develop alternative perspectives on organizing. This requires that business schools themselves, if they are to facilitate a move toward politically led organizational forms, address the charge that they are prone to reinforcing the status quo (Willmott, 1994). This article argues that there are now several converging pressures likely to create opportunities for academic leaders to facilitate the transition toward more political forms of leadership. It is also argued that these pressures provide a basis upon which business schools can innovate and differentiate themselves in their task of improving management practice.

The Changing Context for Organizing

At a time of unprecedented technological and economic change it is frequently argued that we are experiencing substantial shifts in the nature of the social institutions around us (Cohen, 1999; Rubery et al., 2002). Gratton and Ghoshal (2003) describe this as a post-bureaucratic 'revolution' which reflects a desire for individuals to express their potential, the need for protection from the arbitrary use of power, and greater involvement of people in determining the conditions of their association (p. 1).

These changes are perceived by some to be transforming individual relationships with institutions at all levels, but at their core they reflect the primacy of individuals and their capacity to act with autonomy (Gratton and Ghoshal, 2003; Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007).

At the same time as demands for more participative organizational forms increase, hyper-competitive environments are forcing organizations to be more responsive in their interaction with customers, suppliers, and partners. In turn, this is creating many fragmented and structurally diverse organizational arrangements that highlight both the centrality of power and competing interests (Brunson, 2002). In these circumstances sustainable competitive advantage is seen to lie in 'micro assets that are hard to discern and awkward to trade' (Johnson et al., 2003: 4). These are most likely to lie at the edges of organizations and in the hands of line managers, such that more people, more often, need to be involved in strategy than ever before (Johnson et al., 2003). It is argued that the resulting hybrid organizational forms cannot be considered a passing fashion; rather, they reflect contextual developments that have a profound significance for leading and organizing (Child and Rodrigues, 2003).

Views differ as to the potential effects of this shift. For some, the outcomes are entirely beneficial, freeing individuals from disabling bureaucratic rules and allowing them to be more responsive to dynamic market demands, and providing fertile ground for more democratic working (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002). Conversely, there are those such as Du Gay (2000), who fear that these shifts serve to encourage organizational members simply to respond to the rules of the free market, in which self-interest is encouraged at the expense of a moral obligation to others (Du Gay, 2000; Hendry, 2006). As such, positive bureaucratic values of accountability to the institution, loyalty to assigned responsibilities, and mitigation of arbitrariness through self-restrained, rule-governed action are deemed to be lost (Du Gay, 2000; Reed, 2005). Whilst this argument mainly concerns the issues of public sector management, and has accordingly been criticized for taking insufficient account of private sector dynamics (Parker, 2002), it does serve to highlight the dangers of moral codes developed through the actions of individual transformative leaders (Newman, 2005). In situations where leaders are grappling with a multiplicity of demands, it is unsurprising that such moral codes may be opaque rather than transparent (Johnson, 2006).

For other commentators, these types of ambiguity are an inevitable outcome of the tension between the post-bureaucratic discourse and the enduring nature of centralized bureaucratic control and institutionalized power (Thompson and Davidson, 1995). Thus, rather than witnessing the emergence of the networked organizational form, we are merely observing a periodic re-structuring of bureaucracy as it realigns itself to pressures of international capitalism. Managerial behaviour is still guided and circumscribed by a hierarchy of positions, such that both authorship and guardianship of rules rest with senior management. In consequence, bureaucratic rule enforcement is far from reformed, but is merely cleaned up as a form of 'bureaucracy lite' (Hales, 2002).

Arguably, the emergence of the concept of distributed leadership (Bennett et al., 2003; Gronn, 2002; Huffington et al., 2003) provides an understanding of how this tension between the perceived benefits of a free market approach to organizing, and the enduring nature of bureaucratic control, is enacted and resolved in practice. Deviating from traditional essentialist perspectives, where leadership is viewed as a possession of individuals, distributed leadership is conceptualized as a collective, inclusive, collaborative, and emergent process between networks and groups of individuals (Bennett et al., 2003). As such, it is seen to offer 'a powerful post-heroic presentation of leadership well suited to complex, changing and inter-dependent environments' (Bolden et al., 2006). Moreover, its essentially collaborative nature is perceived potentially to provide the basis for more democratic organizing. Research into the practice of distributed leadership by Bolden et al. (2006), Nelson et al. (2006), Huffington et al. (2003) and others suggests that this concept is now viewed by managers as an increasingly legitimate approach to organizing.

