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Effective leadership in higher education: a literature review

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This article is a review of the literature concerned with leadership effectiveness in higher education at departmental level. The literature derives from publications from three countries: the UK, the USA and Australia. Surprisingly little systematic research has been conducted on the question of which forms of leadership are associated with departmental effectiveness. The analysis of the studies selected resulted in the identification of 13 forms of leader behaviour that are associated with departmental effectiveness. The findings are considered in relation to the notion of competency frameworks and, in the conclusion, their general implications are explored in relation to the notion of substitutes for leadership.

This article derives from a review of the literature concerned with leadership effectiveness in higher education. The key research question directing the search for and review of the research literature was: ‘What styles of or approaches to leadership are associated with effective leadership in higher education?’ In other words, the emphasis was on the kinds of leadership styles or behaviour that are found to be effective in studies of higher education leadership.

This would appear to be a simple research question, which might be expected to have attracted a considerable amount of empirical attention. However, there is surprisingly little empirical research addressing this research question. There is a good deal of anecdotal reflection, and also quite a lot of research on what higher education leaders do, but remarkably little systematic research on what aspects of leader behaviour makes them effective leaders. Gomes and Knowles write: ‘Although academic departments have been appointing heads for decades, little research exists concerning exactly how those leaders contribute to departmental culture, collaborative atmosphere, and departmental performance’ (1999, p. 81). Harris *et al.* write that: ‘While a few research studies have focused on leadership practices in higher education, little research has

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focused on effectiveness or on the means for increasing effectiveness, particularly at the departmental level' (2004, p. 4). Barge and Musambira (1992) write:

'Do chair-faculty relationships within academic institutions really make a difference for the department and the university?' While much of the leadership literature answers in the affirmative for nonacademic organizations, this question has not been empirically tested in colleges and universities. (1992, p. 75)

Thus, several writers have suggested that little research directly investigates leadership effectiveness in universities. This is very consistent with the literature search that was undertaken for this article.

The literature review

It was decided to search for articles in refereed journals for the period 1985–2005. The reason for the date restriction is that it was hoped that the literature review would help to inform current circumstances, and it was felt that it would be difficult to relate current circumstances to those of over 20 years ago. Many writers on higher education make it clear that they view the higher education setting as having changed greatly in the last two decades, and it was felt that this should be reflected in the period covered by the review. As such, the findings reported here are specific to the time period and its associated context. The emphasis on peer-reviewed journals was imposed because articles in such journals provide a quality indicator, at least to a certain degree. It was also decided to restrict the international focus to the UK, USA and Australia. The main reason for this restriction was to keep the literature search manageable, and also because the vast majority of articles uncovered would probably be written in English, and thus would be accessible to the author.

Although the literature relating to three countries was the focus of attention, most of it originated in the USA. The literature covered and the inferences generated from it relate exclusively to departmental leadership. The department represents a crucial unit of analysis in universities, as it is often, if not invariably, a key administrative unit for the allocation of resources, and the chief springboard for the organization's main teaching and research activities. Leadership relating to other levels, particularly the leadership of universities, will be the focus of a separate publication. As such, the findings reported in this article are concerned with leadership among what are variously called heads of department and department chairs.

Searches were made of online databases using the following key terms: leader* or manage* or administrat* plus higher education* or university* or academic plus effective*. Although the focus was on leadership, which many writers seek to distinguish from kindred terms like management and administration, it became apparent early on that the terms were being used in ways that did not distinguish them in a precise or consistent way. In part, this is because it can be very difficult to distinguish activities that are distinctively associated with leadership from managerial or administrative activities. In considering whether findings related to leadership, the key criterion was whether the styles or behaviour being discussed were to do with influencing

the goal-directed behaviour of others, since this notion underpins most definitions of leadership (Bryman, 1986). The online databases examined were: Educational Resources Information Center; Educational Research Abstracts; British Education Index; and Social Sciences Citation Index. Key articles were also subjected to citation searches so that further related articles might be identified. In addition, reference lists at the end of key articles were searched for related articles. The online database searches produced the vast majority of the references.

