

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP AS A COLLECTIVE ACHIEVEMENT: AN AUSTRALIAN CASE

Ken Dovey, Steve Burdon and Robert Simpson
University of Technology Sydney
Australia

Abstract:

In this paper we examine the construct of ‘leadership’ through an analysis of the social practices that underpinned the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) television production entitled *The Code*. Positioning the production within the neo-bureaucratic organisational form currently adopted by the global television industry, we explore new conceptualisations of the leadership phenomenon emerging within this industry in response to the increasingly complex, uncertain, and interdependent nature of creative work within it. We show how the polyarchic governance regime characteristic of the neo-bureaucratic organisational form ensures broadcaster control and coordination through ‘hard power’ mechanisms embedded in the commissioning process *and* through ‘soft power’ relational practices that allow creative licence to those employed in the production. Furthermore we show how both sets of practices (commissioning and creative practices) leverage and re-generate the relational resources - such as trust, commitment and resilience – gained from rich stakeholder experience of working together in the creative industries over a significant period of time. Referencing the leadership-as-practice perspective, we highlight the contingent and improvisational nature of these practices, and metaphorically describe the leadership manifesting in this production as a form of ‘interstitial glue’ that binds and shapes stakeholder interests and collective agency.

Key Words: leadership; leadership-as-practice; practical reflexivity; praxis; relational resources; neo-bureaucratic organisational form; television industry.

Introduction

It seems that, for much of its history, the traditional conception of leadership has escaped deep critical scrutiny. Until recently, the voluminous leadership literature (Smith et al., 2008; Read, 2000) reflected a broad consensus on the ontology of leadership as a set of individual attributes, traits and competencies that manifest independently of context and other contingencies [see Yukl (2008) for an overview of this perspective, and the critique thereof offered by Carroll, Levy and Richmond (2008)].

The consequences of the profound socio-economic changes brought about by the impact of neo-liberal political regimes, globalisation and technology over the past four decades have, however, led to the questioning, in some quarters, of the traditional perspective on the phenomenon of leadership. While the hyper-competitiveness brought about by an increasingly de-regulated globalising economy has led, in general, to forms of managerialism (and cost-cutting practices such as downsizing, offshoring and outsourcing), it has also encouraged the adoption of practices that emphasise innovation, organisational agility, stakeholder collaboration; and speed of decision-making. The enactment of these (latter) strategies has put pressure on organisations to adopt ‘leaner’, more flexible, organisational forms and practices (Mason, 2015; Naim, 2013). Furthermore, the new working arrangements being spawned by such emerging forms and practices are challenging the traditional conception of leadership and, in the process, the hegemony of the dominant research paradigm from which this notion of leadership emerged (with its assumptions of the existence of general laws of leadership and of the value-neutrality of the concept) [see Allen and Dovey, 2016]. As a consequence of such challenges, Yukl (2002) claims that consensus on the meaning of leadership no longer exists.

The recent ‘practice turn’ in leadership studies is an example of emerging alternative perspectives on leadership. Questioning the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that underpin traditional research on leadership, Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff (2010) argue the case for leadership to be viewed as a collective achievement that encompasses a broad range of phenomena (including socialised dispositions and the embodied knowledge that informs everyday work routines). Furthermore, ‘practice turn’ theorists recognise leadership as a deeply political process; the navigation of which draws on the conceptual frameworks of critical theory. At issue in the enactment of the collective praxis is the development of everyday *practical reflexivity* (Cunliffe, 2009; Cunliffe and

Easterby-Smith, 2004); that is, a capacity for critical scrutiny of assumptions, interests and interpretive bias through collective debate on contested and contrary positions. Carr and Kemmis (1983: 133) describe such an order as, ‘a forum for group self-reflection (and action) which transforms communities of self-interests into learning communities’. Passila, Oikarenen and Harmaakorpi (2015) see dialogue as underpinning reflexive practices; a process unlikely to develop in organisations structured as functional hierarchies (Dovey and Fenech, 2007).

The imperative to innovate has further illuminated the political and contingent nature of leadership. In their research within a global high-tech company, Allen and Dovey (2016) conclude that social innovation precedes other forms of innovation. In the context of their research, positional power characteristic of the company’s functional hierarchical structure had to give way to more relational forms of power management for the requisite kinds of critical intra-personal and inter-subjective engagement to manifest [on this point, also see Karlsen and Larrea (2014) and Verhoeff (2011)].

In this paper we offer a case study on the creation of a television drama - entitled *The Code* and broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 2014 - by several partnering organisations and freelance artists. Our initial interest in this production, which was sold globally including to the British Broadcasting Corporation, was in the everyday practices that facilitated the collaborative creation of artistic value by a range of partners, each of whom brought something unique to the process. As we investigated the production and its industrial context, however, we began to see the manifestation of an alternative form of creative leadership; one that has emerged in the television industry in response to the contextual pressures discussed earlier. This case, we realised, provides a stark example of relational ‘leadership’ practices that are emerging in response to the challenges posed by global political, economic, and technological transformation.

