

Patterns of Responsibility

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1. ABSTRACT

This paper considers issues of responsibility, leadership and leadership development through drawing on prolonged periods of observational, ethnographic research of educational leaders 'at work'. In an era of a supposed crisis in leadership, we use our rich data and interdisciplinary backgrounds to consider leadership development as essentially a *design* problem, adapting the notion of patterns that emerges in the architectural work of Christopher Alexander and the organisational studies of Tom Erickson.

Keywords

Responsibility; Leadership; Ethnography; Patterns of Interaction.

2. Introduction: Responsibility - a DIRC approach.

This paper attempts to address the issue of making ethnography accessible by taking a novel concern – the problem of 'leadership – that originated from outside of DIRC and by applying several aspects of what might reasonably be regarded as a 'DIRC approach' attempt to fully understand and represent, explicate exactly what this problem looks like. For us a DIRC approach involves: treating problems as design problems, deploying ethnographic approaches, emphasising the value of using an interdisciplinary approach, and in this particular case, utilising 'the framework provided by developing patterns of interaction'. Of course, the issue of leadership raises a whole range of issues concerning 'responsibility; leaders (and leadership roles) are commonly regarded as both wielding and delegating responsibility, being held responsible and holding others to account. Equally obviously leadership is an interesting and different, if strange, 'design' problem, but what we are attempting to do is take seriously the notion of socio-technical system by, in this instance, focusing on some of the human factors involved in responsibility in order to show clearly the ways, the patterns, in which the acceptance, recording and discharge of responsibilities are reflected in these systems, with the eminently practical concern of using such investigations to provide 'teachable moments' in the creation of leadership development packages.

Leadership as a Design Problem

Our starting point is a 2003 report from the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership found that practical leadership skills in the UK were "*in short supply from top to bottom of organisations*". The 1992 Further and Higher

Education Act increased college's responsibilities enormously (and suddenly) to include managing multi-million pound budgets, negotiating staff pay and conditions, resolving legal issues of ownership and maintenance of property and so on. Faced with an increase in the numbers of colleges in serious difficulty, 'managers right to manage' has been swiftly overtaken by a 'crisis in leadership' as failure has increasingly been assigned to Chief Executives: "... *ambitious to the point of recklessness.. and have got their way in doing all this by being 'strong', 'ruthless', 'heavyweight', 'determined' and 'visionary'.*" (Goddard-Patel and Whitehead 2000: 202) – paradoxically the very qualities often associated with 'good leadership'.

Despite this supposed crisis, leadership itself appears poorly understood as both problem and solution – or, as Sacks (1972) so famously commented (on police work), leadership seems "a solution to an unknown problem arrived at by unknown means". Leadership seen as the problem in FE appears simultaneously as the solution to that very problem – though, of course, 'good leadership' as opposed to 'bad leadership'. In much of the established literature leadership appears as a quality, a skill, an aptitude that transcends the everyday, the mundane and the ordinary, often associated with mystical qualities - ability to influence, arouse, inspire, enthuse and transform. Within organizational settings leadership is associated with the exercise of power, the setting of goals and objectives, and the mobilisation of others to get work done (Kotter, 1990; Wright, 1996) - 'a saviourlike essence in a world that constantly needs saving' (Rost cited in Barker, 1997: 348) This, of course, begs a whole gamut of questions. Is leadership the solution or the problem? What is it? Who does it? How do we recognize it? Can we develop it? What appears to be at stake, however, is not an adequately worded definition, but rather a more fundamental agreement on what leadership – when all is said and done – actually consists of. What makes someone a leader (good or bad) rather than a follower? How can we identify leadership and how can it be adequately measured? In short, most calls for a definition of leadership are concerned with a kind of purity, a boiling down, or isolating of leadership qualities and characteristics. As Grint (2002: 14-15) observes:

"...It is rather as if a leadership scientist had turned chef and was engaged in reducing a renowned leader to his or her elements by placing them in a saucepan and applying heat. Eventually the residue left from the cooking could be analysed and the material substances divided into their various chemical compounds. Take for instance, Wofford's (1999: 525) claim that laboratory research on charisma would develop a 'purer' construct 'free from the influences of

such nuisance variables as performance, organizational culture and other styles of leadership'. What a culture-free leader would look like is anyone's guess..."

