Demythologising 'Leadership': The Trojan Horse of Managerialism

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Almost 60 years ago, Douglas McGregor (1958) noted that the eagerness with which new ideas in organizational theory are received and the extent to which many of them become fads are indications of the dissatisfaction with the status quo. More recently, Klaus Weber argues that management scholars should 'study fads and fashions, not chase them' (Birkinshaw, Healey, Suddaby & Weber, 2014, p. 51). Taking his argument seriously, in this chapter I argue that 'leadership' is a myth generated by, and sustaining of, the managerialist project. Before proceeding though I want to be clear on what this chapter is, and more importantly, what it is not. To being with, this chapter is not a critique of 'leadership'. I have done that before (Eacott, 2013, 2015) as have many others (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Lakomski, 2005; Pfeffer, 1977). This is not to say that critique is absent, rather it is not my primary argument. Instead, what I am arguing is that 'leadership' is at once, a product and producer of the contemporary managerialist condition. 'Leadership' has become that which is desired, if not necessary, as part of the contemporary social condition. Through its seductive agentic rhetoric, that of individual will and choice, not to mention the aspiration for something 'better', when positioned in opposition with the technicist, alienating and emotionless administration of the bureaucracy, 'leadership' has become the dominant ideology of educational leadership, management and administration.

The use of 'myth' in the title is deliberate. If we take a myth to be a story used to explain a social or natural phenomenon that is widely held yet based on either a false belief/idea or involving supernatural beings/events, then 'leadership' fits the profile. As with others, I consider 'leadership' to be little more than a methodological artefact (Eacott, 2013, 2015; Pfeffer, 1977). It is a social construction more so than a material reality, one that relies on a pre-existing assumption of its existence yet a post-event identification of where it took place. These underlying generative assumptions, for the most part, remain obscured from the researcher in educational administration due to the minimal problematizing of their own intellectual gaze (Eacott, 2015). This is not to say that 'leadership' is not a force to be reckoned with, rather just the opposite. Despite the apparent flaws in the conceptualisation of this mythological 'leadership', its popularity, expansion and desirability have arguably never been greater. As a self-sustaining ideology, when questions are raised regarding its utility as a theoretical and/or practical resource, such as those challenging the possibly of an individualistic notion to engage with the scope and scale of more collective forms of organisational governance and group dynamics, it has expanded its reach through a proliferation of adjectives – each apparently demarcating a 'new' space or form for this flexible, dynamic and inexhaustible construct.

'Leadership' also exhibits an exclusionary or elitist principle despite any perceived inclusivity in the 'everyone is a leader' rhetoric. A 'leader', one who enacts 'leadership', is positioned as distinct from the 'follower', that passive soul who submits to others and slaves away within the structures of society. The 'follower' is one of a collective, an under-class of society, a critical mass of social actors whose labour is constrained and who lack the agentic freedoms of the 'leader'. This 'leadership' is however enacted, and it is a personal choice to take it up. It is available to everyone, irrespective of any biological, political, cultural or socio-economic marker. If an individual actor, or collection of actors, fails to take up the opportunity then this is a personal failure – such is the logic of the 'leadership' ideology.

Notwithstanding the recent proliferation of adjectives expressing more collective notions, 'leadership' is an individualised and distinction creating ideology. There cannot be too many 'leaders' otherwise the idea loses it rarity. 'Leaders' are an elite upper echelon of society. To expand its membership is to dilute the value of 'leadership'. It remains a class based system for the social structure, embraced by business schools yet shied away from by educational administration departments.

Working within the *relational* approach to scholarship in educational administration that I am advancing here and elsewhere (Eacott, 2015), for the remainder of this chapter I return to Weber's challenge to study fads and fashions and not chase them. After outlining the *relational* approach, I engage with, albeit briefly, the rise of 'leadership' in educational administration before building my argument around the epistemic imperialism that has allowed for the mythology of 'leadership' to spread like a contagious pathogen across the globe and how this has sought to bring rationality and order (much like the bureaucracy) to explain away the messiness of the social world, obscuring the spaces in-between and creating unhelpful binaries. Before concluding I resist the all too easy step of making this another critique of 'leadership' and seek to productively theorise the mythology of 'leadership' in ways which contribute, if not think anew, the intellectual space that is 'leadership' in educational administration.

