

# A critical exploration of collaborative and distributed leadership in higher education: developing an alternative ontology through leadership-as-practice

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## ABSTRACT

Since the turn of the millennium, interest in collaborative and distributed conceptualisations of leadership has gathered momentum, particularly in education. During the same period, higher education institutions have been embedded in practices shaped by New Public Management. The resultant reconfiguration of structural arrangements within institutions has led to the existence of two staff groups, professional and academic. The former is often aligned to the rise in managerial practices over claimed academic collegial practices, thus creating conditions for a possible dualistic positioning with the two groups. Distributed leadership and collaboration are claimed to be approaches that overcome this dualism, yet they may also be susceptible to maintaining this dual state and subtly reaffirm embedded interests and structures. As an alternative, a leadership-as-practice approach ontologically shifts the way in which sense is made of organisations. The practice-based model for understanding organisations presented in this paper offers a theoretical and applied framework that incorporates and also goes beyond collaborative and distributed leadership due to its association with practice theory.

## KEYWORDS

Academic leadership; collaboration; distributed leadership; leadership-as-practice

## Introduction

Higher education has undergone a multitude of significant shifts since education reforms swept across developed nations from the 1980s onwards. In parallel to, and not always directly associated with such reforms, the leadership studies field has grown and undergone a partial conceptual reforming of leadership, beyond, yet still inclusive of individualistic perspectives. In the midst of these dual shifts, increased attention has been given to the distribution of leadership and collaborative configurations of work arrangements in higher education institutions. The aim of this paper is to argue that distributed leadership and other collaborative approaches to theorising, researching, and developing capacity to lead the academy are not sufficient in themselves if we are to follow through with the encouragement to also incorporate critical reviews of New Public Management (NPM) (Bolden, Jones, Davis, & Gentle, 2015). Rather than contribute to the perceived absence of alternative approaches when NPM and managerialism are critiqued (Gray, 2015), principles from

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practice theory and the emerging leadership-as-practice movement in the leadership studies field (see Raelin, 2016) are drawn on to offer an alternative ontology. This alternative approach would bring a subtle shift to the title of this Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management special issue from *leading the academy* to *practices of leading within and beyond the academy*. The shift in approach to understanding what leader, leadership and leading constitute is significant, because practices, rather than leader would take centre stage. A central tenet of leadership-as-practice decentralises leadership away from an individual, usually pre-established as the leader, and repositions leadership as an outcome rather than a prerequisite of practice involving more than one person and non-human artefacts. Leadership-as-practice shifts our gaze more to practice as it unfolds, so the verb leading, rather than the noun leader comes to the forefront of our understanding.

To support this argument for an alternative ontology, the paper is structured into five sections and draws on some of the findings reported across a range of research studies situated in higher education that focus on one or more of the following: distributed leadership; collaboration; academic leadership; and, professional staff. Nearly half of the 29 studies are based in Australia, with the others located in either, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the United States or Europe (see Appendix 1). The first two sections provide the background for this paper and highlight some of the significant shifts that have taken place within the leadership studies field and policy environments that shape a higher education environment with its multiple tensions. This sets the scene for a critical exploration of distributed leadership in higher education with reference to some of the aforementioned studies in the section that follows. In response to this critique, leadership-as-practice is presented in the fourth section as an alternative ontological position to understand leadership in higher education institutions, followed by the practice-based model for understanding organisations. In the final concluding section, the model is then drawn on to discuss the implications for researching and practicing collaborative approaches to leading the academy.

### Changing times: major shifts in leadership and higher education

Leadership has grown in popularisation and conceptual development, while higher education has undergone transformation through policies and managerial expectations brought on by NPM. Adding to the growth of the leadership industry as an international phenomenon (Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, & Taylor, 2011), leadership can also be positioned as a political project that incorporates managerialist ideology through positioning institutional leaders as agents of reform in public services such as education (Gunter, 2012; O'Reilly & Reed, 2010). Eacott (2013) argues 'there has been a shift from leadership as meaning making to the significance of leadership for economic performance' (p. 91). This is perhaps because both leadership and NPM are associated with achieving expected organisational outcomes, where 'leadership seems to have become a kind of universal solution for any issue, irrespective of context' (Alvesson & Spicer, 2014, p. 40). The conceptual development of leadership is also reflected in the growth of the leadership studies field into more than 60 theoretical sub-domains (Dinh et al., 2014) and consistent through this development is a preferred ontology of leader(s), followers and goals, though this ontology has increasingly come under greater scrutiny (Drath et al., 2008; Youngs, 2009). The emergence of distributed and shared leadership,

as well as the leadership-as-practice movement are part of a number of alternative approaches that challenge the leader-follower-goals ontology.