However, if the logic of moral community and distributed power is fundamentally at odds with a bureaucratic model of organizing (Hales, 2002), this may prove to be illusory. The tension inevitably created through the promotion of distributed models of leadership and governance is argued to heighten managerial feelings of vulnerability as protective processes and structures are dismantled (Huffington et al., 2003; Lindgren and Wåhlin, 1999). Hales (1999, 2002) suggests that managers assuage these anxieties by embracing and colluding in the institutional and bureaucratic routines that permit affirmation of self. Perhaps more telling is Robertson and Swan's (2003) notion of 'dependable autonomy', where identity control is exercised through a form of enforced democracy in which managers adopt apparently independent behaviours, but ones that ultimately align with the organization. The result neither enables moral faculties nor facilitates positive processes of accountability.

Distributed leadership then, may serve to disguise power differentials, offering an illusion of participation that obscures institutionalized power relationships (Bolden et al., 2006). Such conceptions of distributed leadership are therefore ultimately political (Bolden et al., 2006) and take insufficient account of power and political purpose in managerial action. As with much of the mainstream literature on leadership, 'theorists in the field have tended to treat the relationship between leadership and power as unproblematic' (Ray et al., 2004: 324), and far from freeing individuals from bureaucratic oppression, notions of distributed leadership may only serve to reinforce them.

Political Leadership

An emerging alternative, the idea of political organizational leadership, derived from political philosophy, takes greater account of institutionalized power relations. The analysis of political institutional leadership as a means of illuminating the practice of organizational leadership can be traced back to the seminal work of Burns (1978). However, in recent years there has been renewed interest in the potential advantages of such cross-disciplinary analysis (Butcher and Clarke, 2006;

Hendry, 2006; Morrell and Hartley, 2006; Peele, 2005). This nascent body of work should be seen as connected to, but distinct from, much of the current literature addressing the relationship between personality, politics, and leadership (see Vigoda-Gadot and Drory, 2006). What appears to distinguish this emerging field of enquiry is the view that the traditions of institutional political activity provide a potentially valuable perspective for informing the understanding of organizing in contemporary contexts, where divergent interests, contested authority, and institutionalized power are embedded but contradictory features.

From this perspective, power—and its continuous negotiated deployment through political discourse—is viewed as an explicit feature of managerial activity: the means of getting things done (Giddens, 1984); it is a 'democratic asset' that reflects the potential capacity of organizational members to influence the way they are governed (Novicevic and Harvey, 2004). This may be as much through challenge and deliberate conflict as reasoned debate. Progress towards organizational democracy (and thus de-bureaucratization) is conceptualized in terms of enhancing individual autonomy and the legitimization of processes that enable individuals to be self-reflective—to deliberate, judge, choose, and act upon courses of action (Held, 1987).

The basis for a parallel between institutional and organizational political contexts is illustrated by several authors. For example, Hartley and Branicki (2006) highlight the increasingly interrelated nature of political action at both organizational and institutional levels, as managers work with state representatives, consumer and pressure groups, and manage in a complex environment of legislation, regulation, and policy advice. In each context, the underlying political purpose is to mobilize support for vested interests by reconciling differences. Courpasson and Dany (2003) also find linkages between the tenets of contemporary entrepreneurial forms and democratic governance, noting in particular that personal accountability and responsibility to work within, and independently of, bureaucratic rules are key to both settings. Butcher and Clarke (2006) concur by highlighting the idea that the enactment of both institutional and organizational leadership is characterized by similar demands: the need to balance the drive for organizational cohesion and the productive exploitation of differences on the one hand, and the exercise of political interest and civic virtue on the other.

Approaching the subject from an organizational learning perspective, Coopey and Burgoyne (2000) make the case for the formal legitimization of a system of organizational political rights that could provide scope for the interplay between conflicting agendas inherent in organizing. Hendry (2006), in an examination of the moral vacuum created by the tension between market liberalization and bureaucratic controls, asks what suitable role models exist for managers struggling with the entrepreneurial demands of contemporary organizational forms. He concludes that the role of management has ample precedents in the traditions of responsible political leadership and governance. These can enable managers to develop an identity that 'empowers them to exercise judgement, to reconcile interests, and to build and lead communities of trust' (Hendry, 2006: 278).