THEORETICAL RESOURCES

This intellectual heritage of the *relational* approach is eclectic, drawing heavily on French social theory (e.g. Pierre Bourdieu, Luc Boltanski), management scholars (e.g. Peter Dachler, Dian Marie Hoskings, Mary Uhl-Bien), also critical management studies, political science, organisational studies, philosophy, and given my own disciplinary location, recognised educational administration thinkers such as Richard Bates, Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski, Thomas Greenfield, and contemporaries such as Helen Gunter, Pat Thomson, Eugenie Samier and Fenwick English. Significantly, in bringing critical pluralism to scholarship, I engage with what I see as the key theoretical problem of the legitimation of the social world and its empirical manifestation in the organising of education and educational labour. Through this theoretical and empirical focus, a *relational* approach investigates how the production of knowledge of the legitimacy, effectiveness, efficiency, and morality of organising is embedded and embodied in the practices of organising. In doing so, questions are raised regarding the extent to which existing ways of thinking are generative or limiting of alternate ways of being. As a means of bringing this *relational* approach into conversation with spread of 'leadership' as the dominant ideology of the discipline, the key features of the *relational* approach are:

- The centrality of 'leadership' in the social world creates an ontological complicity in researchers (and others) that makes it difficult to epistemologically break from ordinary language;
- Rigorous social scientific inquiry calls for questioning the very foundations on which labels such as 'leadership' are legitimised;
- The contemporary capitalist condition is constantly shaping and shaped by, the image of organisational labour;
- Foregrounding social relations enables the overcoming of the contemporary, and arguably enduring, organising tensions of individualism and collectivism, structure and agency; and

- In doing so, there is a productive – rather than merely critical – space to theorise educational administration.

The type of analysis made possible by this *relational* approach offers a means of crafting theoretically charged narratives illuminating the situated nature of knowledge production and organising. The work of institutional actors is the ongoing construction of the social world through the embedding and embodying of it with meaning centred on what is considered legitimate action. Therefore, change in ideology can only take place through shifts in the logics whereby alternatives are deemed appropriate. For the purpose of this chapter – arguing that 'leadership' is a myth of the dominant ideology of the discipline – a *relational* approach provides an analytical lens for interrogating the social relations that define the ongoing work of organising educational labour. Specifically, this *relational* approach opens up analysis that brings to the level of discourse the underlying generative features of knowledge production. In doing so, this approach provides a means of sketching an alternate narrative, or logic, whereby the legitimacy of what it means to 'lead' can be rethought.

THE RISE OF 'LEADERSHIP'

There is a stream of scholarship arguing that changes in economic conditions bring about parallel changes in administrative rhetoric and this relationship is most observable during periods of economic expansion and contraction (Hartley, 2010; O'Connor, 1973). The rise of 'leadership' is no exception. It was during the 1960s that organizational theorists thought of 'leadership' as worthy of serious study (Podolny, Khurana & Besharov, 2010), but as Barbara Kellerman (2013) argues, the 'leadership' industry gained significant momentum during the 1970s when corporate America was fearful of competition from abroad (notably Japan). It came to prominence as a response to the dehumanising effects of bureaucracy and Tayloristic management, those which were perceived to limit agency and creativity. An obsession with change, adaption, flexibility, improvement and vision left a significant impression on the psyche of the general population. Becoming a 'leader' is presumed to 'be a path to power and money; a medium for achievement; and a mechanism for creating change, sometimes, though hardly always, for the common good' (Kellerman, 2013, p. 136). 'Leadership' has reached a point of not only dominance, but came to be *the* field once known as educational administration. This is well recognised (Bush, 2004; Oplatka, 2010) and sustained as an increasing number of candidates pass through the academy in preparation (e.g. master's and EdD) and research (e.g. PhD) programmes. The 'leadership' worldview has influenced the ways in which problems are constituted but surprisingly been decoupled from broader sociological and organisational analysis. The relationship between economic conditions and education is little explored (Carpentier, 2004; Hartley, 2010) and even less so in educational administration (Eacott & Norris, 2014).

Eric Abrahamson (1997) classifies two major rhetorics of management: i) the *rational* which focuses on standardisation, hierarchy, audit, performance management and efficiency; and ii) the *normative* which appeals to the social and emotional needs of employees. A similar argument is made by Paul Adler and Charles Heckscher (2006) who refer to 'control' and 'commitment' approaches. Within the educational administration dialogue, this division is arguably similar to the Tayloristic / scientific stream and that grounded in the human relations movement. Building on the work of James O'Connor (1973) and David Hartley (2010), this is significant in thinking through the rise of 'leadership'. The late 1960s and 1970s was a period of large-scale social distrust, reduced confidence, and arguably rejection of restrictive social structures – notably the bureaucracy. Although as Lawrie Angus (1993) notes, it is a