Common to these alternative approaches is a recognition that leadership occurs beyond positions that have an institution-wide or institutional subunit responsibility, namely senior leader and middle leader positions. There is a shift in the leadership studies field that decentres leadership from the individual-only perspective where the leader is equated to leadership, to one that also embraces a more distributed, shared and collaborative approach beyond these individuals (Grint, 2011; Wassenaar & Pearce, 2012). Despite this, there is still a propensity in leadership literature in general to focus on the individual (Edwards, 2015) and to also 'pre-establish the occupants of leadership roles' (Raelin, 2016, p. 5) in the literature that takes a more distributed and shared approach. In contrast to applying a distributed perspective with this pre-establishment of individual leaders within hybrid configurations (see Gronn, 2011), a leadership-as-practice approach starts first with practice and process, rather than the traits of individuals and structuralist assumptions informed by organisational role and work arrangements. These approaches that decentre leadership from solely being associated with the individual also provide opportunity to shift leadership out beyond a managerial lens that can favour individualism within higher education and be in opposition to collegial academic practices (Ehrich, Kimber, & Ehrich, 2016). It is also important to move beyond focusing only on a managerial-collegial duality due to the multifarious shifts higher education has undergone since the 1980s and have now blurred some of the demarcation that used to exist between academic and non-academic work.

The rise and prominence of central service units and professional staff within institutional structures has contributed to this blurring due to: their engagement in academic leadership and development (Berman & Pitman, 2010; Cardno, 2013); interactions with students (Graham, 2012); some degree of agency to take control of situations (Davis, 2014); an increase in decision-making competencies of administrative heads (Blümel, 2016); having roles that sometimes complement the work of academic staff (Gray, 2015); collaborative work with academic staff (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012; Pitt & Mewburn, 2016; Veles & Carter, 2016) and research staff (Sebalj, Holbrook, & Bourke, 2012); and, the development of roles in higher education institutions that span both professional and academic domains (Whitchurch, 2009). The aggregation of this type of work is reflected in professional roles now making up just over half of the roles in comparison to academic roles, a ratio that has stayed consistent for nearly two decades when employment numbers are compared for Australian higher education institutions (Gray, 2015; Larkins, 2010; Szekeres, 2011).

This professional-academic configuration within higher education can be attributed to shifts institutions have experienced due to a growth in demand for tertiary education and the expectations brought on through NPM reforms. The increase of quality assurance measures (Fitzgerald, 2014), audit cultures with performative targets (Zepke, 2007) and marketisation (Veles & Carter, 2016), have within a competitive global environment given rise to elaborate institutional systems, rigorous demands of governance and conditions conducive to top-down decision-making (Gray, 2015; Sharrock, 2012).

As a result, higher education institutions are no longer the protected entities whose legitimacy is taken for granted, but instead are expected to face the complexity of balancing the need to operate according to market pressures, teach an increased number of students despite diminishing financial means while struggling to maintain traditional academic and educational principles of quality. (van Ameijde, Nelson, Billsberry, & van Meurs, 2009, p.764).

When these demands are viewed alongside historical notions of academic autonomy and collegiality with the increase of professional staff and central units, there has had to have been an increase in the distribution of roles with functional leadership expectations related to goal-setting and reaching targets. The demand for work, both academic and managerial has increased and become more complex, where managerialism can be viewed in conflict to collegial practices.

Managerialism is expected to assemble the traits of a complete organization, with positive outcomes in clarity of vision and strategy, rapidity of decision-making and efficiency through global management of resources. The collegial culture stresses different and seemingly opposing aspects: democracy among peers, the right of veto, dispersion of influence and authority and bottom-up influence in decision-making (Marini & Reale, 2016, pp. 111,112).

