



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

**ENACTING COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN
A SHARED-POWER WORLD**

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The idea of collective leadership is starting to take hold. Under many guises—*shared, distributed, constructed, and relational* leadership are just a few of the terms in use—a quiet revolution is challenging the traditional notion of a single, heroic individual. Instead, the lens has gradually widened from leaders, to leaders and followers, to a complex of shifting and interconnected relationships that more or less successfully drive toward a shared vision and tangible outcomes.

Applying this broader lens of leadership means that we shift from considering only the individual attributes and behaviors of leaders, like their courage or their capacity to shape followers' visions, to also considering the processes and conditions that help members of a group or organization—a collective—work together to achieve their common vision. This is a shift of attention from the individual to the collective dimensions of leadership.

This shift is gaining significant traction in public and nonprofit management. We now accept that multiple actors participate in the social sector to address intractable problems embedded in a shared-power world (Crosby & Bryson, 2005). Successful public service leaders today manage effectively two contradictory forces. On the one hand are the demands of vertical command-and-control relationships embedded in hierarchical agencies and driven by traditional forms of accountability and authority associated with a constitutional framework. On the other hand, we see emergent, horizontal, collaborative, and often peer-to-peer relationships

of accountability and mutuality taking place across organizations, sectors, and network structures of information sharing, service delivery, and problem resolution.

The new forms do not replace the traditional ones but coexist and interact with them (Heinrich, Hill, & Lynn, 2004). The imperatives of vertical authority and accountability that require rule setting, role clarification, and value preservation work in tandem with the imperatives of horizontal connectivity and boundary crossing that require risk taking, flexibility, adaptation, and collaboration. These requirements must be placed in the service of fundamental commitments of leadership in the public sector: "preserving democratic values, cultivating public trust and enhancing public service motivation" (Getha-Taylor, Holmes, Jacobson, Morse, & Sowa 2011, p. i88).

In this chapter we show the benefits of expanding our understanding of leadership and describe in some detail how various forms of collective leadership—what Denis, Langley, and Sergi call "leadership in the plural" (2012)—can be enacted or practiced. We draw on key research from public management but also consider research in business contexts that has pertinent insights for public leadership. We highlight what research tells us about effective collective leadership practice, offering first a brief justification for why collective leadership is crucial in the context of public service. We next offer key insights according to the level of action where leadership is enacted, turning to implications for public administration. We summarize the convergences and cornerstones of collective leadership and offer some practical guidance to enact effective collective leadership.

Collective Leadership and Democratic Governance: What We Know

Bill Georges, the author of *True North: Discover your Authentic Leadership* (2007), argues that while there is no shortage of people with the capacity for leadership, there seems to be a leadership crisis in business, politics, government, education, religion, and nonprofit organizations. The reason, he argues, is that we have a "wrongheaded notion of what constitutes a leader": we are obsessed with leaders at the top of hierarchies as the standard from which to measure leadership. This keeps us hostage to old mental models that do not correspond to the qualitatively new demands of a postindustrial society. These demands have turned public service—government and civil society—upside down as well. Scholars describe a profound shift in governance in how social actors distribute the

responsibility to solve collective problems (Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012). This shift has significant implications for leadership.

Collective Leadership in a Shared-Power World

New mental models and practices are reflected in the shift from the new public management to the new public service movement (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Thomson & Perry, 2006). A new way of thinking of public service encourages us to see the role of government as serving rather than steering. The idea of public managers working within their bureaucracies to solve wicked problems and deliver services has given way to that of public leaders acting as stewards of the public interest. This requires more responsiveness to citizen needs and greater networking with other actors, both corporate and nonprofit, concerned with the same issues.

These shifts from pyramids to webs and from production to coproduction have substantially changed the requirements of public leadership. Under conditions of asymmetric power and weak incentives to collaborate in a shared-power world, the myth of the heroic leader loses currency (Pearce & Manz, 2005). Instead, collaborative leadership emerges within all branches of government, from elected and appointed leaders down to street-level bureaucrats and citizens (O'Leary, Gerard & Bingham, 2006). The reemergence of citizenship in these new models also requires attention to leadership within civil society and across sectors (Van Slyke & Alexander, 2006).

