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Effective Leadership in Higher Education – ten Years later: a contemporary Literature Review

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Abstract

Effective leadership is as essential for institutions of higher education as it is for all organizations. Updating Bryman's (2007) systematic review, the current study conducts a systematic analysis of the discourse on leadership on the department level. Results show that Bryman's (2007) original aspects still resonate loudly in the discourse ten years later but they also identify the emergence of a new central concept – ambidexterity – has found its way into the canon of micro-level leadership research. While there is still no one best way to achieve effective leadership in higher education, findings reveal a growing distinction between leadership behaviours and the specific characteristics ascribed to effective leaders. Advancing both the discourse on practical issues of leadership in higher education and the unresolved issue of complexity in higher education management, the current review provides a valuable overview of the current state-of-the-art and opens up broad avenues for future research.

Keywords: Leadership, Higher Education, Effectiveness, Leadership Behaviour, Leader Characteristics, Systematic Review.

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Introduction

Leadership is essential for organizational effectiveness (Valle 1999; Van Wart 2003; Vogel and Masal 2014) and even more so in the complex environment of higher education management (House et al. 2004). Etzioni (1965) broadly defines leadership as a form of power based on individual qualities of a person that allows him or her to elicit followers' voluntary compliance in a broad range of matters, or – more precisely – 'to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members' (House et al. 2004, 15). In the context of higher education and university management, effective leadership originates from a latent competence grounded in the individual but with the leverage to visibly influence the behaviour of everyone involved in the social environment of a department; It is 'a mysterious process […] that touches everyone's life' (Yukl 2002).

The fascination with leadership has created a vast body of research. However, the effects and effectivity of different styles of leadership in their idiosyncratic *context* has long been understudied (Teelken 2012) and leadership in institutions of higher education is special in many regards. Universities and colleges function differently than for-profit businesses. Prior research on public sector leadership clearly points out that in public organizations – in contrast to for-profit private sector organizations – leaders have to balance a much more complex configuration of potentially conflicting roles and institutional logics, multi-dimensional functions and strategic goals as well as a diverse set of actors, stakeholders, and governing bodies (Valle 1999; Torres 2011; Blaschke, Frost, and Hattke 2014; Vogel and Masal 2014). In higher education, leaders are faced with the complex task of both managing dependent staff and relatively independent academics, which hold rather broad autonomy within their associated

department. Raelin (1995) has pointed out that in higher education the essential challenge of leadership lies in the *management of autonomy* within this unique system of collegiality, which poses a sharp contrast to the viewpoint of *new managerial leadership* in higher education, a lens widely adapted in the 1980s but with often disappointing results (Deem 2004; Bryman 2007; Blaschke, Frost, and Hattke 2014).

For a long time, scholars have overlooked these peculiar challenges of leadership in higher education (Teelken 2012). In December 2007, *Studies in Higher Education* published an article on leadership effectiveness in higher education written by the late Alan Bryman. The empirical evidence of Bryman's paper was derived from a systematic literature review asking what kinds of leadership behaviours are found to be effective in institutions of higher education. More specifically, this systematic review focusses on the micro-level of leadership scholarship asking *what are the typical behaviours of leaders in higher education that result in department-level effectiveness?*

The original review by Bryman (2007) covered an extensive body of literature spanning from 1985 to 2005 and focussed specifically on studies on departmental leadership in English-speaking countries (i.e. the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia). Drawing onto the well-established framework of behavioural leadership competences, Bryman (2007) effectively identified 13 specific 'aspects' or behaviours of leaders that were associated with higher departmental effectiveness. While these 13 aspects largely reflect Yukl, Gordon, and Taber's (2002) taxonomy of leadership behaviour, Bryman (2007) was the first to shed light onto how exactly heads of academic departments contribute to departmental performance, thus, answering the long standing call by Barge and Musambira (1992) for more empirical research on the micro-foundations of leadership theory in higher education. Putting the research focus on the department level is important because departments are nuclei of strategic choice in organizations of higher education and amalgamate the micro clusters of chairs and specific

research groups into denser macro structures within the wider organizational environment of the university macro-structure. Therefore, effective leadership on the department level is crucial for university management effectiveness and effectivity.

In the last decade, leadership research – especially in public sector scholarship (see Vogel and Masal (2014) for a profound review mapping the by now impressive quantity and variety of the discourse) – has made great leaps forward, calling for a follow-up to Bryman's (2007) study. Ten years later, the current paper represents a natural extension to Bryman's work describing the ways in which the discourse has deepened and widened， where it still resonates the 13 aspects of leadership effectiveness identified in Bryman's (2007) original review, and where it has taken roads less travelled.

Method: Systematic Literature Review

Systematic reviews are especially valuable for the scientific discourse in higher education. Their rigorous search strategy allows going beyond the commonly and best-known concepts and evidence and provides meta-insights into the state of the art of a specific topic (Bearman et al. 2012). In this way, systematic reviews provide direction in the jungle of literature and reveal the underlying concepts and positions taken in the discourse, its conceptual clusters and gaps (Gough 2007; Bearman et al. 2012).

Selection criteria

The academic research that is reviewed in this article was selected with due diligence following the PRISM guidelines (Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart 2003). The selection criteria applied Bryman's original approach and used the same search terms and the same research focus and limitations. The terms 'leadership', 'higher education', and 'effectiveness' were searched to identify research relevant in this study in the six major databases of academic literature (EBSCO, ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, Science Direct, and Web of Science Core Collection). The scope of this

study is limited to research published in international peer-reviewed journals from January 1st 2006 to December 31st 2017 which included the three search terms either in the title, in the abstract, or in both. The complete search log is documented in the appendix.