Together with other commentators, Butcher and Clarke (2002, 2006) point out that an approach which takes the governance of democratic institutions as a legitimate starting point for business leaders appears dubious at first sight. Thus Cragg (2000) suggests that despite the increasing interest in stakeholder theory, the idea of business leaders representing the interests of a constituency, other than that of market capitalism, seems as yet embryonic. For Cragg, the stewardship role of business leaders has become institutionalized as a concern for organizational wealth and shareholder return rather than democratic principles of governance. In a similar vein, Coopey and Burgoyne (2000) note that whilst protecting the rights of democratic participation is an immutable aspect of political leadership, it is not reflected in a business context.

However, on closer scrutiny, these are mostly differences of degree rather than substance. Thus, on the one hand, political leaders within the institutions of democracy make considerable use of formal power in such roles as party officials or committee members. 'Modern parliaments are primarily representative bodies of those ruled with bureaucratic means' (Weber, 1978: 1407), and thus political parties and the executive institutions of government are organizations with hierarchies, in which formal power has a role in enabling political leaders to create coherence (Savage, 2005). On the other hand, from a stakeholder theory perspective, the formal authority of business leaders co-exists with their role as de facto representatives of constituent interests. As businesses become more complex and fragmented, the role of informal power derived from relationships and networks increases in importance (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998), and leadership thus becomes ever more the product of an informal social process (Ray et al., 2004). The appointment of leaders to senior positions is therefore dependent upon them representing the interests of a whole range of relationships, which if not recognized can lead to political turnover (Denis et al., 2001). Business leaders are thus required to become representative in their approach, a process further reinforced by increasing public scrutiny of corporate affairs.

As it is for political leaders in democratic institutions, the requirement both to coalesce and distribute power can only be achieved on the assumption that the leadership of organizations is intrinsically a political process. Since there is ample evidence that this is the case (Buchanan and Badham, 1999; Pfeffer, 1992), it follows that business leaders need to, and indeed appear to, embrace behaviours that not only include challenge, debate, lobbying, and coalition-building, but also more contentious activities such as information management and covert action. In other words, if some level of cohesion around core organizational values is to be achieved, these behaviours need to become as integral to business leadership as open dialogue and debate over differences. As has increasingly been recognized (Buchanan, 1999; Pfeffer, 1992), political behaviour in organizations, far from being dysfunctional, is central to the achievement of managerial goals. Moreover, it can constitute a vehicle to strengthen the social responsibility of managers (Grit, 2004). Again, as with the leadership of political institutions, responsible political behaviour can only be predicated on the assumption that business leaders possess civic virtue. There is no evidence to suggest that managers are any less

motivated by just causes, any less willing to forego self-serving ends, or any less prepared to distinguish between ethical and unethical means, than elected politicians (Michalos, 2001).

Case study evidence, albeit limited at this point, suggests that behaviour reflecting elements of political leadership is clearly observable in some organizational contexts. By way of illustration, Clarke and Meldrum (1999) highlight examples of embryonic political leadership in four organizational cases where the tensions created by bureaucratic control were mediated by leadership capabilities that included vision, personal risk-taking, subversion, and political astuteness. Denis et al. (2001), in their study of leadership and strategic change, note how the use of power through constructive political activity, in terms of compromise, lobbying, alliances, and collaborative solutions, is central to the leadership process. In a situation where power is diffuse and objectives divergent, levels of coherence were achieved by constellations of leaders who were sensitive to the needs of different constituencies in order to gain credibility and support. In particular, Denis et al. note the role of 'creative individuals and committed unified groups in proactively moving to make change happen' (2001: 834) in situations where the legitimacy of change initiatives could not be taken for granted.

In a similar vein, Clarke's (2006) empirical study of senior managers' leadership approaches attempted to identify how individual executives cope with diverse and competing interests. Responses varied from those managers reflecting a hierarchical bureaucratic mindset to those demonstrating behaviours consistent with the political leadership mode described here (see Table 1). In the absence of any formally agreed model of working, the latter group of 'representative' leaders, in seeking to work with the tensions of plurality, arrived at their own conclusions largely irrespective of organizational circumstance. In consequence, they tended to see themselves as being independent of the goals of their organizations, whilst also working within them.

This cluster of managers was delineated from the rest of the sample by a combination of factors. First, they each viewed diversity of interest as a critical organizing principle to be encouraged in order to enhance organizational effectiveness. Second, this orientation encouraged a mindset in which individuals felt able to make a personal difference by legitimately pursuing their own goals, often in contravention of hierarchically imposed priorities. This perspective was balanced by an orientation in which personal success was inextricably interwoven with the success of others' agendas, suggesting that these managers attached real value to the achievement of collective goals. Third, in order to ameliorate accusations of self-interest, individuals attached importance to building legitimacy of action through transparency of motive.