Leadership-as-Practice

Initial attempts to move away from an individualistic conception of leadership took many forms but, as Crevani et al. (2010) point out, most still retained the individuality of the leader in spite of now ensconcing him/her within a group. However, as increasingly the concept of leadership has become viewed as a phenomenon with broad contextual and contingent dimensions, more nuanced notions of this complex construct have developed (Graeff, 1997). Gradually the notion of the heroic individual, as the epitome of leadership, has morphed into

more collectivist conceptualisations of this phenomenon (as in the articulation of *relational* (Uhl-Bien, 2006), *shared* (Pearce, Manz and Sims, 2009), *distributed* (Gronn, 2009) and *collaborative* leadership (Collinson, 2007). In their comprehensive review of the literature on what they refer to as ‘leadership in the plural’, Denis, Langley and Sergi (2012) point out the growing importance of ‘pluralising leadership’ in contexts where work is complex, interdependent and requiring creativity. This view is endorsed by Carroll and Simpson (2012) who argue that more collectivist notions of leadership are emerging as organisations face situations characterised by greater complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity that demand novel and transformative action.

The leadership-as-practice perspective is a recent, and complex, conceptualisation of the ‘leadership phenomenon’. Following on the heels of the ‘practice turn’ in the fields of strategy and organisational research, this approach advocates leadership as a collective achievement that emerges through everyday practices that manifest macro (socio-structural) as well as micro (embodied, situated and material) dimensions (Ladkin, 2013; Crevani et al., 2010). Whittington (2011: 184) identifies three aspects of practice: *practitioners* (actors in the domain), *praxis* (the interconnectedness and contextual embeddedness of practitioners’ reflexive action), and *practice* (the consistency of routinised action). Furthermore, he states that the inter-relationship between the macro and micro dimensions of practices is ‘exceedingly complex’. This complexity is exacerbated as an increasing number of contextual dimensions of leadership practice are raised in the literature. These include the *material* (Carroll and Simpson, 2012; Pullen and Vachhani, 2011; Barad, 2003), physical (*space and place*) [Pullen and Vachhani, 2013; Ropo et al., 2013], *aesthetic* and *sensuous* (Pullen and Vachhani, 2013; Koivenen and Wennes, 2011; Soila-Wadman and Köping, 2009), *performative* (Spicer, Alvesson and Karreman, 2009), and *symbolically mediated* (Pullen and Vachhani, 2013) dimensions of leadership practice.

The construal of practices as ‘social sites in which events, entities, and meaning help compose one another’ (Schatzki, 2005: 480) - underpins the leadership-as-practice perspective. In particular, it emphasises those relational dimensions whereby leadership is re-oriented ‘in terms of processes, practices and interactional engagements’ (Carroll and Simpson, 2012: 1287). Through such *praxis*, actors participate in the co-construction of relationships, structures, realities and meanings (which, in dialectic fashion, reconstruct them) in an attempt to create, and re-create, a social reality in which a collective’s strategic intent (or *agency*) can be realised. As Rouse (2006: 531) points out, such ‘strategic intent’ need not

be explicitly stated but is embedded in practices that feature patterns of interaction that ‘constitute something at issue and at stake in their outcome’. Such ‘inter-subjective engagement’ requires a range of complex relationship-based resources – such as trust, commitment, and resilience, for example – to be generated and leveraged by a broad community of stakeholders. As personal and sectarian interests manifest in relation to those of others, the nature of stakeholder relationships determines the degree to which the strategic endeavour has access to these vital collectively-owned, and historically co-produced and leveraged, resources. These resources (collectively classified as forms of organizational capital, with the resource of trust the core constituent of *social capital*; commitment and resilience being the primary constituents of *morale capital*; and ideas and knowledge constituting *conceptual capital*) enable a vibrant social environment in which stakeholder reflexivity and contestation flourish. In this regard, Rouse (2006: 532) argues that, ‘practices point ahead of themselves toward something essentially contestable ... for the sake of something at stake in the interaction and its consequences’. This future-orientation of a practice underpins the *praxis* through which shared presuppositions can be surfaced and questioned; viewpoints/interpretations contested; and prevailing forms of hegemony negotiated (see Williams, 1977).

Similarly, Carroll and Simpson (2012: 1286) argue that, in this sense, leadership is a form of social capital that is generated continuously through collaborative practice where ‘interpersonal relationships, networks and structures that result in shared meanings and cooperative endeavour’ are built. Thus, from this perspective, leadership is viewed as an intangible relational resource that is embedded in the social life of the collective and which is based on a notion of ‘power’ that:

does not denote a substantive capacity within the world (it is distinct from force or violence, for example); instead, it expresses how one action affects the situation in which other actions occur, so as to reconfigure what is at issue and at stake for the relevant actors (Rouse, 2006: 533).