little ironic that calls for 'leadership' came at a time when many commentators were displaying a lack of confidence in public and private institutions and their 'leadership'. With an increasingly global economy, organisations, and particularly social institutions such as education, were no longer confined to national boundaries. With the advent of Post-Fordist models of management globalisation shifted the scale of the industrialised world and the factory floor. 'Leadership' was argued for as the difference between average (or below) and above average performance. Unlike conservative capitalist accounts which rely heavily on subordination, alienation and exploitation of a proletariat by an elite class, 'leadership' offers the aspiration of availability, accessible to those who strive hard enough, all the while hiding the subtlety that makes the achievement of that unlikely. To think with Karl Marx, people (followers) work hard to avoid the negative consequences (remaining a follower), even if that labour advances the advantage already held by the elites.

Social structures are central to 'leadership', management and administration discourses. Talcott Parsons (1956), among others, argues that the very existence of organisations is a consequence of a division of labour in society. These organisations are sustained through the production of specialised outputs that are either consumed or utilised in further production. For the most part, and based on our internalisation of this orthodoxy, organisations are thought of as having a class of actors (e.g. 'leaders', management, administration) that bear responsibility for a certain type of organisational affairs (e.g. strategy, policy making, decision-making). 'Leadership', through the provision of direction and vision for a better future – particularly if accompanied with an incremental plan for perpetual improvement – appeals to the rational, yet simultaneously calls upon the charisma and motivation required to reach the social and emotional needs of other social actors. That is, 'leadership' is a hybrid (or mutant) management rhetoric. This also makes 'leadership' an onto-epistemological rather than empirical problem. Let's consider two major assumptions embedded in the 'leadership' literatures:

i)   'leadership' is *the* difference between organisational outcomes; therefore,
ii)   'leadership' is *present* in organisations achieving above norm outcomes.

Neither assumption calls into question the origin/s or self-sustaining nature of the ideology. The assumptions reflect a pre-existing belief in the existence of 'leadership'. Given my argument that 'leadership' is a social construction rather than material object, this acceptance of its existence is based on an epistemically objective truth rather than an ontologically objective truth. The second assumption completes the circular logic of the epistemically objective truth. If performance is the result of 'leadership', then 'leadership' is present where there is above average performance. I want to call, ever so briefly, on John Searle's (1995) work on *institutional facts* to make this point around the complicity of 'leadership'. Searle's argument is based on the notion that 'X counts as Y in context C'. Here, the expression 'counts as' indicates the imposition of a status that people collectively attach to a function. In bringing this into conversation with my argument, organisations are 'C', performance 'x' and 'y' is 'leadership'. Alternatively, 'performance' counts as 'leadership' in the context of 'organisations'. If we agree that performance counts as 'leadership' in organisations as I contend is the dominant ideological argument then individuals and collectives are in a position to determine if the statement 'A is a high performing (effective / successful, etc) 'leader' in education' is an epistemically objective truth. With such status functions, researchers, as with everyday people, are able to make true claims in an epistemically objective sense, and construct internally consistent collections (e.g. theories) of these claims about objects in the world that have genuine, and somewhat defensible, explanatory power.

My argument being that 'leadership' is a social construction. It comes into being through human cognition and does not exist without human construction. The at-scale acceptance of 'leadership' as the distinction between organisations is grounded in a time when there was heightened anxiety surrounding the performance of domestic institutions in an increasingly global economy. This is what enabled Edward Deming's (1982) *Out of the crisis* to bring Tayloristic thinking into a new time, however, to move beyond Fordist managerial structures and engage with the 'new' problems of the time required something more. Enter 'leadership' (which incidentally was one of Deming's 14 principles). It offers the integration of the human, the subjective, an aspiration of the human spirit to overcome adversity that appeals to the social and emotional needs of the masses. The popularity of 'leadership' is built on its tapping into the human desire to matter, to make a difference.

It was during the 1970s that scholarship in educational administration was experiencing its first major onto-epistemological debate since the rise of the *Theory Movement* some 20 years earlier. In this case, Thomas Barr Greenfield's challenge to logical empiricism[1] and calls for a 'humane science' (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993) changed the nature of dialogue and debate. How then did 'leadership' assume the ascendency? How did a new label emerge and come to dominate the language? I contend that it is because the debate between the *Theory Movement* and the humanist alternative was frequently limited to epistemological tensions (see Willower & Forsyth, 1999) rather than the ontological conditions which give rise to our understandings. As a result, 'leadership' research became somewhat of a vehicle for making epistemological claims rather than interrogating the ontological foundations of knowledge claims about 'leadership'. The intellectual divisions – primarily sustained through parallel research traditions – of educational administration, which continue today, are more concerned with how one comes to know 'leadership' rather than what makes it possible in the first place. Our complicity with the projection and ongoing maintenance of 'leadership' remains, for the most part, untouched.

