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# Leadership in Public Sector Partnerships

## A Case Study of Local Safeguarding Children Boards

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**Abstract** In the complex cobweb of public sector organizational structures, the need to tackle intricate societal problems set the context for a new direction in leadership studies, one that enables the achievement of policy goals by creating collaborative capabilities. In the policy area of children and young people, Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) can allow leadership to manifest itself through a number of media. First, the local authority is the statutory designated leader of this partnership in the local community. Second, the representatives of agencies with a duty to cooperate on children's issues are themselves leaders of their organizations' resources and commitment to the partnership's goal. Third, in the light of unprecedented complexity in policy making, getting things done often depends on the leadership capabilities of people and of organizations to work with the tension between multiple sets of professional, organizational and sectoral values. Although, in theory, leadership should be an important element of inter-agency working, essentially being about making things happen beyond usual institutional constraints, in reality however, empirical findings have shown that leadership in LSCBs is systematically inhibited, hence endangering the outcomes of collaborative, inter-professional and inter-organizational work. The article concludes with the paradox of public servants demonstrating leadership in inter-organizational settings while remaining an impersonal administrator subjected to tight public scrutiny. The article seeks to make a contribution to the public policy and management field in general and to that of collaborative management in particular. To this end, the existing developments in the leadership literature have been used to shed light on one case study of one of the more controversial partnerships in the British public sector: LSCBs.

**Keywords** inter-agency working, leadership, safeguarding children, partnerships

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## Introduction

'Leadership' has become one of the buzzwords of modern policy context in the UK (Office of Public Service Reform, 2002; Performance and Innovation Unit, 2001) adding to others such as 'modernization', 'multi-agency working' and 'joined-up government'. By association, this is an indication that leadership has now stepped into a new context: to public policy of the Third Way.

After the New Right reforms that fragmented the public sector in pursuit of economic, efficient and effective ways to manage the provision of public services in the UK, 'Third Way' politics sought to bring these parts back together to collaborate in cross-cutting initiatives to tackle society's 'wicked issues' (Clarke and Stewart, 1997). In the new paradigm, leadership is potentially as important a tool as neutrality is for bureaucracy, and efficient management, for the managerial state (Newman, 2005). This is because it takes initiative and responsibility to be able to think and act creatively across organizations and sectors, hence outside traditional accountability lines, in order to contribute to complex 'meta-strategies' (Huxham and Macdonald, 1992) such as 'safeguarding children and young people', 'eradicating poverty' or 'reducing crime'. Yet is this type of responsibility to be assumed by people or by organizations?

The literature on leadership has traditionally linked the concept of leadership to people *in organizations*. In the light of the joined-up government's aim of designing and delivering services in partnership across sectors, however, there has been an increased call for reconceptualization or adaptation of traditional leadership models to suit the new paradigm (Hartley and Allison, 2000; Huxham and Vangen, 2000). This is why a number of theorists have, more recently, looked at leadership capacities *of organizations* (e.g. Huxham and Vangen, 2000). Finally, leadership was pushed even further to a state of definitional uncertainty when it became associated with something more diffused than ever before: *processes* by which things 'get done' in inter-organizational collaborations (Hartley and Allison, 2000; Hartley and Hinksman, 2003; Huxham and Vangen, 2000). The position embraced in this article is that all these three dimensions of leadership should be taken into account together, rather than separately defined by different theoretical frameworks. A theoretical framework that allows for such a complex conceptualization is that advanced by Hartley and Allison (2000), who looked at leadership as personal quality, position and processes. In the paradigm of public service delivery through partnerships, it is important to look at all these facets of the leadership phenomena, for processes are more complex in interaction than they are when performed by disparate individuals, professions or organizations in isolation from each other. This article aims to follow this three-dimensional theoretical framework in a case study of a statutory local partnership in place to help deliver policy outcomes for children and young people in England.

The aim of this article is to unravel (1) how leadership is designed to manifest itself in LSCBs under the Every Child Matters prescriptions, (2) how in reality

this has proven to be problematic, and (3) why it is a particularly difficult for public organizations to rise to the challenge of leadership in inter-organizational and inter-professional settings. The theoretical basis for this article is given by public management studies, from which lens this article explores leadership and how leadership manifests itself in collaborative public management settings.