The leadership-as-practice literature constitutes a clear break from the positivist research paradigm (Crevani et al., 2010; Carroll et al., 2008). Adopting constructionist assumptions, it differentiates social realities from material reality in its acceptance of the nominalist nature of social realities (holding the assumption that social realities do not exist independently of human cognition; that in order to structure our action we use names, concepts and labels to negotiate the social constructs that we create) and the ideographic nature of social knowledge

[to explore these assumptions in more detail, see Burrell and Morgan (1979: 1-9)]. This position has been criticised within the leadership-as-practice community for ignoring the fact that through our bodies human beings are *situated materially* and, as Pullen and Vachhani (2013: 315) argue, ‘leadership is practised through and between bodies, where matter matters, and body challenges leadership as an over-cognitivised phenomena (sic)’. Similarly Barad (2003: 801) protests the granting of too much power to language in ‘the linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretive turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every “thing” – even materiality - is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation’. However, by assuming that social realities are inter-subjective constructions, and thus are vulnerable to the impact of social interests in their construction and transformation, the ‘practice turn’ perspective acknowledges the political nature of social realities. This represents a break-through in leadership research in that it enables more pertinent studies into the role of social power, in its multiple forms, in the construction (and re-construction) of particular social realities. Furthermore, it introduces methodological approaches (such as action research) that include reflexive research practices (such as *praxis*) and which identify and critique those conceptual practices [such as those of *reification* (see Berger and Pullberg, 1964) and *hegemony* (see Williams, 1977)] that mystify the role of powerful interests in the establishment and maintenance of any particular social order.

Similarly, in their recent extensive review of the research literature on creative leadership, Mainemelis, Kark and Epitropaki (2015) identify *integrative* leadership as a form of leadership required in contexts where ‘multiple leaders’ have to integrate and synthesise their heterogeneous creative work collaboratively. Showing how this conceptualisation of creative leadership is evident in a stream of studies in the creative industries (see Mainemelis et al., 2015: 398), they argue that it manifests in specific ‘moments’ of dialectic negotiation and the integration of group members’ perspectives in a dynamic process that unfolds over time through everyday interactions among participants.

An example of integrative leadership is provided by improvisational performance art (see Vera and Crossan, 2004), where the imperative of mutual responsibility for ‘the other’ endorses the role of relationship (and the availability of relational resources such as trust, respect and resilience) in the capacity of a collective to negotiate competing interests and contested positions. In this form of leadership, as Lingo and O’Mahony (2010) show, the ‘authorship’ of creative work is shared in a unique manner, and the processes through which

heterogeneous creative ideas are integrated are very different to those through which, conventionally, attempts are made to generate and leverage stakeholder ideas.

Methodology

This research is part of a set of studies into innovation within the creative industries in various countries (see, for example, Dovey and Muller, 2011). As interpretive studies that are located within a broader social constructionist research initiative, in each research setting we are attempting to gain access to knowledge that those who have experienced the phenomenon under research, have acquired through their participation in the creative process.

Our interest in researching the creation of *The Code* at the ABC was aroused when we learnt of the innovative approach taken in its production; an approach that appeared to us to have led to its widespread recognition. Given that the production process had been completed by the time we were alerted to *The Code*, we adopted a phenomenological methodology for this research. This entailed the conducting of interviews (ranging from 30-45 minutes) with six of the key stakeholders in the project: David Maher and David Taylor, directors of *Playmaker* (a production partner) and producers of the series; Shelley Birse, creator, script writer and creative producer; Dan Spielman, co-lead actor; David Ogilvy, the ABC's commissioning editor and executive producer; and Greer Simpkin, also executive producer from the ABC.

The methodological assumption was that those who had experienced the production process would be the custodians of privileged knowledge; that their 'lived experience' of the phenomenon under research would have facilitated unique insights into the practices through which the creation of this innovative product had been achieved. Thus, the interview questions were focussed upon drawing out the tacit, and other experiential forms of knowledge gained by each of the interviewees through the production experience. Given the 'stickiness' of tacit knowledge (Szulanski, 1996) and the difficulty of translating aesthetic and sensuous experience into language (Koivunen and Wennes, 2011), the questions were open-ended and were followed up with a series of probes that sought to gain more detailed explication of the interviewees' interpretation and sense-making of their experience on this production. Through these probes (requests such as 'can you elaborate please?'; 'why do you think that happened?'; 'what initiated that event?'; etc.), the interviewer (one of the authors of this paper) sought as far as possible to make explicit the insights gained from the experience, as well as the meanings ascribed to them, by the key participants in the production of *The Code*. At no time was the word 'leadership' used in interview questions or

probes. Thus, through the relational dynamics of generative conversation, the interviewer attempted to gain access to interviewees' experientially-privileged knowledge of the processes, practices, and practitioners through which/whom *The Code* was produced. However, in the process, as a participant in the conversations, the interviewer became a co-producer of the meanings ascribed by those interviewed to the experience. As Carroll and Simpson (2102: 1287) describe, 'there is no stable external 'spectator' viewpoint; rather all actors, including researchers, are co-evolving participants in the construction of relationships, structures, realities and meanings'.