In the research cited above (Clarke, 2006), those managers reflecting elements of political leadership tended to define their identity and autonomy in relation to others, suggesting a predisposition toward social fairness. Galunic and Eisenhardt (2001) view this as a key element in the development of organizations as social communities. Courpasson and Dany, quoting Selznick, note that for a community to be strong there must be a desire to further the interests of others: not merely to give

them the consideration they deserve as moral equals (2003: 1249). The behaviour of those managers in Clarke's study operating from a political leadership perspective might be seen as indicative of the formation of just such communities.

Table 1 – Leadership behaviours

From rational leadership	To political leadership
Preference for formal meetings and processes	Extensive use of informal processes, e.g. covert activity, corridor meetings
Focus on senior management approval/ buy-in	Focus on working with personal agendas
Relationship-building focussed at senior levels	Relationship-building and networking at all levels
Debating and challenging amongst small coterie	Encouraging debate and challenge at all levels
Carefully prescribed delegation and empowerment	Providing others with space and autonomy to experiment, stimulating bottom-up change
Tendency to influence through operational control	Influencing by focussing on broad direction
Working on formally agreed priorities/ issues	Working outside of agreed responsibilities, often on unofficial initiatives
Challenging through established processes	Challenging the status quo, irreverent and subversive
Exclusive and Involving of few	Inclusive and involving of many
Representing legitimate organizational interests, e.g. own department, customers	Representing the interests of quasilegitimate constituencies, often external to own responsibilities, e.g. other functions, unofficial issues

However, it is necessary to recognize that critical theorists have been concerned to highlight the dark side of communities that tend to imply or assume consensus at the expense of individual difference (Reedy, 2003; Reynolds, 2000). Thus, it is important to stress that the conception of community discussed here is very much concerned with the 'politics of difference' (Reynolds, 2000: 71), where internal differences are accepted as being inevitable and not always resolvable. This orientation is similar to the notion of an 'arena' described by Burgoyne and Jackson (1997) in the context of management learning, in which 'differences "meet", are fought over and reconciled and reconfigured into new groupings, factions and alliances' (p. 61).

The acknowledgement by political leaders that organizations are composed of a multiplicity of conflicting human values and ethical principles implies the concomitant risk of an 'ethically irrational' social world (Watson, 2003, citing Weber), in which managers are not able to access a single set of

principles to solve their moral dilemmas. 'Even such simple questions as the extent to which Table 1 Leadership behaviours From rational leadership To political leadership Preference for formal meetings and processes Extensive use of informal processes, e.g. covert activity, corridor meetings Focus on senior management approval/buy-in Focus on working with personal agendas Relationship-building focussed at senior levels Relationship-building and networking at all levels Debating and challenging amongst small coterie Encouraging debate and challenge at all levels Carefully prescribed delegation and empowerment Providing others with space and autonomy to experiment, stimulating bottom-up change Tendency to influence through operational control Influencing by focussing on broad direction Working on formally agreed priorities/issues Working outside of agreed responsibilities, often on unofficial initiatives Challenging through established processes Challenging the status quo, irreverent and subversive Exclusive and Involving of few Inclusive and involving of many Representing legitimate organizational interests, e.g. own department, customers Representing the interests of quasilegitimate constituencies, often external to own responsibilities, e.g. other functions, unofficial issues an end should sanction unavoidable means [...] or how conflicts between several concretely conflicting ends are to be arbitrated, are entirely matters of choice and compromise' (Weber, 1949: 19). Nevertheless, an individual manager 'faced with the ethical challenges arising from having to deal with the ethical ambiguity of the social world [...] will necessarily become a moral actor in their job' (Watson, 2003: 173). Implicit in the political orientation described here is the notion that, rather than simply pursue the opportunities of self-interest provided by free market deregulation as suggested by Reed (2005), or defer to bureaucratic rules in order to assuage feelings of vulnerability indicated by Hales (1999), managers who embrace the political leadership model actively attempt to reconcile the ethical pressures and moral dilemmas among which they find themselves. 'The moral agent is one who enacts agency rather than one whose actions are considered to be wholly determined structurally' (Clegg et al., 2007: 112). These moral struggles in themselves create a resilient trust that has the potential to reconstitute the cohesive ties and community association seen to be lost in the drive for market responsiveness and empowered individualism (Courpasson and Dany, 2003).