The systematic query yielded a total of 162 results after clearing for duplicates. In as second step, the titles and abstracts of these articles were screened to determine whether the search results were relevant for the topic of leadership effectiveness in higher education. Figure 1 presents the following steps of manuscript screening and the respective conditions for inclusion and exclusion as a PRISM flow diagram.

<<< Please place Figure 1 about here. >>>

A considerable number of hits were false positives (i.e. by being concerned with schools or teacher leadership, or with methods of teaching in leadership courses, or because they were already included in Bryman's original study in 2007). Consequently, n = 133 studies were excluded from the prior set of results because they did not fit thematically to the focus of the current review, resulting in a set of 29 potentially relevant articles. For the final selection, all abstracts were scanned to determine whether the papers reflected the challenges of practical leadership in higher education. This lead to the exclusion of a further n = 13 studies that did not focus on leaders' behaviour or practices on the department level but, for instance, rather on the principles of distributing leadership throughout the organizational structure of universities. In a final step, the remaining 16 studies were evaluated for their specific country context since Bryman's (2007) study specifically focussed on publications from the UK, the US, and Australia which is important because the specific academic tradition of these countries form one of the central clusters in the landscape of higher education. Furthermore, the reference lists

of the final selection of papers were screened for additional articles that might have been missed in the original database search queries. The criteria for snowballing were the same as applied for the original literature search and only peer-reviewed articles published after 2006 were included. This post-hoc search yielded another $N = 4$ papers (which did not appear in the original search query because their keywords were imprecise) resulting in a final selection of $N = 10$ manuscripts which form the basis of the current literature review. Snowballing yielded one study from New Zealand (Cardno 2013). Originally, Bryman (2007) only included studies from the US, the UK, and Australia because he was more familiar with the academic institutions in these countries and the language compared with other parts of the world. Since New Zealand's higher education system is very similar to the Australian system, Cardno's (2013) study was included in the current review.

Data

This systematic review is based on a full sample of $N = 10$ manuscripts. These papers originate from a diverse set of nine different scientific journals. Table 1 shows the number of papers extracted by the individual outlets and by the respective years. It shows how the material of this review is spread out among nine different journals of very dissimilar focus, for instance the more general *Leadership*, which published two articles relevant for the current review in 2009, and the more specialized *Academic Psychiatry* or the *Journal of Agricultural Education*.

<<< Please place Table 1 about here. >>>

Consequently, there is no real clustering regarding the origin or the scientific perspective of the studies. The sample comprises four qualitative studies (Bryman and Lilley 2009; Collinson and Collinson 2009; Cardno 2013; and Kleihauer et al. 2013), four quantitative studies (De Boer

and Goedegebuure 2009; Fernandez 2008; Keith and Buckley 2011; and Vilkinas 2014), one synthesis based on a narrative review strongly referencing to Bryman's study (Gonaim 2016), and one study using both quantitative performance data as well as case-study analysis and semi-structured interviews (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008). Table 2 provides an overview on the method, scope, and results of each study. The small number of published research means that little can be said about a trend; In 2008, two studies were released, three in 2009, one study in 2011, two in 2013, one in 2014, and one in 2016. Furthermore, the papers target a diverse set of English speaking countries; four studies focus on empirical evidence from the US, three studies on material from the UK, two from Australia, and another study from New Zealand. One study, Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008), derives its material from 19 university departments from eight different countries without being explicit about the countries actually involved.

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All studies were assessed for their methodological quality and rigor according to typical benchmarks of quality (see for instance Hoon 2013; Groeneveld et al. 2015) and were found to live up to the classical standards for both quantitative and qualitative research. The single narrative review (Gonaim 2016) was found to comprise a sufficiently balanced and critical perspective and its arguments are grounded in an in-depth analysis of the scientific discourse.

Findings from the Literature Review

The research question of the current review asks: *what are the typical behaviours of leaders in higher education that result in department-level effectiveness?* This might seem like a question that is easy to answer but even the small number of manuscripts included in the current review promote very dissimilar concepts of what is actually meant by the terms 'effectiveness' and 'leadership behaviour'. Using an inductive approach and close reading, the literature reveals a mixed landscape where typical aspects of *leaders' behaviours* and *leaders' characteristics* intermingle and, in some way, seem with effectiveness. While most of Bryman's (2007) aspects are still there, the current discourse adds a whole new and more personalized layer onto our understanding of higher education leadership. Table 3 summarizes all aspects of leadership behaviour and leadership characteristics identified by the ten articles reviewed (2006 to 2017). The aspects are displayed in alphabetical order and were named to accord for the sum of empirical or anecdotal evidence given in the individual manuscripts to characterize them. Column two gives examples for the respective behaviours and characteristics and column three names the manuscripts that explicitly attest the connection of the respective aspect with effectiveness.

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The process of clustering the complex content of the literature items was not as straightforward as it seems but rather iterative and recursive. Each manuscript was, first, analysed and summarized for its content according to the overall research question of this review. In a second step, the central claims (with evidence and examples given for their support) were systematically compared and contextualized with each other and, subsequently, connected to

the findings of Bryman's (2007) former review to identify clusters within the collective argumentation and evidence. These clusters are what table 3 presents as '*aspects*' in the very left column. In total, we identify six aspects of *leader behaviour* and *four characteristics of leaders* that are constantly associated with effective leadership. The following section describes these in total eleven aspects in detail. The order of presentation is alphabetical.