Therefore, there is a need according to Davis (2014) to draw on leadership literacies to navigate these 'complex and turbulent conditions of work in the sector at this time' (p.372). Higher education institutions are now established where academic and professional roles intermesh increasingly around work activity. However, these shifts in work activity and expectations are not devoid of a range of resultant tensions and issues that have become more apparent in higher education settings. These must be acknowledged, critiqued and grappled with when calls for distributed leadership and collaborative approaches are made, so forms of power, capital and ensuing micropolitics are surfaced.

## Tensions and issues in higher education

The tensions and issues exist across several overlapping domains; political, ontological assumptions of leadership, structural and identification. Politically, 'the uneasy relationship between government and universities is a long-standing arena of tension and struggle over a material and ideational resource' (Samier, 2002, p.42). For example, in New Zealand, a university is expected to 'accept a role as critic and conscience of society' (New Zealand Parliament, 1989) and so this encompasses potential critique and commentary against a government that also funds them. Higher education institutions can also be susceptible to internally contested meanings of leadership (Juntrasook, 2014) and the resultant pluralist expectations placed on roles formally associated with leadership (Berdrow, 2010; Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008; Cardno, 2013; Murphy & Curtis, 2013). Sharrock (2012) argues the 'multi-polar disorder' (p.331) inherent in this pluralist environment sets those in management roles an impossible goal of meeting all needs, as well as institutions needing to distribute the multiplicity of functions through work groups. Therefore, adjustments to organisational structure through distributed leadership and collaborative practices may appear at a functional level, an acceptable way to dissolve pluralist expectations. However, lurking beneath this at an individual level are issues of identity formation and identification with groups that may be in

conflict with structural arrangements. The tensions associated with identity often tend to confirm an underlying managerial–collegial divide still exists across higher education institutions. The associated ‘competing motivations and allegiances ... may inhibit the development of a sense of shared ‘social identity’ (Bolden et al., 2008, p.367) due to these tensions being experienced in various forms by differing groups of higher education staff.

Some of the research studies selected for this paper illustrate that to understand and identify these tensions, engagement with staff needs to go beyond the homogeneous nomenclature of managerialism and collegiality, and academic staff and professional staff. For example, studies involving academic staff identify: unmet expectations of the professoriate mentoring new researchers, though many in the professoriate would have been promoted on the basis of their contribution to knowledge not mentoring ability (Evans, Homer, & Rayner, 2013); promotion to a Head of Department role as an interruption to career development rather than as an opportunity (Floyd, 2012; Franken, Penney, & Branson, 2015), where attention is given to the milieu of day-to-day administrative operations rather than innovation (Berdrow, 2010); programme leaders as possibly the academic group who are most under stress due to the expectations placed on them to deliver quality programmes and a positive student experience (Murphy & Curtis, 2013); and, research active staff who are likely to feel less stressed if more of their time is apportioned to research activity, despite the hours they work (Opstrup & Pihl-Thingvad, 2016). In a similar manner, studies on professional staff illustrate a range of tensions such as: the lack of women in senior positions (Simpson & Fitzgerald, 2014; Strachan, Bailey, Wallace, & Troup, 2013); differing perceptions that academic staff can have towards professional staff in their own local department when compared to professional staff in central units, with a preference for working with those at a local level (Gray, 2015); even though professional staff are now more visible, they ‘still have some way to go to claim their space in universities’ (Szekeres, 2011, p.689); and, professional staff with research degrees are not always fully appreciated by others (Berman & Pitman, 2010). Despite these studies ranging from large-scale quantitative ones through to single-site case studies, they illustrate another layer of complexity associated with the roles, expectations and identities of higher education staff that may look different from institution to institution.

### **Distributed leadership in higher education**

The nomenclature ‘distributed leadership’ or ‘shared leadership’ can appear to be a possible remedy to the divisions and tensions that permeate higher education studies. If leadership is positioned as a phenomenon akin to influence and distribution is associated with sharing, then the focus becomes one of origin. If work labelled as leadership originates and is distributed by the few to the many, distributed leadership becomes a functional tool of work activity and can continue to reify and protect existing power structures. In this manner, structure triumphs over agency and the issues discussed in this paper will continue to exist. However, if leadership is equated less with role and also encompasses origins from anywhere within an institution, then studies are more likely to reveal the tensions and issues that pervade higher education institutions, rather than uncritically gloss over them. When these two perspectives are brought together, distributed leadership is not without its own issues, while it:

may be used to enhance the sense of belonging and engagement in universities it may equally be utilised by those in positions of real power to give the illusion of consultation and participation while obscuring the true mechanisms by which decisions are reached and resources allocated (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2009, p.273).