From this perspective, political leadership has the potential to enable a more fruitful reinterpretation of bureaucracy that moves beyond the hegemony of 'bureaucracy lite'. This is not to suggest that political leadership will in some way resolve the tensions between bureaucracy and liberal market forces, since these are inevitable. Nor do we imply that managers will be freed from the constraints of institutionalized power relations, but rather that political leadership may provide a 'relational synthesis' (Clegg, 2003: 378), in which progress toward moral organizational communities may be made by going beyond the notion that more of one necessitates less of the other. Ferdinand (2004) has criticized this emerging model of political leadership (Butcher and Clarke, 2002) as being insufficiently plural and too centred on a managerial elite. However, some commentators (see Clegg, Kornberger et al., 2006; Fenwick, 2005) note that an undue delineation between managers and non-managers is unnecessarily dichotomous in the face of increasing organizational polyphony. Ferdinand's observations may therefore be overly critical.

Rather than justify further the notion of political leadership here, our intention from this point onwards is to consider the possibilities for its practice in managerial contexts. At a time of increasing concern over the role of organizations in society, and the attendant consequences for corporate governance and social responsibility, the issue of who determines the moral voice in organizations is of growing interest. As democratic systems of governance ensure and protect the right to participation, an explicit acknowledgement of the political dimension of leadership may serve to legitimize this same principle (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000; Courpasson and Dany, 2003). In doing so, a political leadership orientation can accelerate the mediation between individuals and organizations in a way that enables participation in the establishment of moral communities. Moreover, this kind of self-organization appears increasingly to be viewed as critical for encouraging the necessary levels of innovation and continual reconfiguration of strategic capabilities for sustained competitive advantage in dynamic markets (Child and McGrath, 2001; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). Arguably, then, there is an increasing imperative for the practice of political leadership.

Developing Political Leadership

To extend the notion of political leadership beyond theoretical discourse and embryonic empirical practice depends upon its widespread adoption as both an ethical and effective orientation to organizing. Yet to the extent that an imperative is emerging for its adoption, as we have sought to elucidate above, the deep tension between totalitarian bureaucratic values and democratic systems of governance serves inevitably to inhibit and limit this possibility. The remainder of the paper is concerned with how this cycle of reinforcement may be addressed. It considers specifically the role of management learning in this process on the basis that, as a mechanism of intervention, management learning has an established legitimacy as a challenge to management thinking (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000). Moreover, it is more easily introduced and is more direct in impact than policy interventions.

Nonetheless, criticisms of management learning practices abound, including there being: an undue focus on analysis at the expense of wisdom (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002); a superficial and narrow managerialist perspective (MacDonald, 2003); a neglect of the emotional domain of learning (Watson, 1996); a need for more external perspective (Conger and Xin, 2000); and a need to acknowledge the politics of management education (Grey, 2004). Thus for many commentators, management learning reflects the instrumental rationality of bureaucracy and casts the manager as morally neutral technician through which the world can be analysed and controlled (Hendry, 2006).

Corporate management learning professionals are caught in this cycle of reinforcement, perhaps above all because their interventions are seen to provide senior managers with effective ways to align people to corporate goals. Moreover, the 'truth, trust, love, and collaboration' approach of management learning professionals to organizational change (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992) helps them to create the ritual and symbolism that contributes to the legitimization of the management

learning agenda (Kamoche, 2000) and to overcome their frequent lack of credibility (Guest and King, 2004) with senior management.

Management learning professional associations in principle are independent of the imperatives faced by corporate professionals and could provide the necessary protected opportunities and diversity of view for the dislocation and reframing of existing approaches. However, the limited empirical work on the impact of such professional associations (Farndale and Brewster, 2005) suggests that training and development activities are mechanisms of reproduction rather than change (Greenwood et al., 2002). Whilst management learning professional associations usually have a reform agenda, this is often in response to change initiated by their corporate members rather than as a result of their own mandate (Greenwood et al., 2002).

Yet for the management learning profession to have had such a reinforcing effect, thereby failing to impact on the development of contemporary management practices (Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002), suggests that the profession can also have a significant influence on future practices. Received wisdom suggests that at the pinnacle of management learning is the university business school sector. The significance of this must not be underestimated, for in contemporary society the university as an institution is considered to represent a value well beyond its functional role (Delanty, 2001). University education, more than a thousand years old, is deeply embedded in society as a transformer of science and culture (Delanty, 2001), and business education is considered by some to be one of the successes of the modern world (Lorenzi, 2004)—a source of social prosperity (Bilimoria, 2000; Hubbard, 2006). However, perhaps because of their institutional significance, university business schools most certainly have their critics. They stand accused of de-legitimizing management by substituting market logic for professional logic (Khurana, 2007) and ‘doubts remain about the schools’ viability, their intellectual standing, the qualities of their students and their contribution to society’ (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007: 196). Nonetheless, whatever the view of their contribution, as their institutional status has grown, business schools may be said to hold a symbolic value and the capacity to exert a disproportionate influence on future management behaviour.