Seven Aspects of Behaviour for effective Leadership

The first aspect of behaviour identified is that effective leaders actively built an environment that fosters collegiality and collaboration among co-workers (*collegiality builder*) and encourages the creation of communities of practice (Fernandez 2008; Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008; Bryman and Lilley 2009; Collinson and Collinson 2009; de Boer and Goedegebuure 2009; Kleihauer et al. 2013; Gonaim 2016). This aspect echos Bryman's (2007, 701) aspect of '[c]reating a positive and collegial work atmosphere in the department.' But while Bryman's aspect focusses on the positive effect of a friendly and collegial atmosphere in contrast to a more managerial perspective, the current discourse puts more explicit emphasis on the unique challenge of managing relatively independent academics – or, how Bryman and Lilley (2009, 339) put it, managing academics is like 'herding cats'. Consequently, the active creation of a (scholarly) community of colleagues within the (externally imposed) constraints of the department is an essential prerequisite for the acceptability and support of the leader's position within the department and his or her power (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008). In fact, Bryman and Lilley (2009) emphasize that the idea of collegiality (with or without hierarchy) is a distinctive core feature of universities and other institutions of higher education which has to be taken into account by leadership and that can be regarded as central success factor to leadership. Effective leaders have to be successful in managing relationships within the department (Collinson and Collinson 2009) and, through the management of this network of relatively autonomous entities, create an environment that enables credibility and trust

among all actors involved (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2009). In his original review, Bryman (2007, 698) identifies this aspect as '[b]eing considerate' and we find that the current discourse still finds it to be one of the essential aspects that lead to leadership effectiveness but rather in its connection with building collegiality.

In their central role as managers, department leaders help reduce behavioural complexity (*complexity reducer*) (Fernandez 2008; Collinson and Collinson 2009, de Boer and Goedegebuure 2009; Keith and Buckley 2011; Cardno 2013; Vilkinas 2014). They clarify procedures, goals and objectives; they monitor operations and performance (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008) and they also provide guidance on a personal level (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008; Gonaim 2016). This aspect incorporates four of Bryman's (2007) original leader behaviours ('[p]reparing department arrangements to facilitate the direction set', p. 698, '[p]roviding feedback on performance', p. 702, '[p]roviding resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research', p.703, as well as '[m]aking academic appointments that enhance department's reputation' p. 703). All four are essentially about creating a functional environment to achieve set goals, about distributing tasks and resources adequately and creating processes that allow people to do their job well and with an immediate sense of feedback and direction.

Implicitly or explicitly, many studies of the recent discourse refer to relationship-oriented leadership styles (Yukl, Gordon, and Taber 2002). Effective leaders are characterized as *enablers* who involve their followers when making decisions (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008), and empower subordinates and followers by letting them take part in the proximate process of decision-making (Collinson and Collinson 2009). In this practice, effective leaders show their appreciation of the abilities and strengths of their staff and express confidence in their expertise (Fernandez 2008; Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008; Bryman and Lilley 2009; Collinson and Collinson 2009; de Boer and Goedegebuure 2009; Cardno 2013; Gonaim 2016).

The aspect of enabling others resonates with Bryman's (2007, 700) '[a]llowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/ encouraging open communication' but in contrast to the former discourse analysed by Bryman (2007) the current discourse explicitly integrates the need of non-academic staff – and also students (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008) – to partake in shared decision making. Formerly, the focus was put only on the wish of academics to be involved in decisions affecting them and to being able to discuss about these matters. Gonaim (2016) points out that increasing the involvement of others in managerial decision making and policy development indicates an emerging philosophy of both 'blended' and 'democratic leadership' in the realm of higher education.

Effective leaders do not only exert functional power but they are also highly influential in facilitating motivation and emotional attachment of their staff toward the department as a whole. Effective leaders *inspire others*. They are highly agreeable and hold high motivational capacity which they regularly use to inspire through their own surgency (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008; Keith and Buckley 2011; Kleihauer et al. 2013; Gonaim 2016). This aspect is – less elaborately so – also found in two of Bryman's (2007) leader behaviours ('[c]ommunicating well about the direction the department is going', p. 700, and '[a]dvancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so', p. 702) but the importance of creating emotions for attachment and motivation, and furthermore, of marketing the department as a success also to external partners is a new perspective in the discourse and clearly transgresses Bryman's (2007) findings that could be described as more functional advocacy.

Furthermore, department leaders solve problems instead of ignoring them (*problem solver*) (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008; Collinson and Collinson 2009; Keith and Buckley 2011; Cardno 2013; Kleihauer et al. 2013). They are characterized as dynamic, decisive decision makers who like to identify and tackle problems directly (Bryman and Lilley 2009) – or as

Collinson and Collinson (2009) put it: ‘they are ready to get their hands dirty’ – with no fear of being held accountable after the issue is set (Cardno 2013). In order to being able to solve the immediate problems of a department, effective leaders are strongly committed to their role, they are prepared for leadership in the sense that they know what they are doing and are highly conscientious (Gonaim 2016). In order to achieve this, many studies point out that department leaders have to be resistant to pressure and stress (Gonaim 2016) and that they have to be highly skilled and trained in conflict management (Gonaim 2016) which requires strong will, a certain toughness, perseverance, persistence, and assertiveness (Keith and Buckley 2011; Kleihauer et al. 2013).

But effective leaders are not simply characterized as tough mangers. To the contrary – and again resonating Yukl, Gordon, and Taber’s (2002) relationship-oriented leadership styles – empirical evidence suggests that effective department leaders should be very protective (Collinson and Collinson 2009) and supportive (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008) to their staff (*protector*) in order to foster a strong, immediate, and pro-active sense of followership and a high degree of legitimacy of his or her leadership among their staff (Fernandez 2008; Bryman and Lilley 2009; Vilkinas 2014).