## Theoretical Background

There is a lack of consensus in literature about consistent and precise definitions of the leadership concept (e.g.Hartley and Allison, 2000; Hartley and Hinksman, 2003; Rost, 1993; Yukl, 2002). Indeed, rather than defining it, most theorists have been associating it with other, equally vague concepts: influence (Maxwell, 1998), vision (Laub, 2004), relationships (Hogan and Kaiser, 2005) or change (Laub 2004). Limiting to broad conceptualization certainly serves some purposes, such as avoiding reducing complex phenomenon to simple tags. Yet this hinders the production of what is known as systematic research, based on objectivity, variable control, replicability and universal propositions. In this context, Rost's (1993) definition of leadership as 'an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes' is appropriate.

However, the theoretical bias of this paper departs from the view that definitions are useful in themselves. Rather, in tune with the social constructionism tradition in social science research, the author of this article argues that concepts are defined naturally by the context in which they are utilized. This is even truer in the case of relatively new contexts that may present a few challenges to existent definitions. Hence, the aim here is to avoid starting from a precise definition of the term that could be applied systematically to the case study. Instead, the author advances a working definition: 'mobilising people to tackle tough problems' (Heifetz, 1996). This is a general enough framework to be applicable to the case study, for it does not imply that leadership is definitely related to either people or organizations.

A number of studies looked at leaders as being individuals in organizations, in various places in their organizations' hierarchies but who share several personal characteristics – skills, abilities, personality, behaviour (see Burns, 1978). Most of the literature around leaders outlined such individual traits in positive terms, however some theorists raised questions as to the dangers that individual leaders may pose (see Hogan and Kaiser, 2005). Heifetz (1996) distinguishes between the type of leadership that anyone in an organization may exercise (which he calls 'informal leadership) and that which only those designated formally as leaders can ('formal leadership'). The latter type can be connected to what Burns (1978) calls 'transactional leadership' – reinforcing positive behaviour or followers through rewards that are usually part of a system and offered in accordance with policies. The informal type of leadership can however originate anywhere in the organization, its strength in motivating people lying in envisioning, energising and enabling

(Nadler and Tushman, 1990); this is what Burns (1978) calls 'transformational leadership'.

The fact that leadership is not exclusively related to people has been signalled increasingly over the past few years, especially in relation to the need to conceptualize leadership in collaborations. Huxham and Vangen (2000) have been especially explicit about that in their conceptual framework of the leadership media: the structure, the process and the participants. When looking at how leadership manifests itself through participants in collaborations, the authors conclude that they could be individuals, but also groups or organizations in partnerships. Indeed, many writers on collaborations assume the existence of a lead organization in partnerships (Alexander, 1995; Broussine and Miller, 2005; Mandell, 1984; Provan and Milward, 2001). This is sometimes called 'network broker' (Mandell, 1984) or 'network administrative organisation' (Provan and Milward, 2001).

Leadership has also been increasingly related to processes (see the literature review conducted in Hartley and Hinksman, 2003), and especially so in the context of partnership working (Hartley and Allison, 2000: Huxham and Vangen, 2000). Processes can be 'formal and informal instruments such as committees, workshops, seminars, and telephone, fax and email use, through which a collaboration's communication takes place' (Huxham and Vangen, 2000, p. 1167). In more general terms, it is about 'a set of processes or dynamics occurring among and between individuals, groups and organisations' (Hartley and Allison, 2000, p. 36). Within this conceptual framework, leadership is important to get people motivated, to energize and enable them to deliver outcomes. This can be done through either a transformational or a transactional approach. It is, however, the case that partnerships are not always in place to fulfil one given mission, such as finding an immediate solution to a particular problem, but perhaps more essentially they are set up to invest in building collaborative capabilities in the participants, abilities that can then be used to solve future challenges. Thus, the goal of the leaders' motivational activities could be to obtain immediate solutions to problems, but could also be to invest in forming relationships that are durable enough to deliver solutions to a whole range of issues which may or may not appear in the future (Mandell and Keast, 2008).