We are neither leadership scientists, nor chefs, but we are involved in understanding just what is so 'special' about leaders and leadership and for us the starting point to this kind of understanding comes from considering, in detail, what it is that leaders actually do.

The need to conduct more detailed studies of leadership-in-practice has long been recognised (Gronn, 1982, 2003; Yukl, 2002) and yet few studies venture into the everyday *doing* of leadership, concentrating instead on developing new theories or explanations of leadership. We are not interested in developing any new theories of leadership - or even attempting to evaluate the plethora of theories and approaches that currently exist - since we doubt the 'work' that such theories do in actually understanding the phenomena they purport to explain. Our interest in leadership is rather different, and, in a sense, more practical (what might be seen as another DIRCish quality) - we are looking for ways for research to contribute to leadership development - and consequently we approach leadership as a 'design' problem. We want to know, from the interdisciplinary perspective common to the design enterprise, what the requirements for a leadership development programme might be, how we might best design and deploy it. Clearly leadership is what Rittel and Webber (1973) might term a 'wicked problem' and viewing it as a practical design problem has some benefit. When leadership is regarded as a 'design' problem - rather than one associated with personality traits or cultural characteristics - the essence of 'leadership as design' becomes both that 'good' leadership can be taught and that it can become embedded within the organisation. The point of uncovering and relating 'patterns of interaction' lies in developing a set of scenarios of 'teachable moments' that resonate with participants' experiences, that connect with the reality of everyday leadership work in the post-16 educational sector. However, unlike the patterns presented by Alexander these are not typically presented as 'problem-solution' - though they could well be - but (much in the fashion of DIRC (Martin et al) 2001) as stories or scenarios (as in the tradition of 'scenario-based design') that are recognisable as what Clark (1972) terms 'organisational sagas'. In this way we accommodate what is sometimes termed 'the turn to the social' in design (Grudin REF), the recognition of and central concern with users and understanding situations of use, not divorcing systems - and system here incorporates people and their activities as well as technology - from the settings in which they would be deployed and used. Ever since this much heralded 'turn to the social' in systems design research and experience appears to have produced a common ethos that designers need to understand those they design for, they need to understand their work. What we are designing here are sets of leadership development programmes and packages rather than technology but the argument and its force remains the same.

The challenge to which we hope patterns of interaction present some kind of initial response is to design teaching and learning programs for leaders and managers in the post-16 education sector that somehow mesh gracefully and

meaningfully with the readily observed practices and activities of Further Education. In other words we are seeking to look beyond developing generic management or leadership skills towards identifying and encouraging skills and abilities that are rooted in the sector. While empirical research in this area is growing we need to make such findings accessible, we need ways of representing knowledge about leadership and leadership activities in the sector so that it is accessible to the increasingly diverse set of people involved in designing leadership development programmes - diverse enough to include 'horse-whisperers and chocolate makers'. It is in this sense that leadership both becomes and remains a design problem. The use of the notion of patterns is an attempt not only to represent such workplace knowledge, but also to provide a framework within which it can be discussed, explicated, extended, and generalized. In turning to the detection and utilisation of patterns as instantiated in DIRC (Martin et al) - patterns of interaction found in a number of instances - many of the issues of generalisability of ethnographic research findings and their translation to policy and training are thereby avoided.

Patterns of Leadership

While every child understands the notion of a pattern, the academic origin and relevance of patterns for us lies in the work of the architect Christopher Alexander, notably his books 'A Timeless Way of Building' and 'A Pattern Language' (Alexander 1979; Alexander et al 1977). Alexander uses 'patterns' to marry the relevant aspects of the physical and social characteristics of a setting into a design. For Alexander patterns are; "... ways of representing knowledge about the workplace so that it is accessible to the increasingly diverse set of people involved in design.." For us the 'workplace' is that of College Principals in Further Education. As Alexander suggests; "each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again ..., and then describes the core of the solution to that problem, in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice". As such these patterns, when applied in an educational setting, provide both focus and possible solution for leadership development programmes. For us the advantage of the notions of patterns lies in finding ways of transforming and representing our wealth of observational materials in ways that are sensitive to both the observed practices and needs of 'leaders' and that therefore can be readily used in leadership development programmes.