It should be remembered that the interviews took place after the production had achieved commercial and critical success and that the fact of this success was one of the reasons for researching the practices through which *The Code* had been produced. Thus the interviews occurred in a context in which those being interviewed would already have been influenced by the external recognition of the production in their interpretations and sense-making of their experience. Another challenge for the interviewer, therefore, was to probe responses in ways that 'disrupted' the interviewees' *situated* interpretation frameworks in order to access alternative insights that may have remained hidden behind these frameworks. In this way, although we were interested primarily in interviewees' insights into the practices that had facilitated the production's success, we attempted to explore the 'deep structure' of their experience of the phenomenon. However, experientially derived knowledge can never be fully explicated and, furthermore, is itself *situated*, continuously morphing as a consequence of subsequent experience.

We also want to make clear at this point that, given that the purpose of the interviews was to access the privileged insights of those who have 'lived' the experience, these insights are presented uncritically in our outline of the case. In our analysis of these interviews, we attempt to locate the production process within a broader industry/institutional context and discuss the implicit logic behind the practices through which *The Code* was produced.

The analysis of the interviews utilised the hermeneutic circle whereby a reflexive interpretive process was enacted by the three authors (individually and collectively) with a view to gaining an empathic understanding of the parts and the whole (and how these are related to each other) of each interview transcript (text). Hermeneutics has its roots in the art of empathic interpretation of religious scripts. It has subsequently been used in attempts to interpret other important historical scripts, requiring the interpreter to attempt to put

him/herself in the original context in which the text was created and to attempt to understand the text from the perspective of the writer at the time of writing (the assumption being that the writer had special insights as a consequence of a privileged set of experiences).

After attempting to gain an empathic understanding of the meaning of each transcript, we (the researchers) engaged in an interpretation of what was already the interviewee's interpretation and sense-making of his/her experience. Again, bearing in mind that all interpretation is situated and mediated by multiple phenomena, we attempted to identify shared meanings elicited by the interviews. Following the method of interpretation of online scripts by Carroll and Simpson (2012), we used Goffman's (1974) notion of 'frames' as a form of interpretive scaffolding in our engagement with the explicated perspectives of those interviewed. As Carroll and Simpson (2012: 1288) point out, this approach draws on Mead's (1934) theory that conversational meaning-making is mediated by 'significant symbols' (frames) that evoke shared meanings, where 'shared' refers to an implicit agreement that serves as an interpretive context.

An emerging concern during this process of data interpretation and analysis was whether we could identify specific practices within the form of democratic *praxis* that appeared to have contributed significantly to the success of the production (and thus which could be labelled as forms of 'leadership'). Surprisingly to us, the participants demonstrated, through the interviews, an intuitive understanding of the practice of 'practical reflexivity' (this, probably, being a form of *knowing* that, due to their significant experience in *integrative* creative endeavour, manifests in practice (in *doing*) without the practitioner necessarily being aware of that knowledge). However, we heeded the caution of Crevani et al. (2010: 81) that, in our attempt to 'discern and identify leadership activities in the making', we should remain 'open to the idea that all interactions are potential instances of leadership'. Furthermore, we bore in mind Simpson's (2014) argument that the moment of leadership occurs at points of opposition/resistance, where the strategic direction is either confirmed or changed by the way in which visions and resistance constitute, and are outcomes of leadership moments.

The Institutional Context of Television Production

Political, economic and technological change over the past few decades has resulted in the transformation of television production globally. Whereas previously operating under a hierarchical, vertically integrated, production process, broadcasters now have adopted temporary, more flexible, organisational forms for productions and rely upon 'softer' forms

of power management which require the leveraging of cultural and professional norms and of relational capital (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012). Under operational conditions of greater complexity, uncertainty and instability, the traditional functional hierarchical structure of the major broadcasters has given way to more collaborative and flexible organisational forms in which spontaneity, improvisation and risk-taking become important features (Mason 2015). Thus the traditional ‘command and control’ approach to leadership in the large corporate broadcasters has had to morph into ‘concertive’ modes of stakeholder coordination typical of knowledge-intensive work environments (Courpasson and Clegg, 2012). As Fleming and Spicer (2007) point out, while these environments are characterised by ‘high-trust/soft power’ relations, where temporarily hired employees are encouraged to exercise their creative agency in concert with others in creatively contested social and spatial arenas, employer control is assured by the dependency of these freelancers upon the broadcaster for future work opportunities.

These changes have required more sophisticated forms of power management. In the ‘neo-bureaucratic’ temporary organisational form (see Clegg, 2011), the big broadcasting companies remain at the apex with hand-picked independent production companies as partners. These independent companies, usually founded and run by former senior employees of a large broadcaster, then hand-pick freelancers (most of whom are ex-broadcaster employees) for employment in the key production roles (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009). In this way, the work of freelancers is coordinated and controlled, and flexibility ensured, through normative and relational means that include self-regulation; the leveraging of social, and other forms of intangible, capital; and the honouring of freelancer value propositions such as professional autonomy, creative licence and future work opportunities (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). As Caves (2000) and Townley et al. (2009) point out, social capital (and, in particular, the embedded resources of trust, reciprocity and mutuality) is critically important as a means of ‘control and coordination’ in an industry with significant financial and time pressures. As such governance practices are relational in nature (unlike those of positional authority in bureaucratic organisations), they demand sophisticated interpersonal skills of all participants (especially of those representing the broadcaster) as creative decision-making is collaborative, direction is co-determined, and role performance is critiqued in a manner that does not diminish the collective social capital (Bechky, 2006).