Leadership in the sense of achieving policy goals by creating collaborative capabilities can be achieved through constant anchoring of the professionals in the partner agencies to the partnership goal. This can become the glue that sticks it all together and can bear the name of 'leadership' since it is about making things happen beyond what each of the individual agencies are able to make happen themselves. This resonates with explanations of 'emergence' in networks: 'the whole is greater than the sum of parts' (e.g. Byrne, 1998; Kauffman, 1996; Rhodes and MacKechnie, 2003; Smith and Toft, 1998), which gives weight to Newman's (2005) assertion that, if the traditional neutral administrator is the ideal practitioner in bureaucracy and the business efficient manager, the ideal practitioner in the market regime, leadership is the ethos of the Third Way governance regime.

Leadership is located within people, organizations and processes in partnerships. This three-fold structure is applied to the case study of the LSCBs. Leadership capabilities of people will be looked for in the individual representatives in the partnership body who are expected to act as channels of communication between their organizations and the collective to which their organizations commit. Leadership of organizations will be located in the ability of the designated leader of the LSCB (the Children Services Authority) to mobilize all people and their organizations around the partnership aims. Finally, leadership as a process will be investigated as the way things get actually done in LSCBs and how the collaborative advantage of many organizations working together comes about, compared to where they work in silos.

## Method

The case study was chosen on the basis of an existing research relationship with the Children's Services Authority in a borough in North West England. The LSCB in this borough presented the researcher with the opportunity of observing it from its very beginning (late 2005 and, more formally, April 2006) and hence better understand the principles behind it, the group dynamics, as well as its operational mechanisms. Furthermore, it is a partnership structure that presented a rather interesting research problem: it is one of the very few statutory partnerships in the UK and one of the most visible and controversial type, partly due to its novelty and partly because of high-profile incidents that led to the creation of LSCBs in England (see for example Lamming, 2003). An issue such as what it is that makes it hard for these partnerships to deliver outcomes in the way they were designed prompted a research interest here. What followed this interest was an ample study of barriers and incentives to partnership working for children and young people in Britain (now close to completion). The decision to focus on leadership as potential catalyst for effective partnership work came from the findings of over two years of participant and non-participant observation of both regular LSCB meetings and more informal training events and Development Days. The issues observed fall under three broad categories. First, despite certain LSCB partners being traditionally regarded as 'reluctant', occasionally certain representatives of such agencies were extremely cooperative; it was then interesting to find out how those representatives differed from others of the same parent organizations. Second, at a time for change from one LCBS chair to another, it became clear that certain states of things were shaped not by legislation or guidance of any type, but by the chairs themselves; it was of course interesting to explore why people followed. Finally, despite many issues being statutory in LSCBs, some essential ones – such as the budget contributions – were not, which raised the very interesting research problem of how decisions are being reached across traditional accountability boundaries on controversial issues that are not in any way dictated by legislation or policy guidance.

If participant and non-participant observation presented the author with background information on how leadership might have a role to play in partnerships for children and young people, documentary research was employed to study policy documents in order to identify how leadership can manifests itself in LSCBs 'by design'. This informs the content of the next section of this article. Then, a number of interviews (27) were employed to explore the issues as they are perceived 'in practice' by LSCB partners, and a survey, to triangulate the findings from interviews. This set of findings informs the following section of the article focused on 'gaps in practice'.

It is worth noting that the interviews did not focus exclusively on leadership, but on a whole range of issues around partnership working. Leadership came up naturally from the interviewees' narrative, when they talked about how issues were being resolved in the LSCB meetings, but also about how they interacted with their colleagues in different parent organizations. The interviewees were representatives of the police, social care, education, schools, health authorities, and the youth offending teams, as well as senior managers of the Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children and Young People in the borough. Interviewees were found mainly from amongst LSCB members and were introduced to the researcher via a number of non-participant observation sessions of the LSCB meetings. On some occasions, a number of successive representatives of the same organization have been interviewed.