Articles were excluded if they were not based on reporting of original research, in the form of either the presentation of findings deriving from primary research or deriving from secondary analysis of data. Thus, articles deriving from speculations about leadership based on anecdote rather than research were excluded. Further, articles were only included if: the aims of the research were clearly stated; they made clear the ways in which data were collected (sampling, research instruments used, how data were analysed), did so in a systematic way, and indicated how the methods were related to the aims; provided sufficient data to support interpretations; and outlined the method of analysis. The thinking behind the use of these criteria was that a set of criteria was required that would permit an account of published research of at least reasonable quality, but did not mean that so many articles were excluded that it would be difficult to render generalizations.

Even so, although hundreds of articles were initially identified in the above databases, only 20 articles met the criteria fully in terms of issue, time, location and quality. For example, the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) search [leader* AND effective* AND universit*] generated 110 'hits', of which only eight were usable for the full study. However, none of these eight articles was to do with leadership effectiveness at departmental level. Another SSCI search [leader* AND effective* AND academic] produced 101 hits, of which one was used for this article.

This review will emphasize the peer-reviewed articles that formed the basis for reviewing the literature linking leadership and effectiveness in higher education. At certain points, other research that helps to understand the research question and that meets reasonable quality criteria will be added. This refers mainly to books and chapters in books that enhance understanding of these issues. Those items that are included in the review below that were not identified through the search previously described are distinguished through the use of *italics* in Table 1, which outlines the main leader behaviours identified in the review and their sources. These additional items are included because they allow a more comprehensive account, bearing in mind the small number of articles uncovered in the search. The literature review did not include theses, reports and 'grey literature'.

In the next section, I present an account of the factors that were consistently found by researchers to be associated with effectiveness among departmental leaders. There are two points to be made about this exercise. First, in order to be identified as a form of effective leader behaviour at departmental level, that behaviour was only listed if it was found in at least two peer-reviewed articles and one other source that met the quality criteria. This allowed for a minimum critical mass (bearing in mind that only 20 articles were identified in the search) for a form of leader behaviour to be included.

Second, it has to be remembered that the inferences about causality in the remainder of the article have to be treated very cautiously. Almost all of the articles—whether based on quantitative or qualitative research—derive from cross-sectional designs, so that inferences that the forms of leader behaviour discussed below influence or have an impact on departmental effectiveness may be unwarranted. However, such inferences about causal direction are commonly made by the authors of the literature items reviewed.

Analysing the findings was not as straightforward as one might imagine. Three issues were especially striking. First, what is and is not regarded as leadership varies between researchers. As a result, behaviour included under ‘leadership’ sometimes does not conform to many definitions, but equally behaviour that is classified as standing outside the purview of leadership would be regarded as to do with leadership by most definitions. For the purpose of this review, I was concerned with leadership as defined in terms of influencing and/or motivating others towards the accomplishment of departmental goals. Second, there are sometimes differences in what is meant by certain terms relating to leadership. ‘Fostering collegiality’ is an example of this. In order to provide the examination of the literature that is summarized below, it was necessary to pay close attention to definitions of key terms so that these two issues could be accommodated. Third, the criteria of effectiveness differ from study to study, although there was a good deal of consistency in the forms of leader behaviour that were found to be associated with it.

Findings from the literature review

Table 1 summarizes the 13 aspects of leader behaviour that were found to be associated with effectiveness at departmental level. Each of these aspects of leader behaviour will be discussed in turn with some illustrations from the literature. The 13 aspects of leader behaviour are not presented in any order.

Clear sense of direction/strategic vision

This aspect of leader behaviour implies that effective departmental leaders are those who provide clear guidance concerning the routes their departments should be taking. They provide a strategic leadership for their department. Trocchia and Andrus (2003) examined the abilities and characteristics of effective heads of marketing departments in the USA, as perceived by marketing academics and heads of department. This was done by asking samples of both groups about the abilities that they felt were required for a head of department to be effective. One of these was ‘possessing a strategic vision for department’.