Such a highly politicized agenda would only be admissible on the understanding that management education is inherently a political process (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000) and that many of the shortcomings of management learning can be attributed to a failure to acknowledge the restricted set of values at play in much of its execution (Grey, 2004). Just such an orientation is reflected in the development of Critical Management Theory (CMT) approaches to management learning that explicitly seek to challenge existing management practice rather than sustain it (Grey and Mitev, 1995). As such, a critical pedagogy has much to contribute to the design of management learning processes that seek to dislocate and reposition managerial identities.

However, the CMT pedagogy itself has attracted criticisms from both inside and outside of its own tradition that question the practicality of its application. For example, CMT has been taken to task for

neglecting workable proposals in favour of 'grand utopian utterances' (Gibson, cited in Reynolds, 1999: 177) and for promulgating its ideas with such authority that it silences the dialogue it seeks to promote (Alvesson and Wilmott, 1996). Perhaps as a result, Reynolds notes that a critical perspective has yet to make significant inroads into business school curricula (Reynolds, 1999: 174).

In response to this problem, a more pragmatic theme has emerged in the development of critical thinking in management learning (Clegg, Kornberger et al., 2006; Fenwick, 2005; Watson, 2001). In essence, this approach still seeks to reject the view of management as a morally and politically neutral technical activity, but it also takes account of the basic logic of the management educator's role to improve the quality of managerial activity (Watson, 2001). Perriton and Reynolds (2004) describe this as a 'fourth wave of educational practice', in which the aim is to encourage emancipation through a *refusal* to accept a managerialist standpoint. For Watson, the value of this position lies both in being able to question the notion of absolute truth reflected in rational and unitary thinking, and remaining open to the notion that some theories may be 'truer' than others. In practice, therefore, some guides to action may be more effective in certain circumstances (Watson, 2001: 387).

On this basis, and building upon the emerging spirit of pragmatism in the CMT literature, some suggestions can be outlined for the basic pedagogic principles required to develop a political leadership mindset. The following list is intended to illustrate the practical possibilities for such development rather than propose new directions. Fuller descriptions from which these principles are drawn can be found in Bowman et al., 2004; Clarke and Butcher, 2006; Dehler et al., 2001; Densten and Gray, 2001; Grey, 2004; Lewis and Dehler, 2000; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Reynolds, 1998; and Watson, 2001.

Principles for the Development of Political Leadership

- Encourage critical reflection about processes of power, claims of rationality, and organizational unity, raising questions about the interests of those who determine the production and dissemination of knowledge and questioning theoretical assumptions and professional practice.
- Develop managerial self-insight so that individuals become 'aware of their projections of their internal world onto the external world and how the external world activates their internal fantasies and emotions' (Bowman et al., 2004: 19).
- Cast organizations, management and leadership as problematic, incorporating critique into the analysis of managerial tools, theories, and ideas from different perspectives, surfacing paradox and contradiction between equally well-based organizational assumptions and raising complexity of individual thinking.
- Consider managerial work as a social and political practice, politics as a legitimate process to protect and promote diversity and voice, as a means of getting things done, and as a natural consequence of plural organizational forms.
- Value dialogue as a process for accepting and respecting different views, and as a trigger for social action, learning, and unlearning.

- Construct organizations as communities of communities that forge links with outsiders, drive innovation, facilitate multiple identity formation, and encourage a voluntaristic orientation.

The Business School Agenda

If, as has been argued, the university business school is the most likely environment in which these principles of political leadership development might legitimately flourish, how far beyond fanciful conjecture do the possibilities extend? Since it is widely acknowledged that there are now many converging pressures likely to impact significantly on both the demand and supply of business school education over the next decade (Hawawini, 2005), we suggest here that these changes may present possibilities for business school faculty to explore the principles of political leadership in practice. The final sections of this article consider these changes and how they may influence the business school agenda, and conclude that progress may best be made by management learning professionals when they themselves adopt political leadership behaviours.