The point here that distributed leadership can be used to bring about change is reflected in other literature, where distributed leadership is positioned as: a framework and approach that embraces all employees and encourages them to participate and partner with each other to achieve change (Jones et al., 2012); a provider of principles that can help overcome problems (van Ameijde et al., 2009); and, ‘a fluid potential held by a group that enhances the capacities of individuals to take the lead and that aligns this capacity with specific challenges and organisational environments’ (Davison et al., 2013, p.100). The implication here is that distributed leadership is a phenomenon that has agential properties. However, a closer reading of the studies referenced in this section start to reveal so much more is taking place rather than a single phenomenon. It raises the question as to whether reliance on the preferred nomenclature, distributed leadership, is all that helpful and whether instead a more pluralistic position should be promoted with distributed forms of leadership (see Youngs, 2014). Despite this issue studies that use distributed leadership still reveal some of the issues and tensions evident in higher education practice.

A common theme in the studies informing this paper is recognising and understanding sources of initiative beyond those in formal leadership positions (Davison et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2012; van Ameijde et al., 2009). Conjointly, possible barriers and challenges also emerge. For instance, studies reveal that in practice:

- Staff can still be still positioned as followers to those in authority, especially when they ‘are only brought into the leadership process for’ advice ‘or in order to implement’ (Kezar, 2012, p.732). Subsequently, the illusion of participation masks the more centralised power relations that inform decision-making processes (Bolden et al., 2009);
- Formal budget holders may exert a disproportionate degree of influence compared to others in participative settings (Bolden et al., 2008);
- There can be much delegation of responsibility amongst professional staff, yet authority stays with one formal leader or group (Davis, 2014); and,
- Shared approaches can be hindered by silos and hierarchical structures within the institution (Kezar, 2006).

Distributed leadership literature also reveal intentional actions that may address some of these challenges, such as:

- Nurturing spaces for communities of practice and collaboration to emerge (Davison et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2012);
- Project teams building trust with decision makers outside of the team (van Ameijde et al., 2009);
- Formal recognition and commitment to distributed practices from those in senior roles (Bolden et al., 2015);

- The involvement of people through networks based on expertise (Jones et al., 2012; van Ameijde et al., 2009); and
- A reliance on collaborative activity amongst executive, academic and professional staff (Jones et al., 2012).

Inherent through most of these distributed leadership studies and others associated with a collective view of leadership, is the presence of vertical leadership as well as some focus on key individual leaders. A focus on distributed leadership can assume leadership is the practice that holds all other practices together or at least can assist in overcoming the tensions and issues raised in this paper. It is possible that the leadership construct is not always needed (Pfeffer, 1977) or should at least not be positioned as a practice elevated above others (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015). For instance, in relation to NPM, distributed managerialism does not quite have the same appeal as distributed leadership. Distributed leadership does broaden the unit of analysis beyond individuals in formal organisational roles, yet the question remains, does it go far enough to decouple practices sufficiently from leadership reification through managerial reforms so what is constituted as leadership and its distribution are also critiqued and understood? The focus of the remainder of this paper, is not to critique distributed leadership any further as this has been explored in the literature (for example, Bolden, 2011; Chreim, 2015; Flessa, 2009; Gunter, Hall, & Bragg, 2013; Lumby, 2013; Maxcy & Nguyen, 2006; Youngs, 2009); rather, it is to offer an alternative ontology that goes beyond some of the limitations inherent in distributed leadership.