Stark *et al.* (2002) examined the role of the head of department in curriculum planning in US departments in which such planning was occurring more or less continuously. Such leaders were deemed to be effective by virtue of their encouragement of continuous curriculum planning. Seven leadership roles in curriculum planning were identified, of which one was being an agenda setter. Here, the leader

Table 1. Main leadership behaviour associated with leadership effectiveness at departmental level

Leader behaviour	Main literature items demonstrating effectiveness of leader behaviour
Clear sense of direction/strategic vision	<i>Creswell et al. (1990); Harris et al. (2004); Bland et al. (2005b); Mitchell (1987); Benoit & Graham (2005); Stark et al. (2002); Moses & Roe (1990); Trocchia & Andrus (2003); Lorange (1988); Clott & Fjortoft (2000); Bland et al. (2005a)</i>
Preparing department arrangements to facilitate the direction set	<i>Knight & Holen (1985); Creswell & Brown (1992); Creswell et al. (1990); Stark et al. (2002); Lorange (1988); Bland et al. (2005a); Lindholm (2003)</i>
Being considerate	<i>Knight & Holen (1985); Brown & Moshavi (2002); Mitchell (1987); Gomes & Knowles (1999); Moses & Roe (1990); Fernandez & Vecchio (1997); Ambrose et al. (2005)</i>
Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity	<i>Harris et al. (2004); Mitchell (1987); Gomes & Knowles (1999); Murry & Stauffacher (2001); Moses & Roe (1990); Trocchia & Andrus (2003); Ambrose et al. (2005)</i>
Being trustworthy and having personal integrity	<i>Creswell et al. (1990); Harris et al. (2004); Murry & Stauffacher (2001); Barge & Musambira (1992); Trocchia & Andrus (2003); Ramsden (1998)</i>
Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/encouraging open communication	<i>Creswell et al. (1990); Harris et al. (2004); Bland et al. (2005b); Mitchell (1987); Murry & Stauffacher (2001); Moses & Roe (1990); Barge & Musambira (1992); Copur (1990); Lorange (1988); Bland et al. (2005a); Ramsden (1998)</i>
Communicating well about the direction the department is going	<i>Creswell et al. (1990); Harris et al. (2004); Bland et al. (2005b); Gordon et al. (1991); Ambrose et al. (2005)</i>
Acting as a role model/having credibility	<i>Brown & Moshavi (2002); Creswell et al. (1990); Harris et al. (2004); Bland et al. (2005a); Creswell & Brown (1992); Benoit & Graham (2005); Stark et al. (2002); Gordon et al. (1991); Bland et al. (2005a)</i>
Creating a positive/collegial work atmosphere in the department	<i>Mitchell (1987); Benoit & Graham (2005); Gomes & Knowles (1999); Moses & Roe (1990); Trocchia & Andrus (2003); Ambrose et al. (2005); Clott & Fjortoft (2000); Johnsrud & Rosser (2002); Bland et al. (2005a); Lindholm (2003)</i>
Advancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so	<i>Creswell et al. (1990); Harris et al. (2004); Mitchell (1987); Creswell & Brown (1992); Benoit & Graham (2005); Stark et al. (2002); Murry & Stauffacher (2001); Moses & Roe (1990); Trocchia & Andrus (2003); Bland et al. (2005a)</i>
Providing feedback on performance	<i>Creswell et al. (1990); Harris et al. (2004); Bland et al. (2005b); Trocchia & Andrus (2003); Ambrose et al. (2005)</i>
Providing resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research	<i>Creswell et al. (1990); Bland et al. (2005b); Creswell & Brown (1992); Moses & Roe (1990); Ambrose et al. (2005); Lindholm (2003); Bland et al. (2005a)</i>
Making academic appointments that enhance department's reputation	<i>Snyder et al. (1991); Bolton (1996); Bland et al. (2005a)</i>

is someone who regularly suggests issues and problem areas, though not necessarily solutions to them.

A study of 200 US chairs who had been nominated as excellent in a study by Creswell *et al.* (1990) found that a feature of these departmental leaders is that they establish a collective departmental vision or focus. Benoit and Graham's (2005) investigation of 13 departmental chairs designated as excellent by their peers pointed to the importance of the leader being visionary.

Preparing department arrangements to facilitate the direction set

This aspect of effective departmental leadership follows on from the previous one. It means that effective departmental leaders do more than merely set out a direction for their departments—they also make sure that the department is prepared for the direction the leader has set in motion. An example of this notion can be found in Knight and Holen's (1985) study of the leadership styles and effectiveness of 458 US department chairpersons as reported by their faculty members. The authors used measures associated with the Ohio School of Leadership (based at Ohio State University), and emphasized two components of leader behaviour: consideration and initiating structure. Initiating structure denotes an emphasis on goal-directed activity and securing the appropriate structures for getting things done. Knight and Holen found that leaders who scored high on both aspects of leadership were more effective than other leaders. This is consistent with the findings in other Ohio State studies, most of which show that the so-called 'Hi-Hi' combination (high level of both initiating structure and consideration) is associated with higher levels of subordinate performance (Bryman, 1986; Yukl, 1994). The previously mentioned investigation by Stark *et al.* (2002) of leaders of departments involved in continuous planning of curricula found that it was important for the leader to provide a structure to the overall planning process that was introduced to implement the direction set. The Creswell *et al.* study pointed to the importance of chairs who 'allocate resources of time, information and assignments to encourage the vision' (1990, p. 26).