And yet this transformation comes with challenges. Morse and Buss (2007) identify several critical dilemmas. First, demands for high levels of coordination and collaboration come in a context where structures, systems, and conventional approaches to leadership are largely hierarchical. The big issue therefore is "how to lead collaboratively, across organizations, within a hierarchical context" (p. 16). Second, leaders must both conserve the values of democracy while adapting organizations to ensure innovation. Finally, higher degrees of politicization in this new environment require developing collaborative relationships between politicians and public managers without stepping outside the boundaries of their legally authorized roles. We would add that collaboration with civil society must be added to this mix as well.

Morse and Buss's (2007) classification of leadership helps clarify the scope of our discussion. We are not concerned here with political leaders (the policy elite) but with organizational leaders (formal leaders engaged in administrative and supervisory work on the ground) and what they call public leaders (individuals concerned with public value, inside

and outside government, with or without formal authority, at all levels of the organization and community, working in interorganizational and networked arrangements). In this chapter we draw on researchers who have explored organizational and public leadership using a collective lens, that is, they focus on the collective dimensions of leadership in organizational and interorganizational contexts. These offer insights for leaders interested in developing a practice of leadership that is more collective, in accord with today's demands, independent of where they are located (public or nonprofit, organization or network).

In sum, the coexistence of bureaucracies and networks produces a leadership paradox for public managers: new leadership models are essential but occur in a context where the theory of bureaucracy, with its conventional understandings of leadership, continues to drive administrative practice. The new environment demands both directive forms of influence and distributed forms of leadership. We know much more about how to enact the former than the latter. We know even less about how to foster simultaneously the positive results for democracy that both types of demands—for hierarchy and for open organizational forms—can offer.

Collective Leadership in Leadership Studies

Collective leadership is an umbrella concept that includes studies within an emerging strand of leadership studies applying the core insight of relationality to the key problems in the field, at a time of critical need for new ways of thinking and practicing leadership. *Relationality* reveals the individual as a node where multiple relationships intersect: people are relational beings. Collective leadership shifts attention from formal leaders and their influence on followers to the relational processes that produce leadership in a group, organization, or system. Relationality motivates attention to the embeddedness of the leader-follower relationship in a broader system of relationships and to the meaning-making, communicative, and organizing processes that help to define and constitute these relationships (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012).

Table 27.1 contrasts traditional and collective views of leadership. Applying a collective lens means shifting from a leader-centric view to a postheroic view of leadership (Fletcher, 2004)—one that moves beyond the idea of the leader as a hero—and from the individual dimensions of leadership to its collective dimensions. The shift becomes clear when considering how each view answers the question of the source of leadership, that is, where leadership resides when it comes into existence (Drath, 2001). This question is crucial: how it is answered influences what

TABLE 27.1. CONTRASTING TRADITIONAL AND COLLECTIVE VIEWS OF LEADERSHIP

	Traditional Views: Heroic Leadership	Collective Views: Postheroic Leadership
Key focus	Individual dimensions of leadership	Collective dimensions of leadership
Examples of leadership theories	Transformational leadership Servant leadership Charismatic leadership Leader-member exchange theory	Complexity leadership Relational leadership Shared or distributed leadership Collective leadership
Source of leadership	The leader (formal or informal)	The leader, the group, systemic networks of relationships and processes
Object of leadership	The follower	The work to create an environment that is full of leadership
Results of leadership	Influence that yields follower motivation and engagement	Capacity to collaborate and produce collective achievements

the focus of attention is when trying to produce outcomes (the object of leadership) and what is desired, the end result, when we invoke or want to use leadership to produce these outcomes.

How the dominant theory of leadership answers these questions illustrates the leader-centric approach. Transformational leadership theory argues that influence flows from leader to follower and in most cases emerges from leaders in positions of authority. The theory is grounded in the vertical relationship of accountability between the leader who has authority and the follower who plays a subordinate role. The leader's job is to influence and capture followers' imagination by connecting collective values to organizational outcomes. To do this effectively, leaders enact four types of behaviors: inspiring and motivating followers, serving as role models, assigning intellectually stimulating work, and paying individualized attention to followers (Antonakis, 2012).