### **An alternative position: leadership-as-practice**

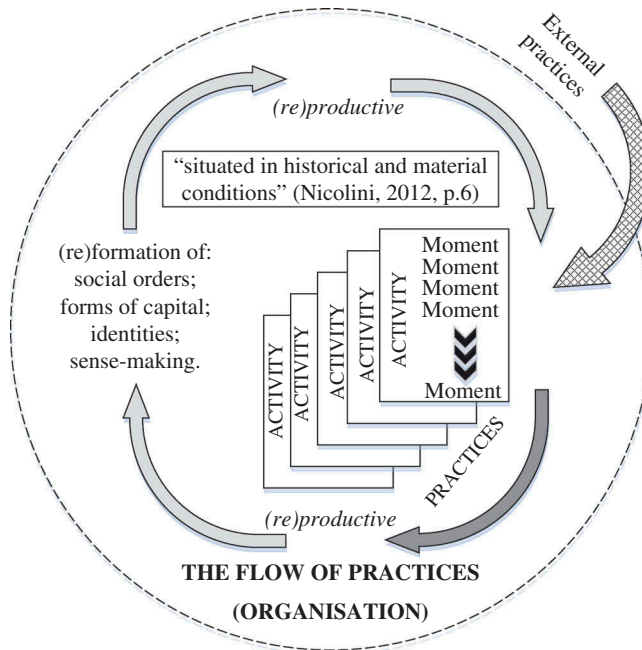
One way to construct an alternative position is to shift the fundamental building blocks through which sense is made of the world. In addition to the issue of leadership reification in reform environments, or what O'Reilly and Reed (2010) label as leaderism, there are other two reasons why an alternative position should be considered so some of the limitations expressed so far may be addressed. Firstly, most leadership theories start with the assumption leadership is wedded to the traits and behaviours of the individual, in other words a leader-centric view of leadership. Coupled to this, and sometimes uncritically acknowledged, is the reliance on this assumption as the means to deliver and uphold reform. Tumbling out from this flows the tidy ontology of leader(s), followers and goals; tidy because it can suit those in power to maintain the structures that determine a preferred way of viewing and promoting organisational practices and a leadership development industry that promotes this. The consequence of this can contribute to thinking prone to dualistic positioning, where ontologies become based around leader and followers, them and us, and perhaps for higher education, keep in place some separation between, collegial and managerial, and, academic and professional. The argument here is not to do away with organisational goals or organisational roles where some roles have more authority than others; rather it is to bring to the surface sometimes unquestioned norms that can prevent alternative ways of understanding and learning about practice. Secondly, despite the vast body of theory and research that makes up the leadership studies field, Dinh et al. (2014) in their review of

this field, acknowledge much more is known ‘about the outcomes of leadership than the processes that affect the emergence of these outcomes’ (p.55). A process perspective shifts the focus to practices, a shift that is lacking in the leadership studies field (Alvesson & Spicer, 2014). The leadership-as-practice movement offers a possible way forward due to its theoretical grounding in a practice-based approach rather than leadership theory.

The practice-based approach is informed by a range of practice theories (see Nicolini, 2012) and rather than provide a treatise of these in this paper, the following points are made to highlight some of the alternatives they offer. Firstly, activity is elevated beyond that of an individual, so the focus is on the practice rather than the action of an individual (Nicolini, 2012). Secondly, bundled human activities are interwoven with non-human materials (Schatzki, 2001), so that non-human materials are no longer a background context. Finally, organisations are no longer viewed as a fixed state, rather a practice-based approach presents a dynamic view of organisations and how they are continually constructed and reconstructed (Geiger, 2009). Wilkinson and Kemmis (2015) argue this position turns attention from leader and leadership, to the practice of leading, where leading is not assumed to: be the practice that is positioned hierarchically above other practices; belong to a group of sovereign individuals; and reduced to managerialist practices that prioritise efficiency. Raelin (2003) has for some time argued for a leaderful practice approach and contends that leadership-as-practice ‘depicts immanent collective action emerging from mutual, discursive, sometimes recurring and sometimes evolving patterns in the moment and over time amongst those engaged in the practice’ (2016, p.3). Focusing on the moment to understand practice labelled as leadership or leading is not a new one (see, Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008; Wood, 2005) and informs Crevani and Endrissat’s (2016) point, that ‘the *accomplishment of leadership* may be said to be the moment-by-moment production of *direction*, or collective agency in changing *and setting courses of action*’ (p.42), as well as Kramer and Crespy’s (2011) observation that collaborations take place in very short exchanges. The following practice-based model for understanding organisations illustrates how an alternative ontological position may be understood (see figure 1).