Being considerate

As implied by the brief discussion of Knight and Holen's (1985) findings, consideration on the part of leaders has been identified as associated with leadership effectiveness at departmental level. Consideration refers to behaviour indicative of relationships of trust, warmth and mutual respect between the leader and followers. Two studies of Australian academics found consideration to be positively related to organizational commitment, but that it was unrelated to job involvement (Winter *et al.*, 2000; Winter & Sarros, 2002). Further support for the relationship between consideration and job satisfaction derives from a study by Fernandez and Vecchio (1997) of employees and their supervisors at a US university. Employees represented a wide variety of job levels. Fernandez and Vecchio found that consideration was related to job satisfaction for middle and higher level employees, but not for low-level

employees. It is not entirely clear which job categories these job-level distinctions refer to, although it is likely that academic staff do not figure in the category of low-level jobs.

However, the significance of consideration for leadership effectiveness in the studies reviewed is not universal. Somewhat contrary evidence comes from a study by Brown and Moshavi (2002) of 70 US department chairs. Faculty members completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, which is designed to measure aspects of transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1985). Individualized consideration is a dimension of transformational leadership in Bass's (1985) influential exposition of the transactional–transformational leadership contrast. It is not exactly conceptually the same as consideration, but sufficiently similar to warrant being examined in this context. Brown and Moshavi found that consideration was unrelated to all the effectiveness measures they employed.

Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity

This aspect of leader behaviour refers to such things as trusting staff, treating staff equitably and being fair to them. Ambrose *et al.* (2005) interviewed current and former academic staff at a US university in depth about issues relating to their satisfaction with their work and the university. The researchers' interviews specifically uncovered aspects of departmental leadership that are relevant to this article. The authors found that one important set of factors in effective departmental leadership was that effective chairs treated people fairly, consistently, inclusively, responsively and were encouraging. In Trocchia and Andrus's (2003) study, evaluating faculty fairly and treating faculty with respect were high on the list of abilities of effective departmental leaders. Mitchell (1987) conducted a qualitative study of 19 'outstanding' heads of department in three Midwestern universities. The heads were nominated by chief academic officers on the basis of being outstanding in terms of their impact on the satisfaction and performance of their academic staff, as well as departmental productivity. Among these were 'unselfishness, fairness and honesty [and] mutual trust and respect' (Mitchell, 1987, p. 168). In an Australian study, Moses and Roe (1990) found that departmental leaders who treat members of staff equally and fairly were more likely to be able to build and maintain morale.

Being trustworthy and having personal integrity

This aspect of leader behaviour points to the need for leaders to be trusted and to be seen as people of integrity. This has been a popular theme in the leadership literature (e.g. Kouzes & Posner, 1993). Trust and integrity issues were found to be important in a study by Murry and Stauffacher (2001) of perceptions of what makes for effectiveness in heads of department in the USA. The data derived from questionnaires administered to different groups (deans, fellow heads of department and academic staff). There was quite a high degree of unanimity among these groups. Two criteria of head of department effectiveness related directly to trust and integrity issues: 'tries

to promote trust and cooperation among department members' and 'exhibits integrity and ethical behavior in all dealings'. The former relates more to the issue of collegiality, which will be addressed further below, but the latter relates directly to this facet of effective departmental leadership.

Trocchia and Andrus (2003) found that the top three chair 'characteristics' of effective chairs of marketing departments were: possessing integrity, honesty and fairness, the last of which is more to do with the previous component of effective departmental leadership. The significance of trust issues in these studies is in tune with a study of turning points in relationships between US department chairs and academics. Barge and Musambira (1992) found that negative turning points were often associated with a change in the perceived trustworthiness of the head of department. Trustworthiness was conceptualized in terms of following through on promises or making sure staff were kept informed about issues they had a right to know about. This last element overlaps with the next one.

Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/encouraging open communication

This factor concerns one of the central values that the literature shows academics hold dear—the ability to be involved in decisions that affect them, and relatedly, to be able to debate issues of concern. The literature repeatedly demonstrates its significance for many academics. It is very much associated with the significance of autonomy for many academics—the ability to be responsible for their own work and to get on with that work in an untrammelled and unconfined way (e.g. Adams, 1998; Evans, 2001).

Evidence that allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions and encouraging open communication were significant to effective departmental leadership can be found in the following. In Murry and Stauffacher's (2001) investigation, 'encourages open communication between and among faculty and staff' was seen as contributing to department chair effectiveness. A study by Bland *et al.* (2005a) examined the distinctive characteristics of 37 highly research-productive departments at the University of Minnesota. The identification of the departments was undertaken by deans in their 'colleges', and was based on a mixture of subjective (impact of research on discipline, reputation as a research department) and objective (quantity of research, numbers of grant dollars) indicators. One of the key leadership factors was promoting participative decision making and a structure to support it. Moses and Roe (1990) found that an important factor in the maintenance of morale among Australian academics was departmental leaders being open to suggestions and to be consultative. Copur (1990) found, in connection with his study of a US research university, that when academics were unable to participate in decisions in which they thought they should have been involved, job disaffection rapidly set in.

Communicating well about the direction the department is going

The research suggests that effective leaders make sure that their staff are apprised of the direction of the department. This helps faculty to develop a sense of ownership of

the leader's vision (Creswell *et al.*, 1990). Ambrose *et al.* (2005) found that effective departmental leaders communicate effectively, while Gordon *et al.* (1991), in a US study of the views of department chairs and academic staff, found that it was important for chairs to stress the communication aspects of their roles more than they in fact do. Bland *et al.* (2005b) report the results of a study of departments within the medical school at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. They distinguished between leadership variables and departmental characteristics that might be related to various indicators of effectiveness. 'Good communication about major issues' was found to be strongly associated with research productivity.

Acting as a role model and having credibility

There is evidence that effective departmental leaders form role models for members of their staff, so that it is important for them to have credibility as academics as well as in terms of being leaders. In Brown and Moshavi's (2002) investigation, when statistical controls were employed, only idealized influence was associated with all three measures of effectiveness. These findings are consistent with the tendency for idealized influence to exhibit the strongest relationships with effectiveness (Bryman, 1992; Lowe *et al.*, 1996). Interestingly, the idealized influence score was found to be high relative to other studies (as reported in Lowe *et al.*, 1996), suggesting that this aspect of leadership is particularly important in a university setting. In the context of credibility and acting as a role model, this finding concerning idealized influence is significant because it denotes leaders who are 'admired, respected and trusted', whose followers 'identify with and want to emulate their leaders' (Bass *et al.*, 2003, p. 208).

Further evidence of the role of these aspects of leadership can be found in several other studies. Creswell and Brown (1992) report the findings of a qualitative study of 33 US department chairs, who had been identified as having excelled in their roles as heads. They distinguished several discrete roles that emerged out of an examination of specific examples that the interviewees gave of helping a member of academic staff to grow professionally. One of these is mentorship, which involves acting as a model for research activities, sharing knowledge and expertise about publishing and funding, and commenting on others' work. This study derives from the work of Creswell *et al.* (1990), which also found that serving as a role model was important to effective departmental leadership. In Benoit and Graham's (2005) research, being a role model (leading by example in teaching and research) was one of four prominent aspects of the leaders they studied. These findings relating to credibility and role modelling are very much in tune with Goodall's (2006) research using citation patterns. Her investigations suggest that it is important for deans of business schools to have credibility as researchers when leading research-oriented departments.

Creating a positive and collegial work atmosphere in the department

One of the most striking aspects of the literature on academic work is the degree that academic staff relish a collegial climate. Recent changes in universities associated with

a creeping managerialism are often disliked, in large part because they are seen as eroding collegiality. Unfortunately, the term is used in the literature in two distinct ways: sometimes it refers to a system of governance driven by consensual decision making and on other occasions it refers to mutual supportiveness among staff. It is the second sense of collegiality—offering professional and possibly personal support to others—that is the focus of this section. It implies that an important aspect of leadership effectiveness at departmental level is the degree to which the head of department is able to foster such collegiality.