According to this theory, the source of leadership is the leader, and the object of leadership is the follower. When the leader acts on the followers, leadership happens. While both sides of the dyad are transformed through their relationship in the process, the result of leadership is that followers buy into the leaders' vision and join them in a common enterprise so that motivation and efficacy contribute to produce the desired organizational outcomes.

These answers contrast with the postheroic view of theories of collective leadership. (As illustrated in table 27.1, there are several strands of collective leadership, but for the purpose of our argument, we treat them together here.) The key argument is that recurrent influence efforts from a single heroic leader fall short of nurturing the required horizontal relationships of accountability to others in the team or in other organizations (Schneider, 2002; Fletcher, 2004) needed in today's work environments. Scholars document shared forms of leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), whereby members in groups lead one another in reciprocal influence processes to advance shared goals. In distributed forms, leadership roles are spread among various individuals rather than under a centralized leader in a superior role (Gronn, 2002). In these situations, performance expectations may include lateral influence, and group members must provide leadership and accept it from their peers, with group members learning to be both leaders and followers (Drath et al., 2008).

Other collective leadership approaches go even further to explicitly decouple the role of the leader from the work of leadership and the processes it generates. Here leadership is a property of a group or network of interacting individuals, not something that belongs to a single individual defined as the leader. This view most radically shifts attention from formal leaders and their influence on followers or from members of empowered groups sharing leadership roles, to the relational, emergent, and contextual processes that produce leadership in a group, organization, or system (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leadership is a process of meaning making among members of a community of practice, and it produces shared direction, commitment, and alignment to achieve agreed-on purposes (Drath & Palus, 1994; Drath, 2001).

All strands of collective leadership theories acknowledge that the visible leader is a manifestation of leadership, but it represents only the tip of the leadership iceberg (Drath, 2001). They also recognize the sequential or recurrent emergence of formal and informal leaders and assume that all members of a group or an organization have the capacity to exercise leadership given the right conditions and contexts (Pearce & Mantz, 2005). Finally, some scholars stress sources of leadership different from the formal or visible leader, perhaps in other people or in structures and processes facilitating meaning-making exchanges that help the group engage in successful joint action. Leadership is thus also found in the outcomes of the group's work, not only in its participating individuals.

Collective leadership turns upside down the basic assumptions about the source, object, and end result of leadership. The source of leadership is not exclusively the leader; it may also be the group or the structures and

- processes devised to advance the shared goal. The object of leadership is not the follower or the group but the work to create an environment that is full of leadership (an environment where everyone can contribute in a joint effort so that the desired results are collectively produced). The end result of leadership is an ongoing community with capacity to collaborate on and jointly produce collective achievements. Collective leadership thus offers an excellent lens to understand and practice leadership in today's shifting governance arrangements.

Enacting Collective Leadership: What Research Tells Us

In the past few decades many scholars have attempted to capture collective leadership in action, understanding how it is brought to life through the enactments of groups and individuals. Terms vary. Some write of leadership practices, others of skills, still others of activities or capabilities. Although there are differences among these concepts, for our purposes they are all attempts to portray the performance of collective leadership.

Here we describe insights on effective enactments of collective leadership in practice. We draw from selected scholars who have focused on public and nonprofit, for-profit, and cross-sector and network contexts. Three broad groups of scholars demonstrate these enactments in different contexts according to the level of action. We begin with scholars who have focused on internal organizational leadership; move on to those who focus more on the leadership required to appropriately steer organizations in complex, shared-power environments; and conclude with organizations working in long-term formal networks to attain a single purpose.

Enacting Collective Leadership inside Organizations

Research on collective leadership practices within organizations comes largely from the business management literature. We provide two examples of such work.