The survey, with a response rate of 30 per cent, looked at a number of issues (mainly those included in the interviews). One key question was exploring partners' abilities to commit resources to the goals of the partnership, without referring back to their superiors. Another essential question was about their personal motivations in their jobs. This meant to establish whether the commitment to the LSCB values goes beyond professional and organizational loyalty and that there might be roots of a personal type of responsibility that the partners may assume. Other questions explored personal characteristics of the respondents, their educational and professional background and relationship with other individuals, professions and organizations in the LSCB.

## Opportunities for Leadership Expressions in LSCBs

LSCBs, introduced by the Children Act 2004, replaced the Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) to reflect the change in emphasis of the *Every Child Matters* agenda (DfES, 2004) from 'protection' to 'safeguarding' of children and young people. This change has prompted a cultural shift: from 'reacting' to 'acting whilst preventing'. When the aim is sustainable avoidance of risk of harm, the list of stakeholders is far wider than social services, health authorities and the police – the actors involved in child protection. This poses challenges to the scope of collaborative activity that these agencies are used to and, arguably, capable of. Under the Children Act 2004 and the 'safeguarding' mindset, the number of core

agencies involved in LSCB meetings is rather large: social services, education, health authorities, the Connexions Service (local providers of information and advice for young people), Child And Family Court Advisory Support Services, local probation boards, youth offending teams, local prisons and the police; add to these, a number of other organizations – such as the voluntary and community sector organizations – that attend the regular meetings depending on the agenda. The five key professions that interact in this partnership structure are: social carers, teachers, nurses, doctors and police officers. Professionals of the other statutory partners share the same five occupational fields, with some exceptions represented by more generalist professions, such as administrators.

LSCBs can be conceptualized as points of interaction between various organizational and professional cultures, but also between the individuals that represent these cultures at the 'negotiation table'. The 'moderators' of this interaction are the Children Services Authorities, local authorities with 'specific duties to organise and plan services and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children' (HMSO, 2006, p. 10) and to establish LSCBs (HMSO, 2006, p. 46). The chairs of the board, appointed by local authorities, must ensure the coordination of 'what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area of the authority' and 'to ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for that purpose' (HMSO, 2006, p. 47–8). Often, the chair is a direct employee of the local authority (for example Assistant Director of Children Services), such as in the case of the local authority in this case study, but many LSCB chairs throughout the country are independent.

## Local Authorities

The Children's Services Authority plays, in the case study analysed here, the role of 'network broker' (Mandell, 1984). This is in accordance with the statutory provisions of the Children's Act 2004 (HMSO, 2004) and of Working Together 2006 (HMSO, 2006). This agency has a statutory role of coordination and administration of a partnership such as the LSCB.

The Children Services Authority has a hard role to play as lead agency in partnerships focused on children and young people, primarily due to the rather vague goals of these partnerships (for example 'children's safeguard'). These blurred objectives – indeed 'meta-strategies' (Huxham and Macdonald, 1992) – nevertheless can help the purpose of the partnerships by allowing them to reach consensus as to the meaning they give to law-prescribed structures and desired outcomes. In this sense, lead agencies can be associated with the concept of leaders as 'managers of meaning' (Brymann, 1996, p. 280), yet not in the transformational, visionary approach to leadership advanced by Brymann. Indeed, in the collaborative context, many of the metaphors used before by traditional leadership theories are applicable, yet they have different meanings than those originally theorised. In the example above, local authorities are in charge with the coordination of the

partnerships meant to deliver goals for children and young people and strive to keep all agencies 'anchored' on these goals. Since their role is statutory, they are expected to act as positional leaders, yet have no actual authority to force commitment from the partners, hence no power to resort to the transactional type of leadership conceptualised earlier in this article. Hence, on the one hand, the scope for visionary transformation is limited by the fact that they are formal leaders and, on the other hand, the chance of exercising real authority as designated leaders is also restricted due to not having the means that the established leaders – individuals – in organizations normally have to force commitment towards the goals of these organizations. This is an obvious problem, yet can also be an incentive for innovative leadership behaviour.