The Case: Innovation at the ABC

The interview data show that, for this production, the ABC encouraged outside production houses to pitch new ideas to them. As a consequence, an alliance with an independent production company, *Playmaker*, was formed with the view to experimentation with new approaches to the creation and production of television drama. Through *Playmaker*, freelancers were hired, based upon prior knowledge of the quality of their work and their dependability. A six-part political thriller, entitled *The Code*, was the first product of this alliance.

Our analysis of the interview transcripts reveals the recognition by the ABC stakeholders that the production required the committed collaboration of ‘a whole lot of leaders’; a requirement that led to the creation of an informally negotiated social order in which ‘the power of the broadcaster never had to be asserted’. The primary practices through which such power dynamics were negotiated during the production of *The Code* were those of *dialogue* and *collective critical reflexivity* - practices that depend upon excellent communicative capabilities and strong, resilient stakeholder relationships for direct, honest critique to manifest constructively. These communicative and relationship capabilities appear to have been achieved through three specific ‘leadership’ practices.

The first of these is that of *wise partnering*; a practice that established the relationship and communicative foundations of the production early in the process. The ABC’s choice of the small production company, *Playmaker*, as an empowered partner in the creation and production of *The Code*, was based upon existing strong and trusting relationships between the ABC representatives and the two directors of *Playmaker*, and knowledge of the innovative approach taken by *Playmaker* to artistic endeavour. In particular, their creation of *Scribe* (a space in which carefully selected writers are invited to work alongside each other at their own choice of times) as a creative hub for idea generation and development offered a way of overcoming key innovation-capability limitations of the ABC. The choice of partners for the production of *The Code* was, thus, based upon personal experience and/or access to the social capital resources derived from industry networks. As David Maher points out:

Recruitment should be based on experience of matching the right person with the right project under the right budget pressure. This means recruiting people whose work is known to you or a trusted other ... and ... gauging peoples’ passion for the project because when it is high everyone wants to get everything right.

He adds that ‘getting the right team in place is everything’ in that creative production models must work within budget parameters and that value is maximised by selecting ‘nimble’ production staff who will not compromise on quality.

Another factor in the choice of partners was that of mutual appreciation for the nature of the situation faced by each partner (for example, the financial and policy factors that influence *ABC* productions, and the challenges faced by freelance *Playmaker* associates when the production process is delayed or interrupted). This mutual appreciation of contextual issues, and respective interests, was initiated early by *Playmaker* directors in their facilitation of a meeting between the *ABC* representatives and freelancers in which such issues were openly discussed. In this respect, Greer Simpkin praised the understanding by the representatives of *Playmaker* of the different obligations and circumstances of the *ABC* (to those of commercial broadcasters), and their appreciation of how these factors were likely to exacerbate the challenges involved in having to deliver a quality production on what she described as ‘Australian budgets’.

Similarly, those interviewed argued that wise partnering was crucial to ensuring the quality of the script. While the selection of the writer was a critically important decision, the development of the script was equally important and this process involved multiple partners. Although *Playmaker* initiated Shelley Birse’s writing of the script and provided the means for her to write it, David Ogilvy (a writer himself) already knew her from earlier times and had a high regard for the quality of her work. However, it took two years to develop the script, as David believed (in line with *ABC* assumptions) that ‘complex work should not be rushed or hurried’. This process involved significant stakeholder engagement including the ‘thorough reading of the script; many round-table discussions and debates; notes written and distributed’; and various other forms of ‘creatively abrasive’ reflexivity in order to stimulate thought, contest complacency and inappropriate assumptions, and facilitate the creative development of the script. David Ogilvy points out that it also involved considerable pre-planning and communication: ‘when we start developing we bring the heads of TV into a non-pitching environment to allow the writer to interact with the buyer’. He points out further that while the reflexive practices which underpinned the development of the script were challenging for all, these were ‘always collaborative, with open discussion that was never combative’. He adds that there was never a sense during the production that the broadcaster’s power had to be asserted. In this respect, the *ABC* representatives created an environment in which people felt ‘comfortable and free to play with ideas’. Similarly, freelancers were

encouraged ‘to be bold’ – while the *ABC* representatives knew that this was risky (given the *ABC* charter and cultural assumptions) it felt like ‘it was the right risk’ because of the quality of the material.

The second specific practice highlighted in the interview data was that of the *collective visioning* of the production throughout the lengthy and challenging process of its realisation. This practice highlights the role of the co-created *core* (vision, purpose, values) in the creation of the ‘negotiated order’ that framed the collaborative activity of many creative people (directors, production design, casting agents, editors, etc.) around the execution of the script. As David Ogilvy states:

There are a whole lot of leaders in a production and, from early on, the task is to connect each person to a vision in which they are emotionally invested.