The Relational Practice of Leadership

- Fletcher (2004, 2012) draws from previous work on relational practice found in feminist psychology to explore the relational practice of leadership itself. While leader-follower relations have always been the core of leadership, Fletcher (2012) argues that more recently, "the practice

of good leadership is increasingly conceptualized as the ability to work in and through relationships" (p. 85). This is one of the fundamental underpinnings of collective leadership. She identifies particular skills necessary for such leadership: self-awareness, humility and empathy, and openness to learning from others.

Self-awareness is fundamental to emotional and interpersonal intelligence. Being able to see yourself as others see you means that you are not captive to your own internal perceptions and assumptions. Shouldering a shared harness requires us to dovetail with others, which is impossible without self-reflection. Humility and empathy are also linked. Humility is critical to conceptions of collective leadership because it acknowledges that one has shortcomings and still needs to learn and that one leader is not enough. Empathy is the other side of the coin: our own capacity to be humble and vulnerable allows us to feel as others feel. Both enable the delicate sensing and sense making that allow a group to move as one.

Learning is another linchpin of relational leadership practice. It is based on openness and curiosity. Truly learning from others can mean letting go of cherished beliefs and permitting oneself to be transformed by others. Collective or relational leaders go beyond their own change to creating the conditions for connection and learning in a group setting. Ultimately Fletcher (2004) argues that the relational practice of leadership is linked to "images and wisdom about how to 'grow people'" (p. 651). It is about creating the conditions for mutual learning and high-quality connections.

D-Leadership Capabilities

Ancona, Backman, and Parrot (2012) describe "D-leadership" as decentralized, distributed, and decoupled from formal positions of authority. This means leadership can be found in people throughout an organization and draws on the collective intelligence of an organizational system.

Ancona and her colleagues start with the idea of the "incomplete leader"—a leader who understands that he or she cannot possibly have flawless vision, charisma, and operational capacity. Instead, incomplete leaders know what they don't know. And they also know "leadership exists throughout the organizational hierarchy—wherever expertise, vision, commitment and new ideas are found" (Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, & Senge, 2007, p. 2).

These scholars identify four capabilities as the hallmark of distributed leadership: sense making, relating, visioning, and inventing. Sense making is the process of actively seeking out data and information in a variety of

forms—experience, research, others' knowledge—and then mapping the territory of what is known and unknown. It is more than descriptive: "In the very process of mapping the new terrain, you are creating it" (Ancona, 2005, p. 2).

Developing and sustaining relationships is at the heart of the capacity of relating. Relating is based on communication, especially on three key skills. The first is *inquiry*, or asking others about their opinions and their reasoning. Inquiry is founded on the assumption that the best path forward is based on collective wisdom. But clarifying what we do know is also primary. When we engage in the second skill, *advocacy*, we state our opinion, make a proposal, and take a stand. *Connecting* is what comes of balancing inquiry and advocacy: the capacity to learn from differences, even through spirited debate and conflict.

D-leadership also requires visioning, or creating an aspirational future. The authors suggest that stories, images, and metaphors can draw in others while enabling them to contribute to the picture. Finally, inventing "is what moves a business from the abstract world of ideas to the concrete world of implementation" (Ancona et al., 2007, p. 6). It is more than implementation since execution often involves revision and even re-creation.

Enacting Collective Leadership in Complex, Shared-Power Environments

The research exploring collective leadership in complex shared-power environments is more often found in the public and nonprofit management literature. This work tends to incorporate extraorganizational phenomena in its understanding of leadership, considering interorganizational dynamics in contrast to merely intraorganizational dynamics.

Leadership Practices for Social Change

Ospina and colleagues (2012) use a collective understanding of leadership in their research on nonprofit organizations seeking to change the circumstances of marginalized communities. They focus on the work of leadership rather than individual leaders to explore how the groups were able to set direction, adapt to changing circumstances, and mobilize allies to joint action. Ultimately they identify three types of leadership practices that can marshal the leadership capital necessary to reach stated goals: reframing discourse, bridging difference, and unleashing human energies.

Practices that aim at reframing discourse recognize the importance of leadership as a sense-giving process, one that can give us some clarity