There is no starting point in this model due to practices reproducing existing structures and also producing new arrangements of structures, where this (re)producing is continually ‘situated in historical and material conditions’ (Nicolini, 2012, p.6). The social orders encapsulate organisational reporting lines, hierarchical arrangements based on role, demarcations that constitute the existence of departments, project teams and committees and alliances that can exist outside these aforementioned organisational arrangements, such as friendship, unions and shared interests. The accumulation and accessing of forms of capital, such as symbolic, social and cultural by actors, individually and collectively means that a similar practice (for example, teaching, researching, assessing, reviewing, planning) will differ across location and time due to their unique histories. In the midst of this, individual and collective identities are being constructed and re-constructed, such as the professoriate in terms of governmental agency and professional staff in terms of broadening work arrangements as discussed earlier in this paper. Sense-making is positioned as emerging from practices and is aligned to the practice view where, ‘organisation emerges as the result of sense-making’ (Nicolini, 2012, p.7), so a dynamic view of an organisation is held





**Figure 1.** (Re)productive moment-by-moment model of practices.

rather than a fixed view. Practices are viewed as the accumulation of shared activities that are in themselves aggregations of moments. This means attention is given to the flow of practices that constitute an organisation, as well as the moment that may only last a few seconds. Shifts in practice are likely to occur in small steps unless there has been a significant interruption in the conditions. These shifts may occur due to practices external to the organisation, for example, a change in mandatory reporting of data to a government agency or a funding formula alteration. In addition to this, the practice-based model opens up the opportunity to understand what enables some practices and constrains others. This enabling and restraining may also differ within a higher education institution even when the focus is on a common practice like research, where constraints may be greater for department chairs, research-trained professional staff and programme leaders compared to others.

### Conclusion: implications for leading the academy

The alternative position argued for in this section is not necessarily a new one for higher education institutions. Though there has not been a co-ordinated call for a shift to a practice-based ontology as there has been in the leadership studies field by Raelin (2016), there is reference to shifting to a practice-based approach bubbling within some of the higher education leadership literature. For example:

- Leadership is viewed as a practice distributed throughout a higher education institution across five dimensions; personal, social, structural, contextual and developmental (Bolden & Petrov, 2014; Bolden et al., 2008);

- Communities of practice can help provide conditions conducive to collaborative work amongst academic staff across institutions (Davison et al., 2013);
- The six tenets of Jones, Harvey and Lefoe (2014) 6E conceptual model of distributed leadership highlight a focus on practices with the emphasis on activity, process and enablement;
- The acknowledgement of hidden practice due to threats in Hancock and Hellowell (2003) study of academic middle managers;
- Academics from differing knowledge domains have distinct collaborative practices (Lewis, Ross, & Holden, 2012);
- Distributed leadership arises from interactions amongst diverse individuals (Van Ameijde et al., 2009); and
- Whitchurch (2009) argues for new forms of activity to be developed encompassing both ‘professional and academic domains’ (p.410).

Key to any further development towards a practice-based approach will be engagement with practice theory, because practice theories go beyond merely observing and describing what activities take place in an organisation (Nicolini, 2012). This is because practice theory recognises when practices become stable over a period of time, they can ‘unfold their institutionalising power to imprint and sustain norms, values and knowledge’ (Geiger, 2009, p.133). Relying on description would disable any attempt to bring to the surface the tensions and issues discussed in this paper.

The distributed leadership and collaborative imperative in higher education is a challenging one. This imperative is positioned as a possible means to address the dualistic issues and tensions discussed in this paper, yet unless there is an ontological shift, then distributed and collaborative approaches may still be open to reification as a tool for NPM reform. A starting point within an institution prior to employing any such approach, should start at a philosophical level with all staff as to what assumptions inform leadership practice promoted as distributed or collaborative (Juntrasook, 2014; Kezar, 2006; Kramer & Crespy, 2011). Developing further cooperation amongst higher education staff ‘cannot be secured through market or hierarchical forms of control’ (Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005, p.59), so an ontological shift in how we view organisations is one way that may further develop *practices of leading within and beyond the academy*. Some pragmatic strategies associated with such a shift may include:

- Redeveloping existing leadership development programmes so they focus more on reflecting in practice in the moment;
- Relying less on the generic term of leader and leadership as pre-existing constructs and use language that more clearly identifies the practices in use. For instance, instead of saying ‘we need some strong leadership here’, an alternative such as ‘we need some dialogue here where we are prepared to suspend and declare our assumptions’ may be used; and
- Rather than starting with two distinct staff groups, academic and professional, start with the practices that support learning, teaching and research. Then as a flow on from that identify which staff and/or groups should be arranged with supportive systems to enable those practices.

