Leadership

Call for papers

Special Issue: Leadership and Authority in a Crises-constructing World

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Guest Editors: Dermot O'Reilly, Eleni Lamprou, Claire Leitch and Richard Harrison

Overview

We are in a world that is both experiencing cyclical and cascading socially constructed crises (of capitalism, of ecology, of democratic institutions), and producing insistent and transforming construals of crises that have variously been subsequently institutionalized and thus socially 'real' (e.g. from a credit crisis in the banking sector, to a fiscal crisis of nation-states, to a political crisis of the Eurozone (Kutter, 2012), to the fall-out from the 'Arab Spring' and to the on-going crisis in North-South relations). These constructed and construed (Sayer, 2000) formations of crises present an opportunity to change ''our way of knowing the world'' (Mabey and Morell (2011:106) and allow us to pose radical questions to our concepts of leadership and authority, and to practices that seek to influence these crises.

Grint's (2005) presentation of the inter-relationships between problems (critical, tame, wicked), power (coercive, calculative, normative), and authority (command, management, leadership) implies that the construal and construction of processes and events as crises entails a move away from normative leadership to coercive command. The fervent social construction of crises evidenced since 2007 in particular undermines the hopes and calls for more humane and progressive versions of leadership popular in the last twenty years (whether post-heroic, spiritual, authentic or distributed) and a regression to more heroic, directive and coercive modes of authority. Indeed, the heroic and prescriptive versions of leadership implicitly suggest that the construction of crises (for example, Kotter's (2008) ideas of 'creating a sense of urgency' and 'finding opportunity in crises') are instrumentally useful in the operation of power in processes of change. While Grint's typology of authority suggests the need to examine closely the agents involved in constructing and disseminating notions of crises, it also calls into play echoes of Weber's ideal-types of authority – tradition, rational-legal determination, and charisma.

In parallel to the constructions of crises that are composed of more discursive and semiotic elements of construal, however, there are the materially- and institutionally- constructed systemic structures and mechanisms that produce unforeseeable consequences to which agents have to react. The very notion of leadership suggests the possibility of containment and control that the increasingly 'liquid' (Bauman, 2000) or systemic contemporary world calls into question. The notion of leadership is traditionally associated with ideas of individual agency and control, which crises undermine or disrupt – so what forms of leadership come into being in such situations?

One potentially fruitful means for furthering our understanding in this regard, is to look towards the increasing appreciation of emergent processes of organizing and change that unfold through micro-interactions between actors (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005), or within groups, as providing space for problematizing the roles of followers, leaders and situations in the social construction of crises. The question of how leadership can be pursued or sustained in times of crises-construction then becomes one of explicating the backdrop of interaction between multiple actors, their position in discursive spaces and their affective attachments to situations, which ground processes of meaning generation and negotiation. Empirical and theoretical considerations of the implications of such interactions may give way to insights into forms and processes of leadership emerging in/through crises-construction or challenges arising for leadership development and practice in this context.

Our focus, of course, is not just confined to deepening understanding of leadership as an activity or practice as well as a concept in times of crises. We also acknowledge that "leadership theory is in the midst of its own crisis" which offers scholars an opportunity to self-critique and re-evaluate (Mabey and Morell, 2011). In this special issue we wish to build upon the discussions and considerations in *Leadership* and to stimulate reflexivity and further debate. Specifically, we wish to extend this treatment of the crises ***in*** leadership to focus attention on the implications of crises ***for*** the practice of, and theorising about, leadership. Therefore, we echo Mabey and Morell's (2011) call for research that explores the concept of leadership from a range of discursive approaches. Contrasting conceptions and perspectives are underpinned by different assumptions of consensus and dissensus, subjectivity and objectivity, duality and dualism and, indeed, challenge what constitutes a leadership problem in the first place (Mabey and Morell, 2011; Lewis and Keleman, 2002). Promoting inclusivity diversity and pluralism in knowledge production should not only enrich our understanding of the multifaceted and complex social construct of leadership but also go some way to addressing the challenge of advancing development of the field in an era of constructed and construed crises.

An indicative, but not exhaustive, list of topics that this call for papers hopes to stimulate are:

- What are the forms and processes of authority and authority construction in the portrayal of crises?
- Do contemporary crises create spaces for new forms of leadership?
- How do contemporary crises ('constructed' and/or 'construed') come into being, and what are the implications for leadership?
- How are 'solutions' to crises construed and institutionalized? – what processes of leadership, followership or authority are evident? And what are their effects?
- How are versions of leadership that seek to be socially progressive and emancipatory to be pursued or sustained, if at all, in times of crises-construction?
- What discursive and extra-discursive elements and processes are at play in crisis construction?
- What impact do crises have on the fields or relations that sustain or produce leadership, followership or authority?
- What are the differences and similarities in multi-layered processes and realms of crises – personal, organizational, social, national or global?
- How do crises in leadership play out in different domains (for instance, developing economies, emerging economies)?

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Papers will be double-blind peer reviewed following the normal practice of the journal.

Further details and discussion of potential submission are welcome:

Dr. Dermot O'Reilly, Lancaster University Management School
Email: d.oreilly@lancaster.ac.uk

Please cc in: Dr Eleni Lamprou (email: e.lamprou@lancaster.ac.uk), Professor Claire Leitch (email: c.leitch@lancaster.ac.uk) and Professor Richard Harrison (email: r.harrison@qub.ac.uk).