In this industry, the emotional and intellectual investment of stakeholders in the production must begin from very early in the process as every minute wasted on set is very expensive. Dan Spielman endorses this point, stating that ‘once the shoot begins the situation becomes impossibly hectic to re-think things’. An environment must be created in which everyone is ‘hugely invested – emotionally as well as cognitively - in a successful outcome’. Claiming that the emotional investment of all stakeholders is ‘the magic ingredient’, Shelley Birse goes on to say that deep intellectual investment (thoughtful collective discussion, debate, and planning) needs to be made early in the process: ‘there needs to be significant brain power and time invested at the starting position instead of fixing problems at the back-end’. Vitaly important is that the co-created vision ensures that the authorial ‘voice’ does not get lost in the process.

A great script can be badly executed and the interviews point out that much also depends on the creative people (directing, casting, production designing, editing) who are ‘put around’ the script, and the nature of the practices through which the production is realised. With so many people involved in a production, it is a complex process because any one thing going wrong can ruin a production. In this respect, retaining Shelley as the creative producer facilitated the requisite emotional investment from the creator and the producers and enabled an enriched development process whereby actors, editors and others were able to engage with the author in reflexive debate on their interpretation of the script and their roles. Those interviewed were emphatic that while much of the success of a script depends on authors coming up with ideas ‘from a place of passion’, it is equally important for them to have the

opportunity, and the communicative and interpersonal competence, to collaborate with others in the refinement and interpretation of these ideas throughout the production process. David Maher adds a warning that while ‘the best writing spreads like a bush fire’, making the practice of casting much easier, the quality of the editing ‘can make or break a production’. He argues that the three practices that really matter – writing, casting and editing – are all inter-dependent and require, for their enhancement, collectively-reflexive practices.

The interviews thus communicate the point that at the core of any successful production is the quality of the script and that, in the case of *The Code*, this was a collective achievement. Described by David Ogilvy as ‘gold’ and by David Maher as ‘king’, the quality of the script determined stakeholders’ belief in the idea and story-telling and fuelled their investment of emotional commitment and energy in the project. Furthermore, David Taylor points out, everyone wants to work with quality material and, thus, the excellence of the script acted as a magnet for top talent. Dan Spielman concurs, arguing that, ‘because the script was so strong and exciting, everyone threw their weight behind the production’.

David Ogilvy sums up the role of the compelling vision co-created for this production when claiming that it facilitated the achievement of a special kind of communicative competence. He argues that the manifestation of ‘an unwritten, unspoken language’ amongst stakeholders during the production of *The Code*, was a consequence of their unwavering commitment to a collectively cherished purpose.

The third specific practice identified by those who were interviewed refers to enlightened relationship management and *stakeholder empowerment*. This practice is said to have manifested in numerous ways and was influenced by professional norms and prevailing cultural assumptions as well as the reflexive dynamics of the production process itself. Starting with the *ABC*, Greer Simpkin applauds the capacity of the representatives of the broadcaster to work collaboratively with the full range of stakeholders. She goes on to say that while at the *ABC* consensus among senior personnel (head of content, head of programming, etc.) must be reached before something is taken to production (given the public money involved) there is a strong culture of valuing everyone’s input – ideas are encouraged and credited and, as a result, nobody is scared to suggest something. Also raised is the *ABC* representatives’ ability to collaborate effectively with ‘the creatives’ due to the fact that they (the *ABC* representatives) all were once ‘on the outside’ and thus have empathy for the issues faced by them. As a result they were able to give difficult feedback without

demoralising people and ‘riding roughshod over their ideas’. Dan Spielman sees such critique as very important to creative people and says that ‘it is taken seriously because it matters to people who are emotionally invested in their roles’.

While critique is important, creative licence and equal say over the production process is viewed as being just as important. Those interviewed describe the social environment in which *The Code* was produced as one in which there was generosity of spirit, and in which creative licence was a feature. Dan Spielman says it was one in which the offering of ideas was valued and credited, and in which, ‘nobody was scared to suggest something ... and ... everyone trusted that they would be recognised if their ideas were adopted’. The production environment was consistently described by those interviewed as being ‘ego-less’, with nobody ego-invested in their ideas being acknowledged as the best ones. Furthermore, all stakeholders were encouraged to take risks, with the knowledge that they would be supported in doing so.

David Ogilvy states that the production was ‘all about people and constructive communication’. He says that the trust factor was huge and this was achieved by recognising everyone’s humanity and ensuring that everything was collaborative: ‘when you start becoming dictatorial that’s when it’s time to get out of the industry’. He applauds *The Code*’s director (Sean) and Shelley Birse as being great communicators. He claims that Shelley’s full-time presence gave people confidence and facilitated mature behaviour, while Sean’s quiet, thoughtful and generous manner was highly appreciated by everyone on the set. Furthermore, he pointed out the effective management of the lengthy decision-making and production processes on this project; processes that put talent retention at risk and that necessitated unusually proactive engagement with talent in order to retain it. David Taylor concurs, stating that sustaining the team’s commitment and motivation (especially that of the writer and the actors) during the interrupted production processes was an important collective achievement. Linked to this was the committed action by key stakeholders in ‘keeping spirits up’ when challenges (such as a six-month funding delay) threatened the production process, and in conducting the rest of the production process with enough urgency to ensure that the talent was retained.