## Partnership Members

When conceptualizing the partners in the LSCB, a distinction must be drawn between individuals, their professions and the organizations they represent in partnership structures. This is because each of these levels is important in shaping the partnership dynamics. For example, in a collaborative setting a male police representative (dominant gender in this organization) may behave very differently than a woman police officer. Equally, a representative that has a personal stake in the policy area of children and young people may find it easier to 'surrender' to the policy problems they deal with as part of their jobs and, hence, to show more leadership than another representative with less of such personal stake. This point has been made clear by a triangulation of interviews (where participants were asked about their personal stake in the subject matter of their work) with participant observation in LSCBs. Nonetheless, an organization with a long tradition of caring for children and young people as their core service (e.g. schools) would tend to be more involved in partnerships with such focus than another for which children and young people are not central to their operations (e.g. police). This point has been raised a number of times in the interviews conducted in this study, especially when explaining the relative involvement of some partnership members in comparison to others.

The LSCB members therefore represent compounds of individual, professional and organizational components that gravitate towards the common goal of effective cooperation. The individual, organizational and professional identities interact very closely, sometimes coinciding. This explains why some theorists see the components of partnerships as being organizations, others as individuals and others as professions, depending on the theoretical angle through which they look at collaborative structures (for example organizational studies, psychology or sociology of professions).

Individuals who sit in partnerships represent their professions and their organizations alike. They have these professional paradigms acquired through education but also through professional and on-the-job training, that influence their behaviour. This bias also reflects on decision-making, the lens they use to evaluate things,

as well as the people they find themselves interacting with. This is the assumption that was made when it was decided to ask people about the other people, professions and organizations in the partnerships for which they are members. Their perceptions about these issues were important in this study. They revealed incompatibilities between cultures that sometimes led to incompatibilities between people. For example, while people generally identified the police as 'the reluctant partner', they also displayed a peculiar, impersonal behaviour towards the police representatives in LSCB meetings. However, there was one instance in which the police representative had grown to be very well regarded by the partners. Looking at the reasons why conversations lost the tension they normally had where police was involved (primarily comparing the conclusions of LSCB meetings' observation with those from the interview with the police representative in question), it has become apparent that it was the personality of that particular individual which made the difference, together with her stated belief in and commitment to the cause of the LSCB. It was revealed that sometimes organizational and professional cultures can be neutralized by strong personalities with personal motivations to work for one cause or another. Indeed, our survey data suggests that many of the individuals that sit in LSCBs have a strong personal drive to contribute to the 'meta-strategy' of safeguarding children, for example having grown up in foster care, or being parents themselves. The link between leadership and proactive personality has been explored and, indeed, confirmed by the literature on leadership (Crant and Bateman, 2000). The police officer in our case study clearly presented many features of a proactive personality, but also some aspects pointing at motivation and loyalty to the cause that are not clearly connected to leadership in the extant literature.

Individuals and their personal characteristics, values and beliefs influence collaborative work as much as their professional and organization baggage. In the context studied here, the assumption made is that people demonstrate leadership when they commit their organizations' resources to collaborative goals and also when they disperse knowledge in their organizations about the partners and about the partnership's work. In order to be able to do that, these individuals must occupy high places in their organizations' hierarchies, high enough to be able to commit resources, yet not so high as to be unable to communicate effectively with both the top management and the field practitioners (HMSO, 2006). Hence, middle management (tier 3–4) is the ideal hierarchical place for LSCB partnership members to demonstrate leadership. However, in practice, the individual LSCB members have very different hierarchical positions in their parent organizations, for example Social Care and Social Work representatives are tier 2 (top management), whereas the police representative is a constable, which is the equivalent status of a 'practitioner' in the other LSCB member agencies (this status is defined by minimum 50% direct work with children and families per week). Hence, when it comes to demonstrate leadership by channelling information to and from the partnership body, none of the two extremes would do an effective job, one being

too high to reach a significant number of people in their agency, whereas one is too low in a strict, hierarchical organization, to disperse information in any direction other than perhaps horizontally (towards those of the same rank as them). Clearly, such disparities lead not only to slowing down the LSCB work due to double checking with the representatives' superiors before decisions were taken, but also to a divide between the representatives' status in the board, by which some would have more power and stronger say than others. This has been confirmed during the author's meetings' observations, when it has been concluded that those in higher ranks in their parent organizations dominate the discussions (over 50% of talk time), which prompted the third sector representative to remark that the LSCB meetings were 'meaningless' and that they appeared to be nothing but an excuse for the Children's Services to clarify and work towards their own organizational goals. Moreover, a sub-group meeting was compared by the same voluntary sector representative to a meeting with a headmaster (that being the chair of the meeting, tier 1 in the Children's Services Authority).