Lastly, effective leaders are *visionaries*. They provide a clear sense of direction, set strategic long-term goals (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008, de Boer and Goedegebuure 2009), and derive a clear vision of the department as a whole. This aspect was prevalent in nine out of ten manuscripts reviewed (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008; Bryman and Lilley 2009; Collinson and Collinson 2009; de Boer and Goedegebuure 2009; Keith and Buckley 2011; Cardno 2013; Vilkinas 2014; Gonaim 2016) and explicitly mirrors Bryman’s (2007, 696) aspect of having a ‘[c]lear sense of direction/strategic vision’.

Four Traits of Character for Effective Leadership

In contrast to the former discourse reviewed by Bryman (2007), the more recent literature points toward the importance of individual, almost iconic character traits which might help leaders to achieve effectiveness.

The first and most loudly pronounced is multi-level *ambidexterity*, the ability to balance demanding and often conflicting roles (Cardon 2013) in the interaction with stakeholders both within the department and outside of the department (Fernandez 2008; Collinson and Collinson 2009; de Boer and Goedegebuure 2009; Vilkinas 2014; Gonaim 2016). Collinson and Collinson (2009) point out that departmental leadership today is almost paradoxical in its role complexity and strategic conflicts – a notion supported by Vilkinas (2014). Referring to Scott et al. (2008), Vilkinas (2014, 321) points out that the call for ambidexterity is not just an abstract construct but that it follows directly from the complex set of tasks that have to be balanced by leaders on the department level; being at the same time in charge of 'managing relationships with senior staff, developing policy, identifying new opportunities, strategic planning, participating in meetings and networking'. The multi-facetted profile of a department leader demands the ability to simultaneously adhere to very dissimilar and at times conflicting demands and it has striking consequences for the whole idea of what leadership is today (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008). Collinson and Collinson (2009) show that these demands calling for hybrid ambidexterity are not just task-based but that they also directly originate from the needs of the staff: In their qualitative study conducting semi-structured interviews with N =140 employees nested on different hierarchical levels of seven further education colleges, they find a consistent preference for what they call 'blended leadership', a mixture between heroic and post-heroic leadership styles that incorporates two seemingly incompatible dichotomies; Combining both delegation and direction, proximity and distance, personal and functional motivation, and subtle as well as flexible practices, 'good' (i.e. effective) department leaders have to complement both

heroic and post-heroic leadership styles in order to maximize followership. In practice, mastering this 'constant juggling task' (Collinson and Collinson 2009) and truly achieving hybrid ambidexterity is extremely demanding. Furthermore, it is important to note that Collinson and Collinson's (2009) interpret the importance of ambidexterity pointed out by their sample as a call against distributed leadership and an incentive to overcome the more often simplistic and (mostly dualistic) assumptions still favoured in large parts of the theoretical leadership discourse. On the other hand, after having identified basically identical leadership behaviours for effectiveness in their mixed-methods study across 19 highly diverse departments nested in eleven world-class universities in eight different countries, Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008) come to the exact opposite conclusion and postulate that dispersing leadership is key to develop ambidexterity and to survive in the growing jungle of conflicting demands: 'No heads in the study managed it all on their own' (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008, 422). Either way, there seems to be no one best way to develop ambidexterity but both hybrid and distributed leadership might help path the way depending on the specific departmental context.

The second aspect is being *knowledgeable*. Effective leaders know what they are doing. They hold high levels of expertise and ability regarding their own operative tasks as well as being equally interested in and informed about their workforce (Fernandez 2008) and the processes they are involved in (De Boer and Goedegebuure 2009). The discourse point out that not necessarily seniority but experience helps in this regard (Keith and Buckley 2011; Cardno 2013). Gonaim (2016) explicitly calls for more preparation for the many challenges future department chairs will be faced with. On the other hand, based on their qualitative study conducting semi-structured interviews with $N = 24$ leadership scholars who also held leader positions in their respective departments, Bryman and Lilley (2009) find that even leadership scholars' pronounced expertise in leadership theory and research only had minimal impact on their own leadership practice. Curiously, Bryman and Lilley's (2009) study found that all scholars

interviewed – six of the interviewees researching education, ten of them studying management, and eight the field of higher education – were consistent in this experience. Too much theoretical leadership knowledge might actually limit reflexivity which is problematic when being faced with the highly complex network of demands poised onto leaders in higher education. Furthermore, the authors note how leadership forms that are characteristic for new managerialism – such as transformational or charismatic/iconic leadership – were virtually absent or explicitly criticised as unsuited or adverse to leadership in the context of higher education.

Third, effective leaders are open to new experiences and to innovations (*openness*). They will find it easier to inspire others when they themselves show a high willingness to learn (Vilkinas 2014) and innovate (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008), to being introspective (Kleihauer et al. 2013), and to be self-aware (Vilkinas 2014; Gonaim 2016). None of the three characteristics explored above resonate in Bryman's (2007) original review, pointing toward real innovation in the discourse.

The last characteristic of effective leaders is *personal integrity*. Leaders who are trustworthy and honest (Collinson and Collinson 2009), who can function as a role model by holding and communicating a clear set of values will be more accepted by their staff and will, thus, find it easier to attain true followership within their department (Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin 2008; Bryman and Lilley 2009; Keith and Buckley 2011; Gonaim 2016). Effective leaders 'lead[…] by example' (Collinson and Collinson 2009, 372). This trait, in broader terms, summarizes three of Bryman's (2007) aspects under one heading: '[t]reating academic staff fairly and with integrity' (699), '[b]eing trustworthy and having personal integrity' (699), and '[a]cting as a role model and having credibility' (701).