Gomes and Knowles's (1999) case study of the impact of a new head of department of marketing in a US university found that the department was profoundly transformed following his arrival. Prior to his arrival it had been perceived as an uninspiring place to work. Among the significant leadership aspects of the changes he inaugurated were encouraging staff to get together as much as possible, and creating a climate of trust and mutual respect. Trocchia and Andrus's (2003) investigation of effective chairs of marketing departments in the US noted that being able to cultivate a collegial department was an ability that distinguished these leaders. Ambrose *et al.* (2005) found collegiality or its absence was an especially important contributory factor in satisfaction or dissatisfaction among academic staff in a US university. Their research suggests that effective heads created a sense of community among staff.

Advancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so

It is very clear that effective departmental leaders are ones who are perceived by their staff as promoting their department's standing and profile within the university and beyond. Moreover, they are thought to be proactive in this regard—actively taking steps to advance its profile and awareness of its needs and its contributions.

Creswell and Brown (1992) found that what they call 'advocacy', that is, 'championing the cause of staff within and beyond the university', was a feature of the excellent department chairs they studied. Similarly, in Benoit and Graham's (2005) investigation of successful department chairs, 'external liaison', which refers to advancing the department through contacts with external constituencies, was found to be an important feature of their leadership. Bland *et al.* (2005a) similarly found, at the University of Minnesota, that being a departmental advocate was one of the features of the leaders of highly research-productive departments. Benoit and Graham (2005) found in their US study of department chairs that successful leaders were seen by deans, fellow chairs and academic staff as ones who effectively communicated the department's needs to the dean. Academic staff in Moses and Roe's (1990) Australian study also attach great importance to heads of department acting as advocates for the department.

Providing feedback on performance

Effective leaders are seen by their staff as providing helpful feedback on performance. Ensuring that staff receive feedback was a noted aspect of the leadership of department

chairs who had been nominated as excellent in the Creswell *et al.* (1990) study. Similarly, Ambrose *et al.* (2005) found that current and former academic staff depicted effective departmental leaders as providing constructive feedback and mentoring. Effective department chairs in Trocchia and Andrus's (2003) investigation were perceived as evaluating faculty fairly.

Providing resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research

This aspect of leader behaviour tends mainly to be associated with greater effectiveness in research-oriented departments and universities. That is not to say that it has no relevance to other higher education contexts, but that its significance tends to be greater in milieus with a strong research focus. It implies that effective departmental leaders are ones who make research a priority, and who fine-tune workloads to reflect this orientation. In addition, they take steps to provide resources to sustain a strong research effort. It could be argued that such actions should be considered the domain of management rather than leadership. However, given that leadership is among other things about the management of meaning (Smircich & Morgan, 1982), it could be argued that this aspect of departmental leadership is as much to do with the symbolism of the actions—that is, as signalling a strong commitment to and encouraging research—as it is to do with the actions themselves.

In the study of research-productive departments at the University of Minnesota, Bland *et al.* (2005a) noted that managing money, space and people to assist research activities was a mark of leaders of these research-oriented departments. In Lindholm's (2003) research on academic staff at a US research university, good leadership was viewed as securing the resources that allowed them to maximize the congruence between their needs and faculty realities. At a research university like this, the congruence was maximized in terms of 'safeguarding their time for research and scholarly writing' (p. 142).

From the point of view of academic staff, leadership is very much to do with creating the conditions for them to pursue their research interests and objectives in a relatively unfettered way. This is most likely to be realized at departmental level through a combination of ensuring that staff acquire the resources they need, and then allowing them to do their work autonomously. The research by Ambrose *et al.* (2005) suggests a corollary of the general point of this section: those department chairs who encumbered junior faculty with tasks that detracted from their research, such as committee work, were seen as less effective leaders.

Making academic appointments that enhance department's reputation

In a similar manner to the previous aspect of effective departmental leadership, this one is likely to be especially significant in departments and universities with strong research traditions and cultures. It should also be pointed out that this aspect only entered the list of forms of leader behaviour associated with leadership effectiveness at departmental level by barely meeting the criteria for inclusion cited above. Bland

et al. (2005a) found that the recruitment of highly regarded researchers was a feature of the heads of research-productive departments at the University of Minnesota. A US study shows that the ability to recruit and retain outstanding researchers is a key strategy in raising research productivity at a research-oriented university (Snyder *et al.*, 1991). This factor also is likely to be significant because US research shows that the academic reputation of institutions and departments is a factor in decisions about whether to move to other institutions (Matier, 1990; Johnsrud & Heck, 1994). In so far as recruiting outstanding scholars might enhance the reputation of an institution, making good appointments might reduce the turnover of academic staff.