## Achievement of Policy Goals by Creating Collaborative Capabilities

The concept of joined-up government is based on the idea that not one agency is capable of delivering modern public policies in isolation from other organizations. Consumer needs are complex and services fragmented; hence a good resolution to this problem can only come from integrated services offered through multi-agency work on various policy realms. In the policy area of children and young people, policy goals are being reached with the focused effort of a number of statutory partners (listed earlier in this article). The organizations are mostly long established (health authorities, social services, education, schools, local probation boards, prisons and the police) but there are also newer ones (Child and Family Court Advisory Support Services, Connexions and the Youth Offending Teams). The newer agencies however are grouped around the same professions as the older ones. Indeed, professions that interact on this policy realm are largely traditional: doctors, nurses, educationalists, teachers, social carers and police officers. Understandably, the collaboration between such diverse and well established organizations and professions can prove to be difficult because of the different values that underpin each of these components. This is in tune with Broussine and Miller's assertion that

> working with tensions between multiple sets of organisational, professional and sectoral values and priorities lies at the heart of a leadership challenge in partnerships. (Broussine and Miller, 2005, p. 384)

Indeed, barriers to multi-agency work (e.g. Leathard, 1994; Lupton et al., 2001; Reder and Duncan, 2003) sometimes seem to be more numerous than the incentives (e.g. Huxham and Macdonald, 1992; Loffler, 2004; Mandell and Steelman, 2003) for collaboration. Thirty years of public inquiries revealed that often poor

coordination of collective efforts can lead to unpredictable tragedies (Lamming, 2003; Reder and Duncan, 2003). Indeed, even when everybody knows their role in the system, things can still go wrong, often starting from minor lapses in communication between professionals of various agencies. These lapses are largely due to the difference in the assumptions (Turner, 1978) that underpin the partner professions and organizations and are, consequently, hard to tackle to achieve sustained convergence of all these cultures.

The idea of a 'complex adaptive system' applies neatly to collaborative structures where, while there are clear lines of behaviour within the individual organizations, the collective acquires emergent properties that make the outcomes of joint work largely unpredictable (Kauffman, 1996; Rhodes and MacKechnie, 2003; Smith and Toft 1998). It has been observed how a carefully planned order of things does not leave any space for the flexibility that a system needs to adapt to new circumstances (see for example Lamming, 2003). Thus, it is fair to assume that, even if government legislation is sometimes criticized as being vague and general enough to be interpretable (signalled by nearly all interviewees in this study), in collaborative structures this may be helpful. Namely, it may help the system adapt the general government prescriptions to contextual specifics, allowing for an adjustment of the partnership components with each other and with the purpose that they aim to serve. Issues such as the overall budget of the LSCBs, or the additional partners that must be asked to contribute on various agenda points, are not indicated by national legislation, and neither is the nature of the partnership chair: employee of one of the agencies or independent. Different local authority areas make different arrangements that suit their contexts best, therefore allowing for the creation of collaborative capabilities in various, unique and context-specific ways.

## Gaps in Practice

If the previous section offered illustrations of how leadership can manifest itself in LSCBs with positive consequences on the effectiveness of partnership work, the reality in LSCBs departs from theory in a couple of points.

First, although the Children's Services Authorities are the designated coordinators of the collaborative efforts in LSCBs, they cannot 'get' the partners to do something, but can merely encourage a certain course of action by using for example reminders of the vision, or just political bargaining. What often happens in practice, however, especially in the subgroups, is that the meetings get to look like excuses for the local authority to sort out some of their own organizational priorities. This is made possible primarily by the fact that present at the meetings are various departments of the Children's Services (such as: safeguarding children, child protection, youth services, adult services, housing, education) as separate agencies, with equal bargaining power with other 'external' agencies in LCBS.