EPISTEMIC IMPERIALISM

David Harvey (2005) argues that European and American capitalism has a tendency towards expansionism and the continued production of space. Unlike earlier forms of expansion that relied on the establishment of colonial outposts, contemporary capitalist ideologies do not require physical infrastructure, instead calling on symbolic infrastructure achieved through the legitimation of key constructs – in this case 'leadership'. With the incorporation of the former Eastern-Bloc into the global economy in 1989, and arguably increasing with emerging and developing economies, Anglophone rhetoric has been, to use Stephen Carney (2008), 'deterritorialised'. It is no-longer possible, if it ever was, to locate *the* leader and/or the origins of 'leadership' as an ideology. There is however little doubt that 'leadership' serves to sustain existing power structures despite any aspirational overtones. This domination theme does not however descend from the elite as it would in a bureaucratic administration but is instead a projection giving the appearance of being removed from any individual or class of social actors (mindful that such a separation of actors and context is highly problematic and

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[1] Greenfield's challenge is generally accepted as beginning with his 1974 address at the International Intervisitation Programme on Educational Administration (IIP) in Bristol (England), however for others, his 1973 American Educational Research Association annual meeting paper was equally challenging. This highlights the difficulties in pinpointing the origins of an argument. Greenfield did see his lack of invitation to the subsequent IIP (1978) as evidence of the field's unwillingness to engage in rigorous and robust debate about theory and anything that brings into question past glories of the field (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993).

reflective of an entity-based ontology to which I do not subscribe). 'Leadership' has become externalised but this externalisation is an illusion. As a creation of human cognition, once projected, it serves as a means of domination, even over those whose cognition it is a product. 'Leadership' is at once a product and a producer of the contemporary social condition. This is not to suggest that 'leadership' is not embodied in some material realities, such as those generated through various performative regimes, but that this imperialism is constructed rather than material.

Administrative buzzwords are easily co-opted in both scholarly and everyday language yet usually wind up with a lightweight or negative connotation or fade into obscurity (Ettore, 1997). The colonisation of language external to educational administration into orthodoxy is not new. Raymond Callahan's (1962) classic *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* describes how school administration reformers looked to Tayloristic practices in their efforts to reshape the organisation of schooling. More recently, Craig Peck and Ulrich Reitzug (2012) provided an explanatory conceptual model for how business management concepts become school 'leadership' fashions, albeit with a time lag. The apparent utility of 'leadership' across time and space obscures its underlying generative logic. 'Leadership' serves to normalise a performative or enterprising culture. It legitimises *relative* performance,[2] at scale, as the orthodox marker of 'leadership'. This circular logic is insatiable, constantly expanding and producing new space through comparators and adjectives all the while deflecting questions of the core.

To think through this expansion and production of space I want to call upon Imre Lakatos' (1999) classification of progressive and regressive research programmes. A research programme is progressive if its theoretical growth anticipates its empirical growth – that is, while it continues to predict new acts with some degree of success. In contrast is a regressive programme, where theoretical growth is behind empirical growth, offering post-hoc explanations of practice. Well-rehearsed accounts of 'leadership' focus on being cutting-edge, ground-breaking, ahead of their time, and visionary. With the acceptance of 'leadership' as an institutional fact, to think with Searle, research on 'leadership' is primarily concerned with describing (recently) past practice. In attempting to keep up with the field of practice, 'leadership' studies is a regressive programme. The identification of 'leadership' remains post-event. Scholarship is descriptive rather than predictive. This allows for historical events to be described using the language of 'leadership' even though this was not a word necessarily used at the time. As a case in point, Keith Grint (2011) argues:

> The beginning for leadership scholars is the beginning of recorded history, not the beginning of homo sapiens. As far as it is possible to tell, all organisations and societies of any significant size and longevity have had some form of leadership, often, but not always, embodied in one person, usually – but not always – a man. This does not necessarily mean that leadership has always been, and will always be, critical or essential but it does imply that we have always had leaders (p. 3).