Shelley Birse argues that the collaborative nature of the production process honoured the value proposition to which creative talent responds best. Creative people, she argues, value challenge and learning and she claims that, ‘if this is not occurring, their motivation drops

and they are likely to leave ... their rewards are intrinsic – they fall into that fuzzy world of creative satisfaction’. She goes on to argue that creative people need support and clear feedback from key stakeholders:

You spend a lot of time at home just tearing your hair out and feeling like a mad person, and clinging on to the last thing somebody had to say about what you have done, and trying to make sense of it.

Dan Spielman adds that ‘duty of care requires recognition of hard work’ and that *The Code*’s team of highly skilled people who were working very hard went a lot further and made a lot of sacrifices because they felt appreciated and respected. Pointing out the valuable intangible capital resources generated and leveraged throughout the production, he claims that these resulted from people feeling that their contribution was recognised and valued. Furthermore this contributed to:

a positive attitude – one of ‘can do’ – rather than one that is problem- and whinge-obsessed. When individuals in a well-put-together team have clear roles and know and respect the people they’re working with, and they know that they have a voice and are appreciated, then a complex process becomes streamlined.

David Ogilvy perhaps best sums up the kind of social environment that these ‘leadership’ practices created on the set of *The Code*, in his comment that they facilitated ‘an unwritten, unspoken language’ between all.

Discussion of the Case

The case demonstrates well how the ABC’s adoption of a neo-bureaucratic organisational form, with its polyarchic governance regime, for this production facilitated broadcaster control through ‘hard’ commissioning power and ‘soft’ relational practices (the term ‘polyarchy’ refers to a form of governance where power is held by a group of people who establish the conditions under which others can be empowered – see Courpasson and Clegg, 2012). By leveraging the intangible capital resources generated through rich prior experience of the work of carefully selected production partners and freelance workers, and the normative frameworks of creative production, the broadcaster representatives were able to retain control over the production process while allowing all participants a high degree of professional autonomy. Similarly, through careful selection of production partners and, with

them, of freelance workers, control based on relational resources, and potential future work opportunities, was achieved without 'ever having to assert the power of the broadcaster'. Furthermore, through normative means and sophisticated communicative capabilities, stakeholder empowerment and creative licence was managed by reflexive practices that were 'always collaborative ... (and) never combative'. This is reminiscent of Andy Grove's description of the style of interpersonal confrontation at Intel as 'ferocious arguing with one another while remaining friends' (see De Long and Fahey, 2000: 124). While there is no evidence of 'ferocious arguing' in this production, the interview data reflect a collective capacity to deal openly with contentious issues through respectful dialogue. Furthermore, these relational resources (free in the financial sense - which is important in the context of limited 'Australian budgets' - but which, in the social sense, are earned through rich collaborative experience over significant periods of time) were also leveraged by the broadcaster when production challenges (such as funding delays) were experienced at various points in the process. Through such practices, an 'unwritten and unspoken' language amongst 'a whole lot of leaders' was developed and leveraged as a form of 'interstitial glue' to bind their respective creative interests together without ever having to make the power of the broadcaster overt.

The case highlights the various contexts of practice and their implications for the notion of leadership. Firstly, in the context of a global order that has been strongly influenced by neo-liberalism (with this ideology manifesting covertly in most of the sub-contexts of this order) organisations have resorted to 'flexible' arrangements wherein employment becomes a temporary achievement and is dependent upon historical connections and reputation. Stripped of much of their state funding, public institutions like the ABC have adapted to this 'new order' by adopting the neo-bureaucratic organisational form which allows them to retain 'invisible' control and coordination of the production process while allowing the production crew considerable creative licence. Thus, once the production team had been commissioned and the contexts and conditions of empowered engagement had been set, power was shared in the interests of collaborative endeavour and creative outcomes. In this respect, the case shows that while the leadership of this production can be viewed as a collective achievement, the practices through which this manifested remain dependent upon somewhat mystified power sources that determine the conditions of stakeholder empowerment. In an important sense, the collaborative endeavour is sanctioned, rather than championed, in the interests of an innovative product.

The case also shows that as a relational resource that is in some sense situated (bodily and materially) but simultaneously must manifest across multiple emergent contexts - and which is impacted by various contingencies - this form of leadership requires exceptional relational and communicative capabilities of all participants. This is something that many organisations will struggle to ensure, and about which emerging conceptualisations of leadership are insufficient in detail. As the case demonstrates, such leadership requires the enactment of complex relational practices: practices which facilitate mutual identification (the generation of identity resources), intellectual humility (the basis of learning) and ‘intelligent caring’ whereby interpersonal confrontation and the contestation of ideas and performances manifests as ‘a form of love’ [see Heffernan (2012) and Spicer et al. (2009: 548) on this point]. The interview data show that it was within the contexts of such intra- and inter-personal practices, that an ‘ego-less’ environment was created for the production of *The Code* and in which creative licence, risk-taking and critique flourished appropriately. In these designated contexts, by respecting the agency of all stakeholders and treating them as equal partners (co-owners) of the production process, the collective purpose was allowed to triumph over selfish or sectarian interests (on this point, also see Allen and Dovey, 2016). Furthermore, while individual agency is recognised in the interview data as contributing to the ‘leadership’ of the production, they also show how individual contributions were mediated by the collective ‘improvisational struggle’, and by material artifacts, during everyday problem-solving on the production set (an example of this is the collective development of Shelley Birse’s original script and the way this co-created artifact mediated subsequent creative endeavour).