Changes in Demand

Against the backdrop of mounting criticism about the relevance and effectiveness of much business education, business schools also have to contend with significant transformation in their markets caused by changes in global demand, technology, deregulation, and demographic shifts (Friga et al., 2003; Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007). Lorange (2005) argues that in the emerging networked society, students will be more demanding of educators, whilst for Hawawini, 'The challenge for these schools is to go beyond delivering a degree. They must deliver a life-changing experience' (2005: 778). When set against the increasing influence of business school rankings, these pressures for differentiation and convenience suggest an increasing focus on product innovation and experimentation (Westerbeck, 2004) that can provide opportunities for creating alternative approaches to development.

In addition, it has been noted in the forgoing discussion that business leaders increasingly accept the need for their organizations to be more innovative, adaptable, and devolved. This requirement is also bolstered by commentators calling for more inclusive corporate governance (Child and Rodrigues, 2003; Courpasson and Dany, 2003), organizational democracy (Harrison and Freeman, 2004), and management education that takes greater account of business ethics (Gioia, 2002). Hawawini (2005) believes these issues can be addressed by a greater determination to develop 'societal skills' in managers, defined as the ability to make business decisions that are ethical and take account of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development.

Research into the orientations of corporate management learning professionals suggests that there may also be a growing willingness to challenge the current orthodoxy of unitary approaches to organizing to be found in many business school curricula. Perriton's (2000) study of management development practitioners revealed a range of heretical management behaviours reflecting a 'pedagogy of doubt'. These professionals were aware of the power inherent in their roles and

encouraged a critique of the management theories they promoted. The study also identified 'management liberators' who, through their development activities, sought to replace a managerialist identity with a wider conception of self, not limited to occupational role. Similarly, research by Clarke et al. (2008) identifies management learning leaders who are highly conscious about the centrality of power in assessing and working with vested interests, and who eschew rational unitary approaches, preferring instead explicitly political strategies that rely on stealth, relationship management, and bottom-up support in order to effect change. Such management learning professionals are likely to favour business school programmes that serve their own heretical agenda.

Changes in Supply

The competitive pressures in the business education marketplace are forcing business schools to consider how best to 'form the future, not simply follow it' (Westerbeck, 2004). In keeping with this proactive stance, Bennis and O'Toole (2005: 103) argue that business schools must now use the strategies that they promote to their business clients. Many business schools are devoting ever more attention to revising MBA products (Friga et al., 2003), and there has been a significant growth in recent years in customized executive education focussed on addressing complex organizational problems (Conger and Xin, 2000). In addition, open enrolment executive (OEE) programmes offer real opportunities for innovation and experimentation (Bailey et al., 2003).

In dynamic markets, business schools need to respond quickly to shifting and temporary demand. Conger and Xin (2000) note a number of challenges for executive education in the next few years which include: the need for managers to possess wider perspectives that are external to individual industries; a focus on future-oriented competencies; increased line involvement in determining development needs; and action learning involving external and diverse inputs.

As governments continue to reduce subsidies to public universities, the issue of alternative financing may also encourage reform. Moreover, with the growing sophistication of digital marketing, university-based executive education business units with focussed product portfolios have the opportunity both to lead and respond to changing customer demand. These can capitalize on emerging niche markets, such as 'The Networked Organization' or 'Business Ethics', and very much reflect the move from 'just in case' to 'just for me' development (Friga et al., 2003). Such portfolios may also appeal to the heretics and irreverent corporate sponsors identified by Perriton (2000) and Clarke et al. (2008) as potential vehicles for encouraging challenge and change within their organizations.

One further factor that may influence innovation in business schools is the increasing difficulty of recruiting and retaining good-quality faculty (Nemetz and Cameron, 2005). With staff morale an issue in many business schools (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007), research by Verhaegen (2005) has added significance. Covering deans from 69 business schools in 18 countries, Verhaegen's findings indicate that deans rank the need for innovation and progressiveness as being most important in recruiting and retaining talent. They also believe that it is within their power to influence this factor. This

research also encompassed 347 business school faculty in 38 schools from 12 counties. Responses from faculty indicated that academic freedom was considered the most important factor in attracting and retaining talent. Willingness on behalf of deans to respond to this key driver, and to encourage such innovation, further suggests the possibility of change in the institutional template.

Consequences

Clearly, the degree to which these demand and supply trends might encourage the wider adoption of the pedagogy described here will to a significant degree be dependent on the educational orientation of deans and senior administrators, but it will also be influenced by the aspirations of those management learning academics responsible for programme design and delivery. Together with the increasing debate within academia (notably amongst the CMT community) as to the role of management learning, the shifts in demand and supply may provide the impetus for change in business school curricula.