He goes on to cite examples such as Sargon of Akkad in the Middle East, Ramesses II in Egypt and many other historical figures – usually linked with war and histories constructed around victory. The subtle move here is that 'leadership' as an ideology has made itself relevant to the past – overlaying or mapping the past using its lexicon. At the same time,

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[2] While benchmarks remain a common mechanism in performative regimes, 'leadership', in a somewhat Tayloristic turn, facilitates and rewards perpetual improvement. Performance is therefore measured against both the self and others with an ongoing desire of doing more and being forever unsatisfied.

'leadership' is important for the forthcoming, in securing the type of future we aspire to. The result is the elevation in significance of 'leadership' for the here and now. In an almost unnoticed expansion, 'leadership' has created an image of itself that is beyond mainstream notions of temporality (notably, clock time) making itself timeless yet forever more, important. 'Leadership' can therefore be applied to describe any practice that satisfy the classifiers criteria across history and projected into the forthcoming. It is both without time but within it.

The spread of the epistemically objective truth does not offer itself to be felt or sensed and passes largely unnoticed. It is, for the most part, unexperienced. It is not separate to, or overlaid upon, but plays out in action. The inscription of this epistemic imperialism is not simply given of practice, but rather the constitution of the individual actors' complicity with the logics of the dominant ideology – making it an ontological problem. As an ideology 'leadership' only became viable once its logics were embedded and embodied in social actors, becoming unconscious and bringing a sense of coherence to the world. To think with Max Weber (1946), there is a 'belief in the everyday routine as an inviolable norm of conduct … (and as) piety for what actually, allegedly, or presumably has always existed' (p. 296). As an immediate given, 'leadership' sustains its own status as an epistemically objective truth. This makes it possible to endlessly adapt to partial modification in the social world through the latest adjectival 'leadership'. Its desirability comes from its illusiveness, its rarity, its importance, all of which sustains the class-based structural arrangements of the contemporary capitalist condition. It provides a scaling up on the individual desire to matter and make a difference by creating new units of analysis (e.g. national systems) within a global economy. A scaling up that crosses socio-geographic space. The proliferation of metrics of economic and social conditions makes it possible to compare against the self and others at different points of time. The representation, usually in tables and charts, across a range of different performance indicators enables the (post event) identification of 'leaders' linked to perceived empirical claims (which are really social constructions) and then the deconstruction of what those 'leaders' did in the quest for 'what works'.[3] Various technologies, namely digital devices, have facilitated the expansion and reach of 'leadership' to global proportions and provided a language to serve as a touchstone between cultural spaces. As a perceived universal claim, 'leadership' reinforces hierarchal structures while mobilising the rhetoric of agency and socio-economic freedoms. Much like the relationship with temporality, 'leadership' is notable for its absence of any socio-geographic marker, yet its appeal of utility. The status, achieved as an epistemically objective truth and with a circular logic, enables the (self-serving) argument of 'leadership' to over-rule or circumvent local traditions as part of its imperialist expansion. It is beyond context. Traversing across territories without boundaries and if anything, constantly creating new spaces.

BEYOND CRITIQUE

The critique of 'leadership', in its various forms, is struggling to grapple with the atemporality and dislocation from socio-spatial conditions of the discourse. While it is common to interrogate specific forms of 'leadership', commonly adjectives, such analysis is frequently limited to constituting descriptors of the adjective rather than the onto-epistemological foundations of 'leadership' itself. Questions of contextualisation and the need to ground 'leadership' in time and space do not attend to the underlying question of

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[3] What works, or the commonly used 'best practice' arguably has more connections to Taylor's 'one right method' than it likes to admit.

whether 'leadership' is appropriate, or even exists, in that space in the first place. If anything, questions around locating 'leadership' in context facilitates its expansion and production of space. The trend for 'leadership' to be beyond any single role, or actor, within an organisation has fuelled the production of new spaces such as teacher 'leadership', student 'leadership', and community 'leadership'. Middle management is now middle level 'leadership'. Apart from re-enforcing organisation hierarchies – which seems lost on many researchers who actually claim to be arguing against such – it is possible to claim that 'leadership' ideology negates critique by expanding into new spaces. The adjective serves to overcome the lack of work in locating 'leadership' in time and space or masks the pre-existing normative orientation of the researcher and how they believe 'leadership' *ought* to be. Although it appears as though 'leadership' is simply being overlaid or mapped onto new terrains, as the expansion and production of new spaces may suggest, it is actually evidence of the onto-epistemological shift achieved through ideology. Due to the orthodoxy of the 'leadership' based worldview, few if any questions are raised about 'leadership' and in doing so, complicity leads to increased reach. The world comes to be known through a 'leadership' based lens. I contend that this is the result of 'leadership' becoming empiricised.