In the case of *The Code* the rationale behind the commissioning process and its role in the up-front establishment of a ‘negotiated order’ (or set of conditions under which empowerment would be practised) was never made explicit. In this way, broadcaster power and control remained covert. Similarly, the practice of leveraging historically-generated, and contemporaneously re-generated, relational capital is rarely mentioned by those interviewed yet its manifestation is clear in the performances that contributed to the form of leadership exercised during the production process. These performances are clearly informed by deep shared experience in the creative industries; experience that has generated the embodied forms of *knowing* (knowledge manifesting in practice) and shared assumptions about ‘what is at issue and at stake’ in a collaborative project. While this approach can lead to a form of parochialism that undermines creativity (see Molina-Morales and Martínez-Fernández, 2009;

Coleman, 1998), the ABC representatives argue that each production brings in different people ‘from the outside’ as a source of ‘fresh ideas’. However, this claim of ensuring stakeholder diversity across productions (and allowing participants creative licence) in order to avoid such problems may not always hold in practice, particularly in domains with limited talent pools and financial constraints with respect to tapping into global industry networks. Furthermore, an important consequence of this practice is that it leverages recognised talent and makes no contribution to the generation of new talent. In a knowledge-based economy, where much *knowing* comes from rich experience (especially collaborative experience), this has serious implications not only for emerging workforces in developed countries but also for the employment opportunities of people in developing countries.

The production also shows that innovation requires the contestation of ‘the way things are’ and an intelligent appreciation of the politics of producing alternative approaches to standard practices within an organisation. As with all good *intrapreneurs* (see Dovey and McCabe 2014), the ABC representatives had a keen understanding of the challenges of innovation at the broadcaster and, thus, were able to work around these through collaboration with independent production partners. In this manner, the collective leadership practices exhibited by those with a stake in the *The Code* challenged some of the ABC’s “shared routines of behaviour, including traditions, norms and procedures for thinking, acting and using ‘things’” (Whittington, 2006: 619). In doing so, the production paradoxically leveraged its ‘temporary’ status (as a creative project) within the ABC’s organisational structure to take risks that may not have been tolerated otherwise.

Conclusion

Profound change in global business and organisational environments is leading to more complex conceptualisations of the phenomenon of leadership, and enhancing the credibility of alternative research paradigms for the exploration of the nature of this vital resource. These paradigmatic changes are challenging traditional notions of leadership by broadening our understanding of the ontological and epistemological aspects of its practice. As a clearer understanding of the complexity of emerging conceptualisations of leadership arises, the relational challenges and social implications thereof appear somewhat daunting.

Our analysis of the production of *The Code* highlights several practices that underpinned this production. The first of these practices, namely *wise partnering*, established covert control by the broadcaster over the production via the commissioning process. Once the bases of

broadcaster control and coordination were established, and a social environment created in which historically-generated intangible capital resources could be leveraged freely, the other two practices - *collective visioning* and *stakeholder empowerment* - were allowed to flourish in the interests of collaborative endeavour that would deliver an innovative product. Informing these two latter practices was stakeholder understanding that the task required the enactment of forms of social dialogue and collective reflexivity that would generate the intra- and inter-personal resources through which the artistic product could be created collectively. Furthermore all stakeholders knew (tacitly) that these practices would have to be sustained throughout emergent contexts by a form of *praxis*. In this way, pertinent partnerships were formed; relationships were reconstituted and enriched through dialogue; excellence was ‘fought for’ without participants becoming combative; individuals were recognised and affirmed in ways that eliminated egocentric behaviour and which generated significant generosity of spirit; and a vision was co-created that promised the kind of intrinsic value to which creative people respond best (as Shelley Birse put it, ‘the fuzzy world of creative satisfaction’). Embedded in all of these practices are social values that endorse leadership as the collective achievement of meaningful human endeavour *that matters deeply* to the full range of stakeholders.

Beyond the practice of *wise partnering* through which broadcaster control and coordination was achieved, the practices of *collective visioning* and *stakeholder empowerment* endorse several features of the leadership-as-practice and the ‘creative leadership’ literature. Furthermore, all three practices offer support for the view of leadership as a contingent, context-sensitive phenomenon with multiple dimensions. These include social structural influences; socialised dispositions; embodied knowledge that manifests in action as *knowing*; reflexivity; dialogue; materiality (physical dimensions such as matter and space); and individual agency [what Rouse (2006: 514) refers to as ‘human agency (that) is realized through participation in practices that are “ours” before they can be “mine”’]. Furthermore, they show that, even where employer power and control hovers invisibly, leadership can still manifest as a collective ‘improvisational struggle’; one in which thought and action are in dialectical relationship, and in which vital relationship-based resources are realised in concert and leveraged in mission-critical behaviour.

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