In conclusion, building on and moving beyond distributed leadership to engage with the leadership-as-practice movement may offer an alternative to seemingly always getting stuck in the dualistic notions of collegiality and managerialism.

## Disclosure statement

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## Appendix 1. Higher education research studies

Author(s)	Location	Focus
Berdrow (2010)	The USA	Interviews with 21 chairs of academic departments about their role and expectations placed on their role
Berman and Pitman (2010)	Australia	Survey of 38 research-trained professional staff and their use of research skills in management roles
Blümel (2016)	Germany	Content analysis of 298 curriculum vitae from heads of university administrations
Bolden et al. (2008)	The UK	A total of 152 interviews of leaders from across 12 universities about their perceptions and experiences of leadership
Cardno (2013)	NZ	A total of 15 interviews with middle and senior level academics investigating the nature and expectation of academic leadership in 6 polytechnics
Davison et al. (2013)	Australia	Study of four communities of practice, distributed leadership and collaboration amongst teachers from differing disciplines and universities
Davis (2014)	Australia	An interpretive inquiry into the lived experiences of work and leadership of 226 non-academic university staff
Evans (2014)	The UK	A study of non-professorial academic staff, other researchers and university teachers perceptions of professorial research leadership
Floyd (2012)	The UK	Interviews with 17 university department heads
Franken et al. (2015)	Australia NZ	Two autobiographical accounts of leadership learning as a new university department head
Graham (2012)	Australia	Interviews with 14 professional staff about the contribution they make to learning spaces in one university
Gray (2015)	Australia	Survey ( $n = 34$ ) and interviews (4) with academic staff about their perceptions of working with professional staff
Hancock and Hellawell (2003)	The UK	Interviews with 14 middle managers (Deans or Department Heads) about their perceptions of personal transparency with those 'above' them and those in their faculties/departments
Jones et al. (2012)	Australia	An account of the Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT) in use in four different university settings
Juntrasook (2014)	NZ	Four narrative accounts of how academics make sense of their leadership
Kezar (2006)	The USA	Case studies of how four institutions fostered collaboration
Kezar (2012)	The USA	Case studies of five institutions with faculty and staff grass root leaders accounts of how leadership unfolds
Lewis et al. (2012)	Australia NZ The UK	A total of 36 interviews (study one) and a further 274 interviews (study two) that focused on how and why academics collaborate
Marini and Reale (2016)	Europe	Survey of middle managers from 26 universities across 8 European nations in relation to collegiality and managerial cultures
Murphy and Curtis (2013)	England	A total of 25 interviews with programme leaders across 2 universities about the challenges of programme leadership
Opstrup and Pihl-Thingvad (2016)	Denmark	A survey of 2127 university researchers related to occupational stress
Pitt and Mewburn (2016)	Australia	An analysis of academic job advertisements with a focus on what employers expect from a PhD now
Sebalj et al. (2012)	Australia	A study of the nomenclature preferences for the roles of 194 university research staff
Simpson and Fitzgerald (2014)	Australia	An examinations of where professional female staff are located in the organisation hierarchy of one university
Strachan et al. (2013)	Australia	A survey of 10,924 general/professional workers across 19 universities about work conditions and gender
Szekeres (2011)	Australia	A review of the literature and changing statistics around employment of professional staff
Van Ameijde et al. (2009)	The UK	An exploration of distributed patterns of leadership in five project teams at a large university
Whitchurch (2009)	The UK Australia The USA	A comparative analysis of the challenges and potentials of blended professional staff
Zepke (2007)	NZ	An analysis of a community-centred distributive approach to leadership in one university

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