Towards a competency model of effective departmental leadership?

On the face of it, the foregoing analysis would seem to provide the foundations of a competency-based framework for departmental leaders in universities, a goal that can often be discerned in reviews of the school effectiveness literature (e.g. Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Such models entail the identification of leadership skills that are associated with superior performance and are typically evidence-based (Hollenbeck *et al.*, 2006). In *apparently* like fashion, the review above has identified a collection of leadership factors that have been identified fairly consistently in the literature as promoting departmental effectiveness. It would seem that if departmental leaders were encouraged to follow the implied imperatives of these aspects of leadership, or if training programmes were designed to develop leaders in terms of these features, departmental leadership effectiveness would be enhanced. Indeed, common sense would seem to suggest that leaders who exhibit these forms of behaviour, or a large number of them, are more likely to be effective than those who do not. However, some caution is necessary with drawing such an inference.

First, these aspects of leader behaviour are quite general. They provide only limited guidance concerning concrete actions, a feature they share with many other leadership competency approaches. Knowing that one has to cultivate personal integrity may be useful, but how one goes about establishing and maintaining it is a different matter.

Second, the aspects of departmental leadership effectiveness occasionally clash. It was shown above that it is important for departmental leaders to have credibility as leaders. This suggests that, in research-focused contexts, they will need to have strong reputations as researchers themselves. Further, it implies that they will need to maintain a level of research performance once they become heads. The finding is striking because the implication is that departmental leaders are selected because they are viewed as having excelled as academics, rather than because of previous leadership or managerial experience. The expectation that they will need to maintain their credibility by maintaining their research profile could conceivably make it difficult for heads of department to pay attention to the other aspects of departmental leadership effectiveness, as outlined above. Certainly, research suggests that departmental leaders find it difficult—even impossible—to maintain a research presence of any significance (e.g. Bolton, 1996). In other words, treating the list of factors as the springboard for

a competency framework, so that leaders are encouraged to display as many of them as possible, may neglect the inherent tensions in lists like these.

Third, there is the problem of context. Do such lists of effective leader behaviours have a validity that transcends the diverse contexts within which departmental leaders are likely to find themselves? The notion that context and situational diversity have implications for leadership effectiveness has a long history in the field of leadership theory and research (e.g. Fiedler, 1967), but this issue was hardly ever addressed. In other words, there is little consideration of the issue that leader behaviour that works in one context may not work in another, even though there is evidence that leaders are often not able to export their leadership styles to other contexts (Roberts & Bradley, 1988).

Fourth, heads of department and department chairs are not the only leaders in university departments. One of the problems with the literature covered in this article is that, at least implicitly, it associates significant leadership of university departments with individuals who are at least formally in charge of them. It is well known that university departments contain a variety of formal roles in which there is an expectation of leadership, such as course directors, directors of research, chairs of important committees, such as teaching and learning committees, and so on. These roles are sometimes uncovered by researchers concerned with departmental leadership in universities (e.g. Smith, 2005), but they are rarely considered in relation to the issue of departmental leadership effectiveness.

Fifth, consideration of leadership effectiveness in university departments is fraught with a problem that is a distinctive feature of these organizational units, namely, most department chairs are temporary appointments. While permanent department chairs are not uncommon (for example, there is evidence that they are quite common in UK statutory universities, that is, post-1992 'new' universities), typically they occupy their positions for a fixed term. In the UK context, this term can be for as little as three years. Indeed, writers like Creswell *et al.* (1990) note that one of the most important things that department chairs can do is to make sure that they do not neglect their roles as researchers. This is not solely to do with the matter of credibility referred to above, but also that they must remember that they will be returning to a research role at the end of their tenure as head of department. The problem that this issue poses for studies concerned with establishing a link between the leader behaviour of a departmental chair and effectiveness is that we cannot know how far it is the incumbent's leadership that is crucial or that of a predecessor—quite aside from the causality issue previously referred to that bedevils many of the studies.