Watson (2001), in particular, has been vocal about the need for the business school community to accept the logic of its role to deliver improved managerial practice whilst still being critical of its enactment. Perriton and Reynolds (2004) describe such an orientation as akin to 'colonisers' who, whilst working within the dominant rational ideology, refuse to act in the spirit of managerialism and are active in debating its reform. Examples of existing autonomous action within academic communities are provided by Räsänen and Mäntylä (2001), who report a deliberate strategy to resist pressures to conform to centrally determined priorities in a Finnish university, and by Gustavs and Clegg's (2005) account of the introduction of work-based learning in an Australian university. The new competitive pressures in management education might thus be used by politically motivated management learning academics to exploit the loopholes and contradictions (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996) of unitary education values and processes.

As an illustration of how this might work in practice, open enrolment programmes offer business school academics wishing to challenge rational orthodoxy the opportunity to engage closely with practising business leaders. Working on such programmes, which demand high 'practicality', requires that management educators find new approaches to presenting their ideas that genuinely resonate with the lived experience of managing. For example, debating the value of organizational politics as a democratic asset would surface issues of institutionalized power, conflict, vested interests, and choice (Fenwick, 2005). Such an approach reflects a view taken by Kreiner (2003) and others: that educators must be able to discuss issues of rational organization using methods that require managers to think in non-rational ways.

Conclusion

For a number of commentators, one of the central issues in reconciling pluralistic and bureaucratic forms of organizing lies in the absence of a coherent model of leadership (Clegg, Kornberger et al., 2006; Hendry, 2006; Khurana, 2007). The intention here has been to stimulate debate about the

notion of political leadership as a contribution to this analysis, and to consider ways in which this approach might be explored by management learning professionals, above all in the business school sector.

In order to exploit these opportunities, business school faculty may well have to become more business-focussed and exercise higher levels of political savvy themselves in order to carve out independent leadership development processes and deliver them successfully. Hendry (2006) describes this type of opportunity in terms of management learning professionals needing to become the leaders they seek to create. Thus, it is open to business school faculty to see themselves as political leaders, representing the emancipatory interests of executive programme participants, the business school curriculum, and the organizational interests of sponsoring companies. This view is consistent with Khurana's (2007) aspiration for the business school to become a community of stakeholders, and Starkey and Tiratsoo's view of the future business school as an *agora*; an adaptable organization composed of multiple stakeholders, 'a centre of political, commercial, social and philosophical activity, a place of congregation, a forum for citizens...' (2007: 212). Such a vision requires a different kind of 'faculty' who will need to be more politically able and to go against the flow of simply following either the market or prevailing academic business model. Such leaders will need to build trust and community in order to develop a collective sense of identity (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007). In this context, such political leaders would, like their corporate management learning counterparts, be working through the 'ethical ambiguity' of management education—neither purely responding to market deregulation or the bureaucratic rules of universities, but seeking a 'relational synthesis' in which they inevitably become 'moral actors' in their roles. The alternative pedagogy outlined in this paper might then become both the end and means by which business schools can have greater impact on the lives of managers.

Applying the tenets of political leadership to the business school management learning agenda would at the very least require:

- Creating opportunities for faculty to experiment with the development principles identified here and use the outcomes to promote the efficacy of political leadership.
- Challenging management learning professional associations to embrace an independent reform agenda.
- Equipping executive programme participants with the political acumen to challenge rational approaches to development within their own organizations, and to act as sponsors of that development.
- Developing relationships with heretical corporate management learning professionals and providing them with opportunities to implement development designs that are challenging of vested interests.
- Engaging with different potential stakeholders to generate new perspectives on leadership development, perhaps even governmental politicians.

Micro-processes of change, encouraged by management learning professionals, do not overturn institutional templates for organizing and managing. They need to be underpinned by policy and regulatory frameworks. But they may promote and reinforce a wind of change precisely because they 'can have more direct relevance to the *lived experience* of people who are continually engaged in local struggles' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996: 176, their emphasis). So although it is often observed that bureaucratic organization has guided managerial values for at least two centuries, if not much longer, it is equally important to stress that in the past 20 years there has been growing debate and experimentation with new organizing principles. As with any social change, the evolution discussed here should to be seen as the beginning of a process that has the potential to accelerate.

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Political leadership, bureaucracies and business schools: A comfortable union?

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