Discussion and Conclusion

Effective leadership is one of or the most essential aspect of university governance, holding 'vital strategic, financial, organizational and motivational importance' (Collinson and Collinson 2009, 369). Examining the last ten years of the discourse on effective leadership in higher education helped identify six specific behaviours that are consistently found to be connected to effective leadership. Furthermore, effective leaders seem to be likely to hold four specific traits that might be helpful in either leading effectively, or becoming a leader that is regarded as effective, or being able to adapt to volatile demands and, thus, being able to remain a leader who is, consequently, regarded as effective. The problem is easy to see. The absolute amount of research on effectiveness in higher education leadership is scarce and being limited to being able to review only ten manuscripts means that it is not plausible to identify causal mechanisms between specific leadership behaviours or characteristics and effectiveness. We simply don't know what is first: Do people become leaders because they are knowledgeable and able to juggle all the tasks that come with the position, or are they open-minded enough to develop this ambidexterity and other skills on the job? Is it because they act as visionaries that they are perceived as highly motivating and agreeable or do they become a role model because they tend to support and protect their staff? It is hard to identify a clear sense of hierarchy or even paths of causality between leaders' behaviours and their traits – a caveat that was already pointed out by Bryman (2007). Yet, all six behaviours and all four characteristics are constantly recognized as having a positive influence on (perceived) effectiveness of leaders in higher education, potentially even more so if they are combined. Finding out what works and when is a task for future systematic and especially behavioural research.

Still, all studies analysed in the current paper point toward three main points and all of them point toward the essential role of context-dependent leadership for higher education: *First*, there is no single most effective style of leadership to maximize effectiveness (Bryman and Lilley

2009). Effective leadership in higher education is multi-facetted and, as pointed out by Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008), it is essential that leadership adapts to the specific context of the department, taking into account the needs and objectives of both internal and external stakeholders (Vilkinas 2014). Fernandez's (2008) study illustrates this particularly well. Based on a sample of N = 100,571 US federal government employees nested in 29 agencies including higher education, shows that basically all three dimensions of Yukl, Gordon, and Taber's (2002) taxonomy of leadership styles (task-oriented, relationship-oriented, and development-oriented behaviour) are perceived as being positively correlated with departmental performance (i.e. being effective). The findings are intriguing because while task-oriented leadership had the strongest effect (β = 0.21**) in direct comparison with the other two styles (relation-oriented: β = 0.08**; development-oriented: β = 0.05**), specific behaviours that are directly related to relationship-oriented (e.g. cooperation: β = 0.39**; workforce knowledge and skills: β = 0.13**) and development-oriented leadership styles (e.g. sharing of knowledge: β = 0.18**) were equally or even more strongly associated with perceived leadership effectiveness. The conclusion is that, yes, higher education leadership seems to have a (perceived) bearing on departmental success but, no, there is no one size fits all.

Furthermore, the complex – and sometimes paradoxical – network of demands of all stakeholders on the department level has to be balanced by a leadership style that is not only fit to the context but that has to be actually helpful in reducing behavioural complexity. Vilkinas's (2014) quantitative study on 360-degree feedback data of 75 non-academic managers in higher education departments comprised responses by N = 816 colleagues (line-managers, peers, staff, and academics) shows that in order to practically manage this complexity, developing ambidexterity and adaptability of personal leadership styles and practices is identified as a *consequence* of the environmental – i.e. contextual – complexity. This means that leaders are actually shaped by their environmental demands and the fact that ambidexterity is so strongly

associated with effectiveness might originate from the fact that leaders who do not have the potential to develop ambidexterity are not successful on the job. More longitudinal research into the nature of cause and effect is needed.

Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008) as well as Bryman and Lilley (2009) explicitly point out how most theoretical frameworks on leadership generally underestimate the significance of contextual factors in higher education, concluding that it was futile to develop prescriptive inventories of specific leadership competencies without taking into account the specific context. In this sense, the current review might be most interesting not for practitioners who want to know which skills and behaviours they need in order to become department leaders but rather for human resource managers trying to identify the set of practices and traits to look for in a person to identify the candidate for deanship or other positions of department leadership that might promise the highest likelihood leadership effectiveness.

Second, growing complexity in department management calls for leaders who can achieve ambidexterity in their leadership style with both the stakeholders within their department and with those in the external environment – and demands on the job are ever growing. As one interviewee of Collinson and Collinson (2009) points out

> ‘I could never do the Principal’s job. It’s so diverse. You have to know what goes on in the college, what is happening in the region, what is going on at a political level. You need to be out in the community, seen to be active at all levels within the college, keep up-to-date with the constant changes from the politicians, deal with all the Government bodies and manage the finances. It is an impossible job.’ (Collinson and Collinson 2009, 375)

Building on prior criticism on the dualistic perspective on leadership (e.g.: leader/follower; transformational/transactional; task orientation/people orientation), which still prevails in large parts of the discourse, Collinson and Collinson (2009) argue that the overwhelming demands on this ‘impossible job’ can be met if we realize that seemingly separate and incompatible

demands are actually interrelated and often mutually necessary to simultaneously addressing conflicting strategic concerns. This idea to think leadership in higher education anew can also be interpreted as calling towards more distributed or even demographic leadership on the top level, an idea also put forth by Gonaim (2016). Instead of expecting the full scope of traits and behaviours at all time from one and the same person departments might want to think about installing a team or small consortium of leaders on the highest level in order to address the 'impossible' multi-dimensional challenge by not just blending different styles but also distributing power in favour of a dialectical approach to leadership and, consequently, to achieve effectiveness.