There are, then, several reasons for not using the literature review as a springboard for developing a competency-based framework for departmental leaders. The first three of the five cautionary warnings are generic to competency frameworks, and can be read in relation to critiques of the approach more generally (e.g. Bolden *et al.*, 2006). However, the last two cautionary warnings are likely to be more specific to university departments or to organizational units that are similar to them. Together, the five points imply that if the literature review is to be viewed as providing the basis

for a competency framework, the limits and limitations of the ensuing programme need to be borne in mind.

Conclusion

This article has reviewed the literature on departmental leadership effectiveness in universities. Thirteen aspects of leader behaviour were identified as associated with effectiveness. These 13 aspects comprise many aspects of leader behaviour that can be found in the leadership literature more generally, such as the emphases on vision, integrity, consideration and sense of direction. However, there are also aspects of department chair leadership that are more strikingly connected to the specific milieu of higher education. While it is common for organization studies to report that workers prefer to participate in decisions at work, the intensity with which the literature suggests that leaders are more effective if they promote this is very striking. Aspects of leader behaviour that are likely to be especially significant in universities are the need to foster a collegial atmosphere and advancing the department's cause.

One of the concepts from leadership theory and research that has had little impact on the study of leadership in higher education is Kerr and Jermier's (1978) influential notion of substitutes for leadership. Kerr and Jermier proposed that there are features of organizations and the people who work in them that can neutralize the impact of leadership. This is a potentially significant concept within a higher education institution context because Kerr and Jermier suggested that when 'subordinates' have a professional orientation and a need for independence—both of which are arguably characteristics of academic staff—the impact of leader behaviour will be neutralized. At the time they were writing, leadership research tended to concentrate upon a contrast between a relationship- and a task-oriented style of leadership. Kerr and Jermier argued that a professional orientation and a need for independence would neutralize the impact of both relationship- and task-oriented leadership. They also suggested that when tasks are intrinsically satisfying, as academic work is for many university staff (e.g. Ward & Sloane, 2000), a relationship orientation will be neutralized. However, while there are no direct tests of the substitutes for leadership concept in relation to the leadership of academics, the findings reported in this article strongly imply that leadership *does* make a difference so far as academic effectiveness is concerned.

Relatedly, there is also the suggestion in some of the leadership literature that professionals need a different or more subtle form of leadership than non-professionals. In other words, leadership, in the traditional sense of providing close supervision of tasks, is likely to be less significant for most professionals like university employees than for other occupational groups. As Mintzberg has put it: 'Most professional workers require little direct supervision from managers' (1998, p. 143). Instead, he suggests they require a covert form of leadership entailing 'protection and support' (1998, p. 146). This means attending to the links with important constituencies that cultivate legitimacy and support for the department or organization. This is consistent with the significance attached to advancing the department's cause (see Table 1). The issue of

support is also echoed by Raelin, who proposed that the ‘management of autonomy’ is central to the management of the academic (1995, p. 210).

These reflections suggest that leadership, in the traditional sense associated with leadership theory and research, may be of limited relevance, because academics’ professionalism and their internal motivation mitigate the need for leadership of this kind. What may actually occur is that leadership may be significant for its *adverse* effects rather than for the positive ones that might be achieved in other milieus. In other words, leadership conceivably may be more significant sometimes for the problems it fosters than for its benefits. This would mean that the issue in higher education institutions is not so much what leaders should do, but more to do with what they should avoid doing. In academic contexts, leadership may sometimes be as significant (if not more significant) for the damage it causes as for the benefits it brings in its wake.

All forms of leader behaviour carry risks that they will have adverse effects (McCauley, 2004). The substitutes for leadership literature remind us that the leadership of internally motivated employees requires considerable care. Thus, from the point of view of the leader behaviours outlined in Table 1, leadership that undermines collegiality, autonomy and the opportunity to participate in decisions, that creates a sense of unfairness, that is not proactive on the department’s behalf, and so on, is likely to be ineffective because it damages the commitment of academics. Unfortunately, this is an area that has received little direct empirical attention but deserves investigation. It is also worth recognizing that such a view of the leadership of academics contrasts sharply with the orientation of the ‘new public management’ (e.g. Deem, 2004). As Trow (1994) pointed out, the new public management in universities has arisen in large part because of a lack of trust and confidence in the professionalism that can act as a substitute for leadership. Indeed, the call for leadership in universities and in public sector organizations generally can be read as a lack of faith in the underlying principles of the notion of professionalism as a substitute for leadership.

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