Second, where committing organizational resources to collaborative work is

concerned, interviews revealed the fact that, in reality, people are reluctant to commit resources and cannot even predict whether their agencies would be able to commit any resources at all. The survey confirmed this result, for only eight per cent of the respondents said that they were able to count on their organizations getting involved financially for one collective goal or another. Most respondents said that they could not decide and could not even guess what their organizations' decision would be in regards to any commitment, especially of a financial nature, to collective goals. This is because the representatives in the LSCB on which this research is centred are not middle managers by and large, but often front-line practitioners. Some of the representatives in the LSCB in this study are top managers (tier 1–2), typically in organizations such as the Social Care, but also in the newer Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and Connexions. The fact that a few agencies are represented by their top managers can skew the discussions in board meetings, these representatives often ending up dominating the discussion. The author has observed this happening very often in the LSCB meetings. This can prove to be problematic, for the type of leadership displayed by these organizations helps to promote their organizations and professions (especially in the case of social care managers) rather than helping create collective capabilities.

Third, in creating collective capabilities, there are still gaps between organizational cultures and professional cultures in LSCBs. This is in tune with the findings of several earlier studies (for example Leathard, 1994; Lupton et al., 2001; White and Featherstone, 2005). Although cooperation between the LSCB partners is not a new idea, its becoming statutory in 2004 signals an urgent need for creation of a common culture that is consistent with the goals of the partnership: children and young people's safeguard and promotion of welfare. However, this is far from happening. Partners are constantly aware of insurmountable differences between them and the others and of the difficulties of working together. Some agencies work considerably better with some rather than with others: for example, schools feel closer to the educationalists in the Children Services Authority than to social carers; similarly, social carers have a better understanding of health authorities than they have of schools or of the police. Nevertheless, more 'modern' organizations, such as the YOT and the Connexions, work best with each other.

These gaps in organizational and professional cultures can obstruct positive manifestations of leadership. Yet, leadership can well be the energy that can link all agencies and all their efforts together despite gaps in legislation and despite divergent interests at the negotiation table. If leadership is about making things happen, than it fits well with the Third Way of delivering public services and it is important to take measures to encourage leadership behaviour in partnerships. What has been illustrated here, however, is that, although media for leadership can be activated in LSCBs, some aspects stand in the way of full realisation of this goal. For leadership to be allowed to 'make things happen', some of these barriers must be lifted. If this seems like an acceptable task to undertake, the more overarching problem in the public sector ethos is not. Indeed, the three issues

underlined as blocking the channels for leadership manifestations in LSCBs have one element in common: the 'fear culture' in the public sector today.

## Discussion: Leadership in the Public Sector's 'Fear' Culture

The findings of this research reverberate within wider debates around the general ability of public administrators to be leaders. Although leadership can be a useful tool under the network governance paradigm of service design and delivery (Newman, 2005), other characteristics have been developed in the public sector, which undermine the importance of public servants taking responsibility and acting proactively as 'boundary spanners'.

Much of the administrative leadership literature since the 1950s focused on the administrative discretion debate – how much discretion administrators should have. In his literature review, Van Wart (2003) detailed on the leadership literature 'waves', associating the intense debate on the theme with the period after 1992. This may have something to do with the fact that, since the 1990s, with the rise of the media and of the blame culture, public sector organizations and employees are susceptible to greater and more open accountability than ever before. Indeed, nowadays 'the manager in the public sector operates within the goldfish bowl of public scrutiny and accountability' (Lawton and Rose, 1994, p. 28). In the attempt to conform and not fall victim to the 'witch hunt' that follows virtually every crisis in the country, public servants may have just gone back to embracing the traditional discretion limits, as prescribed by Weber (1971). One of Weber's basic features of a bureaucratic system is 'impersonality'. Lawton and Rose (1994, p. 30) describe this as occurring when 'the work is conducted according to prescribed rules, without arbitrariness or favouritism'. There is little to no personal interference and personal responsibility when the goal is 'no arbitrariness'. Creativity is lost and risk is minimised to a level to which there seem to be no point in making the effort to raise above the game for public managers. Indeed, as Newman (2005) observes,