As noted earlier, 'leadership' rose to prominence during a period of social and economic uncertainty, offering a path to something better. Coinciding with the shift in rhetoric of corporate America, the School Effectiveness and School Improvement (SESI) movement was gaining traction in educational administration. Filling an intellectual space between educational administration, public (later education) policy, and curriculum studies, SESI (often synonymous with school reform) provided a means of achieving higher levels of performance through 'scientific' inquiry and 'evidence'. The default mode of inquiry was based on logical empiricism, with the inertia of systems thinking (and its entity-based ontology enabling demarcated variables to be identified) from the *Theory Movement*, is attractive to policy makers, funding agencies, systemic authorities, and practitioners looking for 'what works'. Much like the science-into-service model in the health sciences, SESI brought credibility to claims through, at times, sophisticated mathematical equations and using the universal language of numbers, graphs and tables for the purpose of comparison. At the same time, building – but very loosely – from Greenfield's critique of logical empiricism in educational administration, spawned a counter tradition of qualitative (usually small scale) case studies seeking to bring a more humanistic approach to knowledge production. Arguably in recognition of the unproductive nature of the quantitative / qualitative binary, and/or the potential of the third space, mixed methods, many contemporary SESI researchers, particularly those who pledge allegiance to educational administration (as opposed to curriculum studies or sociology of education) have re-labelled their work as 'successful schooling' rather than 'effective' and embraced a wider scope of methods. Despite the semantics of changing titles, the underlying generative logic of the work to produce evidence of what works based on a belief in concepts such as 'leadership' remains the same.[4]

Irrespective of the research tradition in which one locates themselves the widespread acceptance of 'leadership' as an empirical project legitimises it as the orthodoxy of educational administration. 'Leadership' is no-longer an ideal, it is an empirical object that could be studied, described and measured. Kenneth Leithwood and colleagues' (2004) widely cited claim that 'leadership' is second to classroom teaching in the improvement of student

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[4] The most appropriate example of this is the International Successful School Principals Project. It still explicitly seeks 'what works' and looks to validate its knowledge claims through the principles of logical empiricism.

outcomes,[5] solidifies the rise of 'leadership' and establishes it as *the* dominant ideology of educational administration. As with any changing of ideology, the canonisation of 'leadership' comes the demonization of previous labels such as 'management' and 'administration'. The ontological subjectivity is described away to the point that engagement with it could be dismissed entirely or at best carves out an existence at the periphery of the field.

Changes in department names and job titles further legitimise 'leadership'. Outside of North America – although this too is fast changing – there are very few, if any, Professors of Educational Administration advertised. Department names are more likely to be 'Leadership' and Policy Studies, arguably reflecting the marriage (however forced) between improving institutional performance and key actors. Journals launched since the 1990s explicitly use 'leadership', such as *International Journal of Leadership in Education* (est. 1998), *Leadership and Policy in Schools* (est. 2002), or rebranded themselves such as *School Organization* to *School Leadership and Management* (in 1997). Even one of the big three journals of the field, *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* felt the need to add 'leadership' (in 2004) to keep pace with the field.[6] As it stands, among the major established journals, only the other two of the big three *Educational Administration Quarterly* (est. 1965), *Journal of Educational Administration* (est. 1963), and *Journal of Educational Administration and History* (est. 1968) have not changed or added 'leadership'. Long gone are the Centres for the Study of Educational Administration sponsored by the likes of the Kellogg Foundation having been replaced with Educational Leadership Centres. To use other labels, such as educational 'administration' or the somewhat forgotten educational 'management' is to be out of touch with the field. This makes it very difficult to get pass editors, reviewers and make it into print. I myself have had to revise my language (e.g. replace educational administration with educational 'leadership') as a condition of being published to ensure I reflect contemporary language and increasing marketability of the work. Despite all of this, at a certain point in the analysis, the boundaries between educational 'leadership', 'management' and 'administration' blur until all that is left is the pre-existing normative orientation of the researcher. The failure to problematize the intellectual gaze, or to take serious the onto-epistemological foundations of 'leadership' in combination with the common-sense appeal of the label in the ordinary language of the everyday has created a situation where the epistemic label is beyond critique. As Jean Hills (1965) notes, subscription to the beliefs in question is a condition of admission to and continuation of, membership, but the 'individual who accepts the beliefs of his group is not a liar; he simply believes his own propaganda. … it is the exception rather than the rule when an individual questions the ideology of his associates' (p. 26).