Third, having certain traits and behaviours might help but their helpfulness will always depend on the idiosyncratic context leaders are faced with at their department. Pointing toward former work by Gronn (2003), Cardno (2013) emphasises that we might want to start regarding the specific context of simultaneously managing research, administration, teaching, and learning as one single but widely distributed and dynamic structural phenomenon within a single organizational body – the department – and beyond. For leaders who simultaneously have to 'be[…] the frontline, in the frontline, and supporting the frontline' (Cardno 2013, 133), rigorous bureaucratic structures and hierarchies can be obstacles in adapting to the changing environment. Vilkinas (2014) points out that the growing demand on both leaders and followers enhance behavioural complexity and creates a need to constantly re-fit leadership styles and leaders' specific behaviours to these ever-changing contexts and demands. This might give a first hint on why the discourse has turned toward leadership characteristics – competences in a sense – which are held by leaders and which help them to adapt to an environment of volatile demands. In a sense, people who intrinsically hold leadership *characteristics* (ambidexterity, being knowledgeable and open, and having personal integrity) might find it more easily to adapt *and* still lead effectively in the process of adapting. Holding onto different styles of leadership

of very straightforward *behaviours* could be futile without having the ability to learn, without the experience and knowledge, without being a morally integer person that is able to inspire others and to flexibly adapt their style of leadership to the immediate contextual demands of their followers and their peers at their department.

In this sense, the four characteristics identified within the current discourse could also be seen as a foundation of competencies that might not guarantee success but that surely won't hurt either. While paralleling some findings from iconic leadership theory and the competency framework, they are still pointing into an entirely new direction: toward a more democratic and distributed idea of leadership, toward a more flexible and demand-oriented approach to leadership in context, and toward a distinct and specific theory of leadership in higher education.

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Appendix: Search log

No.	Database
1	**EBSCO (EconLit with Full Text)** From 2006 to 31st December 2017 Results: 5 hits Boolean/Phrase: AB higher education AND AB leadership AND AB effectiveness Limiters: Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals; Published Date: 20060101-20171231; Publication Type: Journal Article
2	**JSTOR** From 2006 to 31st December 2017 Results: 10 hits content type: Journals only (ab:(leadership) AND ab:((higher education) OR (university)) AND ab:(effectiv*)) AND disc:(politicalscience-discipline OR sociology-discipline OR laboremploymentrelations-discipline OR education-discipline OR publicpolicy-discipline OR psychology-discipline OR economics-discipline OR manorgbeha-discipline OR business-discipline))
3	**Scopus** From 2006 to 31st December 2017 Results: 17 hits Content type: Journals only pub-date > 2005 and tak(higher education) AND tak(leadership) AND tak(effectiveness)[Journals(Business, Management and Accounting, Decision Sciences, Psychology, Social Sciences)]
4	**Science Direct** From 2006 to 31st December 2017 Results: 7 results found for pub-date > 2005 and TITLE-ABSTR-KEY('higher education' leadership effectiveness) AND LIMIT-TO(contenttype, 'JL,BS','Journal'). [All Sources(Business, Management and Accounting,Decision Sciences,Social Sciences)].
5	**Web of Science Core Collection (SSCI, SCI-EXPANDED, ESCI)** From 2006 to 31st December 2017 Results: 97 hits (TS=(higher education) AND TS=(leadership) AND TS=(effectiveness)) *AND* **DOCUMENT TYPES:** (Article) **Refined by: WEB OF SCIENCE CATEGORIES:** (EDUCATION EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH OR EDUCATION SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINES OR MANAGEMENT OR HUMANITIES MULTIDISCIPLINARY OR BUSINESS OR PSYCHOLOGY APPLIED OR SOCIAL SCIENCES INTERDISCIPLINARY OR PSYCHOLOGY SOCIAL OR EDUCATION SPECIAL) AND **WEB OF SCIENCE CATEGORIES:** (EDUCATION EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH OR EDUCATION SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINES OR BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES OR

	HUMANITIES MULTIDISCIPLINARY OR MANAGEMENT OR BUSINESS OR SOCIAL SCIENCES INTERDISCIPLINARY OR ECONOMICS OR PLANNING DEVELOPMENT OR PSYCHOLOGY CLINICAL OR EDUCATION SPECIAL OR PSYCHOLOGY SOCIAL OR PSYCHOLOGY OR SOCIOLOGY OR PSYCHOLOGY APPLIED) **Timespan:** 2006-2017. **Indexes:** SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, ESCI.
6	**ERIC** From 2006 to 31st December 2017 Results: 74 abstract:'higher education' AND abstract:'leadership' AND abstract:'effectiveness' Since 2006; Journal articles

Table 1: Number of total papers extracted

Journal	Count	Year
Leadership	*2*	*2009, 2009*
Academic Psychiatry	*1*	*2011*
Higher Education Policy	*1*	*2016*
Higher Education Quarterly	*1*	*2008*
Journal of Agricultural Education	*1*	*2013*
Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management	*1*	*2013*
Public Performance & Management Review	*1*	*2008*
Studies in Higher Education	*1*	*2007*
Tertiary Education and Management	*1*	*2014*
Total	**10**	

Note: Sorted in descending count order and by alphabetical order.