> The bureaucratic principle of the separation of office from personal preference that underpinned the development of the public sector calls for an absence of personal enthusiasm. This is the antithesis of leadership discourse, a discourse that is predicated on the visibility of the leader's embodiment of characteristics such as integrity, vision and charisma. Strong values are viewed as an asset that transformational leaders deploy fostering cultural change. (Newman, 2005, p. 720)

It is the transformational type of leadership that Newman advocates here. Elcock (2000), too, opts for transformational leaders in local government at the expense of transactional type, 'negotiating marginal changes in policy and resource allocation' (Elcock, 2000, p. 25). Rather, transformational leaders are needed 'to revitalise local democracy and inspire citizens, councillors and officers with new visions' (Elcock, 2000, p. 25).

However, it is neither an easy task for public agencies to allow leadership behaviour to be demonstrated, nor is it for public servants to take any risks. Although the private sector's ethos has entered public sector to some degree, there are still elements of the latter that have not been – and cannot be – challenged significantly. Thus, the sector is still legalistic, process led and heavily reliant on government regulations. Indeed, the research undertaken here revealed a 'need' of both practitioners and managers to receive detailed instructions – procedures – as to how to behave in certain complex circumstances arising from new legislation. Most of the professionals interviewed here made references to the need for the government to react to both crises and novel legislation with detailed procedural guidance. Hence, although law is being vague as to how to organize to achieve the prescribed policy outcomes precisely to offer local authorities the freedom to implement the law as they find fit, the professionals do not appear to be welcoming such initiatives. Instead, they enquire about procedures, best practices and, more generally, guidance. However, this is not to say that they are not concerned with the growth of paper work and with the amount of government control that these mechanisms entail. But the respondents' views are that they would rather embrace the bureaucratic principles condemning personal initiatives in order to avoid personal liability that may arise in times of crises. Indeed, public inquiries provoke high emotional responses from the public as a result of 'the collision of the horrific with the "ordinary" or "innocent" status of the victim' (Stanley and Manthorpe, 2004). This, in turn, urges the government to take a public stand and first, place blame on someone, and second, initiate policy change.

If public servants are reluctant to put forward personal resolutions to complex policy problems for fear of the responsibility that would arise from such personal commitment, the scope for leadership activities remains rather limited. One can conclude therefore that leadership is especially hard to perform in the public sector, although this is where it would perhaps make a most remarkable difference to people. Leadership can nevertheless be the secret ingredient that was until recently too unpopular to use by policy makers, but that can make a whole difference under the paradigm of joined-up service delivery.

Leadership can be integrated in the accountability debate, in the form of 'active accountability' as advanced by Bovens (1998) or in that of 'moral or ethical obligation' advanced by Newman (2004). Yet this type of accountability will always be at odds with the more traditional types: organizational, political, to stakeholders, to consumers, and so on. This incongruity between the various types of accountability to which public servants are subjected is a threat to successful multi-agency working under the *Every Child Matters* safeguarding agenda.

## Conclusions

This article has originated from an interest in identifying barriers to genuine communication and collaboration in local children's safeguard partnerships. Early findings of that study suggested that leadership was an important variable that could either encourage or hinder effective collaborative work and in consequence deserved a separate focus in the context of inter-agency collaborations. The research employed to this end revealed how leadership theories can help advancing knowledge about work in partnerships in general, and in statutory partnership in the policy area of children and young people in particular.

In theory, leadership in network partnership can be the glue that bonds the professionals working together for children and young people, anchoring them to the same mission and to the importance of working towards it across traditional accountability lines to. In practice, there are a number of obstacles overarched by the inherent inability of public sector professionals to 'surrender' to the cause and take personal responsibilities, as well as by the rigidity of the public sector accountability system in which initiative is discouraged and control is tighter than ever before. These obstacles are taken ultimately to stand in the way of effective inter-organizational and inter-professional collaboration in the spirit of policy-making of a 'Third Way', and more notably here, of the *Every Child Matters* safeguarding agenda.

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