THEORISING 'LEADERSHIP'
Don Willower (1979) argues that ideologies fit the times. As a potential line of inquiry, locating ideologies in a sense of temporality and socio-spatial conditions has the potential to illuminate insights that exist in the blind spots of mainstream research. In their classic text *Educational Administration and the Social Sciences*, George Baron and William Taylor (1969) note that educational administration was once the province of the history of education

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[5] Despite its popularity, this claim fails to engage with the question of whether within school factors are significant (compared to out of school factors) in altering the achievement of students in school.
[6] As a journal *EMAL* began as *Educational Administration* before adding *Management* and finally *Leadership*. The latter is argued for in an editorial by Tony Bush (2004) entitled: 'What's in a name? Leadership in the ascendancy'. In particular it is argued for as a means of aligning with the growing significance internationally of 'leadership' and its ascendancy in the field.

– a retelling of the past. This historicising of educational administration has been lost in the contemporary shift to 'leadership' – that which is more concerned with the forthcoming. Yet as Jean Hills (1965) reminds us, each social situation we find ourselves in is defined for us not only by the groups to which we presently belong, but also our predecessors. More recently, Eugenie Samier (2006) argues:

> Many administrative phenomena are really historical topics rather than strictly managerial problems. First, those involving forces external to organisations that influence decisions and actions, which are regarded simplistically as 'environment factors' in systems theory, would be more fruitfully pursued as the study of administration under different, historical conditions, such as colonisation and decolonisation, social unrest revolt, revolution and the introduction of new political and social values like equality and equity, all of which have had a significant influence on educational systems (pp. 131-132).

If 'leadership' is a problem of organisation as it origins stress, mindful of Stanley Lieberson and James O'Connor's (1972) claim that 'leaders' matter little to organisational performance, then a productive space for scholastic engagement centres on the conditions in which certain problems come to be conceived. To an extent, this is what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005[1999]) did in their analysis of management literatures for *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.[7] It is also consistent with the Marxist move of ideology and its ontological roots towards a deeper analysis of the very nature of thought and the contexts in which that thought took place. How then did 'leadership' come to be front and centre in the discourse of educational administration?

Drawing more from charisma (Weber) than the clipboard (Taylor), 'leadership' sought to breakdown the social alienation on the bureaucratic division of labour in organisations. The class based nature of organisational labour that is central to administration and management I contend remains with 'leadership'. In a subtle move however and arguably a result of its temporal origins, 'leadership' research has remarkably and surprisingly decoupled itself from the messiness of the social world, and replaced fuzziness with rationality. Perpetual improvement, consensus, and incremental adjustments in the pursuit of a desired future state are the principles of 'leadership'. These are encased in the charismatic 'leader' who inspires others by displaying attributes such as a sense of morality that is desired by the masses and for which they will subjectify themselves. The contradiction of the alternate to bureaucratic structures re-establishing a social order is masked through a belief in the 'leadership' based worldview. Imposing a particular ontology on observation means that knowledge claims hold true if the observer believes them to be true – confirmatory of the pre-existing normative orientation. This is not about bias. If we subscribe, as most social scientist do, that all observations are bias, then it is redundant. The stronger claim is that all observation is theory laden, and this holds up while interrogating the expansion and proliferation of the dominant ideology. Searle's (1995) distinction between the epistemic and ontological sense of subjectivity and objectivity makes it possible to demonstrate that claims of educational administration can be true in the sense of expressing epistemically objective facts while the domain of educational administration as a whole is ontologically subjective.

The study of 'leadership' is however not a pointless endeavour. As Fenwick English (2006) argues, 'advancing a field means engaging in deep criticism of it, philosophically, logically, and empirically' (p. 468). My argument, following Klaus Weber's challenge at the start of

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[7] The title of which is an implicit reference to Max Weber's (1930[1905]) classic, *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*.

this paper, is that our focal point of analysis needs to change. The shifts is from studying 'leadership' as it plays out empirically to interrogating the conditions that make a concept like 'leadership' desirable, or even possible, in the first place. 'Leadership' is an historical event. It is beyond the senses and therefore unexperienced, constructed in the re-presentation of the past and projected into the forthcoming. Establishing the realness of 'leadership' and the implications of its onto-epistemological foundations is a critical step in scholarship. The proliferation of 'leadership' as an epistemologically objective fact hides its ontological subjectivities. Sustained through the ontological complicity of the researcher the validity of 'leadership' is infrequently called into question. Assumed links between 'leadership' and organizational outcomes, that which are central to the worldview, establishes a circular and self-sustaining logic that is difficult to refute. Belief in the utility of 'leadership' across populations, settings, procedures, and times facilitates its empiricism. If 'leadership' is real then it can be observed, verified, and serve as the proper basis for developing explanations of phenomena. The cause and effect of 'leadership' sustains its circular logic.