Table 2: Study Characteristics of final sample (*N* = 10)

Author(s)	Year	Country	Participants	Research Question	Method	Analysis	Findings
Bryman and Lilley	2009	UK	*N* = 24 leadership scholars with focus on education (6), management (10), or higher education (8).	What do leadership researchers make of leadership in their own work environments?	Semi-structured face-to-face interviews; organizational auto-ethnography.	Qualitative.	Context dependency; particular complexity of HE leadership; LC: trustworthy, with integrity, protective, honest, fostering collegiality, decisive.
Collinson and Collinson	2009	UK	*N* = 140 employees on different hierarchical levels of 7 further education colleges.	Exploring employee perspectives on effective leadership between 'heroic' and 'post-heroic' leadership.	Semi-structured interviews.	Qualitative.	Need for hybridity and 'blended leadership'; ambidexterity.
Cardno	2013	NZ	*N* = 15 middle and senior level academics, nested in 6 polytechnics.	Investigating the nature and expectations of academic leadership.	Semi-structured interviews; content analysis.	Qualitative	Leadership-management duality; Strategic & operative management skills, HRM; multi-layered LB, level-dependent ambidexterity.
De Boer and Goedegebuure	2009	Australia, Germany, Japan, UK, US	*N* ≈ 7,000	Exploring the changing demands on deanship.	Survey in 20 countries administered by INCHER (2008) & Scott et al. (2008).	Quantitative; secondary.	Strategic & operative management skills, HRM, external stakeholder relationship management.
Fernandez	2008	US	*N* = 100,571 federal government employees; nested in 29 agencies.	Measuring the relation of specific leadership types on perception of performance and job satisfaction.	2002 Federal Human Capital Survey.	Quantitative, ordered probit regression modelling.	All three types are positively associated with performance (most strongly task-oriented LB) but development-oriented LB is not associated with job satisfaction.
Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin	2008	8 countries	*N* = 19 departments of 11 prestigious universities.	Identifying the role of leadership of teaching (department-level) in research-intensive universities.	Performance data; semi-structured interviews; expert groups; in-situ observations.	Mixed methods; case analysis; synthesis.	Leadership is pivotal for teaching excellence; call for multi-facetted and context-dependent set of LCs on different organizational levels.

Gonaim	2016	.	.	What are the challenges faced by department chairs and what is known about effective leadership practices and qualities?	Narrative review.	Synthesis.	LC: Ambidexterity, 'blended leadership', role commitment.
Keith and Buckley	2011	US & Canada	*N* = 85 chairs of departments of academic psychiatry	Identify the skills, experiences, and core values needed for effective academic chair leadership.	Extensive online survey with scales & open questions.	Quantitative.	LC: strategic/visionary acumen, communication skills, core administrative and academic experience, motivational capacity, personal integrity, altruism, perseverance.
Kleihauer et al.	2013	US	*N* = 6 female deans in a predominantly male field.	'How have women deans of agriculture attained their leadership roles in agriculture?'	In-depth interviews; observations.	Qualitative, deductive.	LC: assertive, persistent; surgency, conscientiousness, agreeableness, adjustment, openness to experience (Big 5; typically associated with transformational leadership).
Vilkinas	2014	AUS	*N* = 75 managers with responses from *Obs*. = 816 of their colleagues (line-managers, peers, staff).	Identifying the leadership behaviours displayed by non-academic middle-level managers in HE and their effectiveness.	360-degree feedback	Quantitative, deductive; repeated measures analysis.	HE mid-level managers display behavioural complexity; ambidexterity as a consequence of environmental complexity and paradoxes.

Notes: Studies in alphabetical order. LB = leadership behaviour; LC = leader's characteristic; HE = higher education; NZ = New Zealand; UK = United Kingdom; US = United States of America.

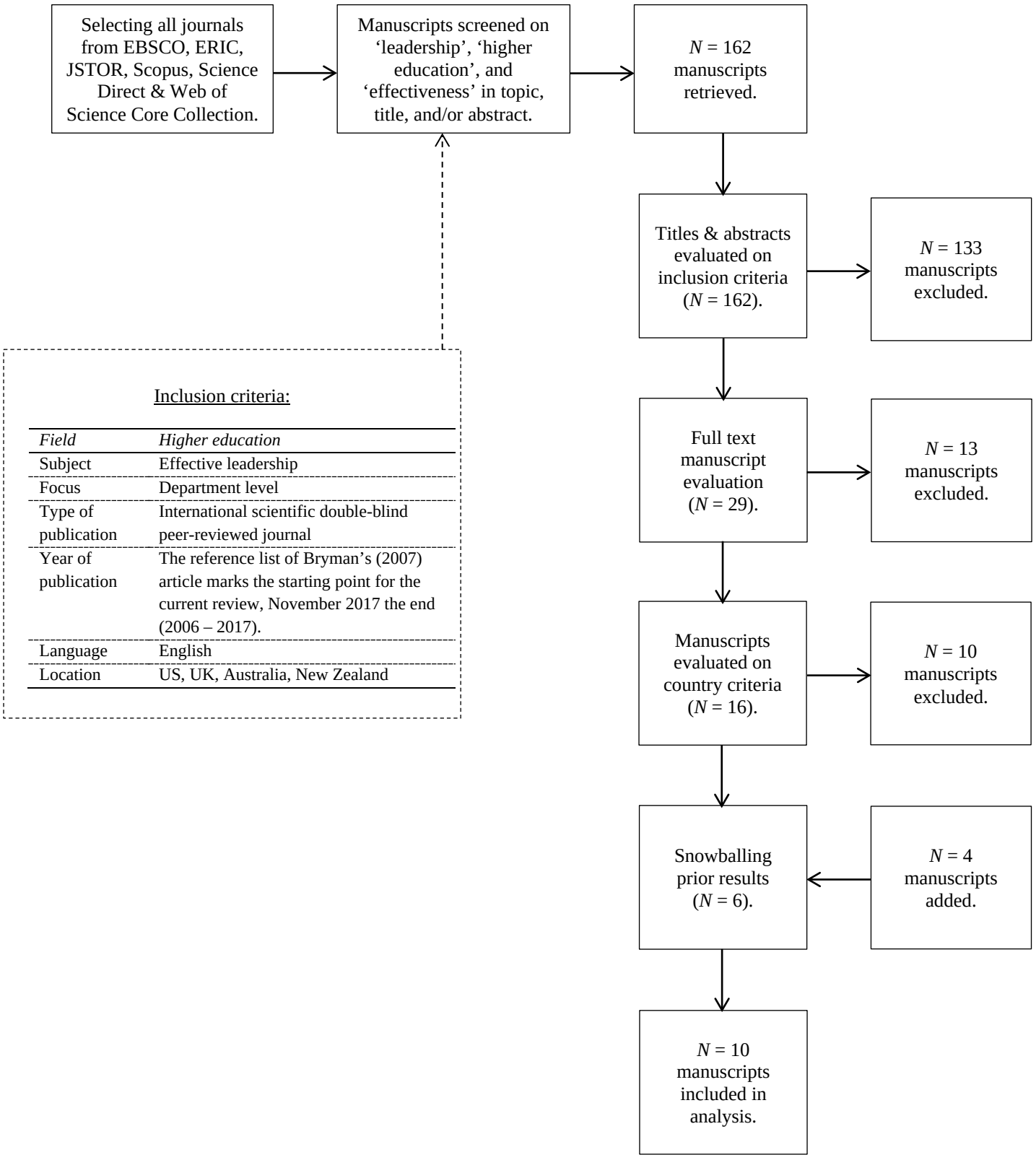
Table 3: Aspects of leader behaviours and characteristics identified in the current review (2006 – 2017)