To break from the expansion of 'leadership' requires a disruption in its production of space. This is not a separation, as that assumes one can stand outside of the social world and manipulate pieces as one would on a board game. I am calling for serious scholastic attention to the rise and maintenance of 'leadership' as the dominant ideology of educational administration. This requires careful attention to the very construction of the label in the first place. What was it about the specific temporal and socio-geographic conditions that gave rise to 'leadership'? How was 'leadership' different to management and administration? This sensitivity to temporality and spatial conditions is not about destroying 'leadership' but enhancing our understanding of the human condition. Whereas the rise of 'leadership' has narrowed educational administration to the rhetoric of – and highly performative focus on – improvement, the embedding and embodying of temporality and socio-geographic conditions accepts the messiness of the social world through description rather than rationalising for the purpose of intervention. This is not to say that such work is apolitical, as this is neither desirably or possible. It is also not about contextualisation, that which embodies an entity based ontology and is more concerned with the influence of (external) contextual factors on practice than grounding practice in time and space. To ground 'leadership' is to break down the perceived binaries of individual and collective, and structure and agency. No organisation is entirely free to do as it pleases, yet neither is it constrained completely by others. The work of organisations is defined moment-to-moment in the relations that it holds with other social organisations. Similarly, no individual has absolute freedom or constraint. This is a challenging proposition for 'leadership'. To embrace the relational is to accept that no-one person or institution has final decision-making authority. Instead, much like a gravitational field, even the person perceived to have absolute power is him/herself held within the network of relations that constitute the social world. It is impossible to find the final decision-maker or 'leader'. Does this call into question the very notion of 'leadership'? For me, it does. It explicitly exposes the mythology from which 'leadership' is built and opens scholastic avenues to interrogate the ideological position that has taken hold of educational administration as a field of practice and knowledge production.

CONCLUSION

Robert Everhart (1991) contends that when a mythical schema – to which I include 'leadership' – is connected to a specific interpretation of history (or the present), corresponding with a particular worldview, mythology transforms into ideology. Given the apparent failure on the part of educational administration scholarship to confront the

specificity of 'leadership', it is perhaps of little surprise that the theoretical resources of the discipline have not been put to use to engage with questions of its scholarly value. This is even less surprising if we consider that as a field of practice and knowledge production, 'leadership' is constituted as a source of *new* methods of institutional performance and social transformation. However, 'leadership' discourses are not composed only of functional tips for improving organisational outcomes, they have a highly normative tone stating what ought to be, not what is. But it is not entirely about the duping of social actors and particularly a specific class of organisational labour. 'Leadership' rose during a period of specific temporal and socio-geographic conditions. As a counter narrative to the dehumanising and alienating effects of bureaucracy it gave the illusion of agency, both individually and collectively. Significantly, it has come to be a means of describing differences in performance and recasting historical events. What remains intriguing is that while robust social scientific inquiry can illuminate the construction of 'leadership', it continues to expand and solidify its place of dominance in the field. Its re-presentation of reality and historical revision has created an impression that it has always been not only present but important. Overlaying upon different historical periods has been combined with a concurrent projecting into the forthcoming as a means of securing success. This mapping and projecting has not been confined to socio-geographic bounds.

The mythology of 'leadership', the agentic narrative concerning individuals or collectives making a difference at scale (however small, but larger than the self) has secured widespread appeal. There is little doubt that 'leadership' has achieved reach into almost all aspects of the social world. When critique is raised it is often aimed at an individual leader or group of people than it is at the very notion of 'leadership'. It has become one of the most influential labels of the contemporary world. Embodying its own rhetoric, the elasticity of 'leadership' enables it to constantly morph to become whatever the classifier wants it to be. Herein lays my argument. 'Leadership' is a myth, a product of human cognition. Its empirical enactment is dependent upon the embedding and embodying of practice with a 'leadership' based worldview. 'Leadership' is therefore an ontological rather than empirical problem. If the rise to dominance has shown us anything, it is that ideology and myth as ontology shifting enterprises play a key role in the organising of labour. The rhetoric of individual and collective agency can be sufficiently seductive that actors will further subjectify themselves to social structures. Significantly, rather than being the antidote to the managerialist project the mythology of 'leadership' has served its ideological purpose and strengthened its grip.

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Bio

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