Leadership Behaviours:		
Aspects	**Examples of leadership behaviours identified**	**Literature items demonstrating its effectiveness**
Collegiality builder	· Fostering collegiality and collaboration; · Building communities of practice.	Fernandez (2008); Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008); Bryman and Lilley (2009); Collinson and Collinson (2009); de Boer and Goedegebuure (2009); Kleihauer et al. (2013); Gonaim (2016).
Complexity reducer	· Reducing and managing behavioural complexity; · Clarifying procedures, objectives, and goals; · Monitoring operations and performance.	Fernandez (2008); Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008); Collinson and Collinson (2009), de Boer and Goedegebuure (2009); Keith and Buckley (2011); Cardno (2013); Vilkinas (2014); Gonaim (2016).
Enabler	· Involving followers when making decisions; · Empowering and enabling subordinates; · Appreciations of and confidence in staff.	Fernandez (2008); Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008); Bryman and Lilley (2009); Collinson and Collinson (2009); de Boer and Goedegebuure (2009); Cardno (2013); Gonaim (2016).
Inspiring others	· Surgency: Inspiring and engaging others, motivational capacity, agreeableness; · Marketing the department as a success to external parties.	Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008); Keith and Buckley (2011); Kleihauer et al. (2013).
Problem solver	· Dynamic, decisive, being accountable; identifying and solving problems; · Perseverance, assertive, persistent; strong willed, resistant to pressure and stress, conflict management skills, toughness; · Strong role commitment: preparedness and conscientiousness.	Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008); Bryman and Lilley (2009); Collinson and Collinson (2009); Keith and Buckley (2011); Cardno (2013); Kleihauer et al. (2013); Gonaim (2016).
Protector	· Being protective and supportive to staff.	Fernandez (2008); Bryman and Lilley (2009); Collinson and Collinson (2009); Vilkinas (2014).
Visionary	· Giving a clear sense of direction; · Deriving visionary long-term strategy.	Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008); Bryman and Lilley (2009); Collinson and Collinson (2009); de Boer and Goedegebuure (2009); Keith and Buckley (2011); Cardno (2013); Vilkinas (2014); Gonaim (2016).

Leadership Characteristics:		
Aspects	**Examples of leadership characteristics identified**	**Literature items demonstrating its effectiveness**
Ambidexterity	· Multi-level ambidexterity; · Balancing roles and stakeholders internally and externally.	Fernandez (2008); Collinson and Collinson (2009); de Boer and Goedegebuure (2009); Cardno (2013); Vilkinas (2014); Gonaim (2016).
Knowledgeable	· Operative task-related knowledge and ability; · Being informed about and interested in the workforce; · Having experience.	Fernandez (2008); Keith and Buckley (2011); Cardno (2013); Gonaim (2016).
Openness	· Openness to (new) experience and to innovation; · Introspection, self-awareness, and willingness to learn.	Kleihauer et al. (2013); Vilkinas (2014).
Personal integrity	· Being trustworthy and honest, having integrity; · Having and communicating a clear set of values; · Being a role model.	Bryman and Lilley (2009); Gibbs, Knapper, and Piccinin (2008); Collinson and Collinson (2009); Keith and Buckley (2011); Gonaim (2016).

Note: Aspects in alphabetical order.

Figure 1


Selecting all journals from EBSCO, ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, Science Direct & Web of Science Core Collection.
Manuscripts screened on 'leadership', 'higher education', and 'effectiveness' in topic, title, and/or abstract.
N = 162 manuscripts retrieved.
Titles & abstracts evaluated on inclusion criteria (N = 162).
N = 133 manuscripts excluded.
Full text manuscript evaluation (N = 29).
N = 13 manuscripts excluded.
Manuscripts evaluated on country criteria (N = 16).
N = 10 manuscripts excluded.
Snowballing prior results (N = 6).
N = 4 manuscripts added.
N = 10 manuscripts included in analysis.
Inclusion criteria:
Field | Higher education
Subject | Effective leadership
Focus | Department level
Type of publication | International scientific double-blind peer-reviewed journal
Year of publication | The reference list of Bryman's (2007) article marks the starting point for the current review, November 2017 the end (2006 – 2017).
Language | English
Location | US, UK, Australia, New Zealand