There are, however, a number of rather different conceptualisations of patterns and while inspired from Alexander's original work the notion of patterns has moved on. We wish to exploit patterns in the much looser spirit suggested by Alexander's original work where familiar situations were used to convey potential (in his case, architectural) solutions. Put simply, the observed reoccurrence of familiar situations lies at the core of our advocacy of patterns. People, designers, College Principals, Senior Managers etc often encounter situations that are similar to previous ones, and one justification for this focus on patterns is the emphasis on drawing from previous experience to support the collection and generalisation of successful solutions to common problems. As Alexander suggests;

"each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again in our environment, and then describes the core of the solution to that problem, in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice".

Another intriguing rationale behind patterns that may prove us in the context of leadership studies and leadership development is Alexander's notion of 'quality' ('The Quality Without A Name'). This quasi-mystical property both attracts and repels designers, but for Alexander it consists of answering questions such as "what makes a good cafe?" - where 'quality' refers not to some mystical characteristic but to features that ensure that buildings, organisations, activities 'really work', that they fit with the social circumstances of use. For us, in contrast, the question is "what makes a good leader" - but we suggest the steps towards resolution, the careful observation and documentation of everyday activities, remains the same. Our interest is to break down the question 'what makes a good leaders' into more manageable, more digestible segments - what makes a good meeting, what makes a good public presentation, what makes a good staff meeting, what makes a good presentation of accounts etc - and to document the patterns that comprise them through a number of empirical examples.

Of course, we are not the first to point to the idea of 'patterns' as offering possibilities for leadership development - and there is seemingly no end of 'self-help', 'self-improvement', management books that attest to this fact. In *"The Manager Pool: Patterns for Radical Leadership"* (Olson and Stimmel 2001), for example, the concept of patterns as general solutions to recurring problems is applied to management and leadership. They argue that knowing a number of patterns will both identify and improve the rare and desirable skills of leadership. But the patterns they produce and analyse (some 61 patterns in five different categories) bear no obvious or stated association to any rigorous empirical reality - instead we are presented with a number of largely 'commonsense' or theoretically derived categories such as psychological patterns (states of mind); behavioural patterns (behaviour); strategic patterns; tactical patterns and environmental patterns. These patterns, drawing on a vast range of theories of good leadership, supposedly describe how people interact, how they are led, and the environments they work in - but the data seems to consist of anecdote and cutesy homily - for example, environmental patterns, supposedly offer ways to improve team morale. In this category, for example, the 'Living Space' pattern builds on Christopher Alexander's ideas and suggests the family home is an effective model for organising workspace with its mix of private and public areas for work, communication, rest, and play. Well who says so? Where's the data? What's the evidence? We certainly would not be the only people to suggest that the family home is neither so simply or unproblematically organised nor such a wonderful place for serious work activity. This is not, particularly, to critique this, or any other approach that uses patterns in this way. What we suggest, however, given that the proliferation of theories of leadership appears to be part of the 'problem' rather than the solution to understanding and developing leadership, is that the place to start looking for patterns, at least if the point is development programmes, is in the setting itself, in the everyday, mundane, empirical reality of leadership work

Observing Patterns: Following the Leader

Our research uses observational or, ethnomethodologically informed ethnographic, methods to study 'leaders' and 'leadership' in the post-compulsory education sector. Our data comes from 'shadowing', 'following about', various education sector leaders in various institutions as they went about their everyday work. The central characteristic of our research has been an emphasis on the detailed observation of how work - 'leadership' work - actually 'gets done'. Within mainstream Sociology this approach, ethnography, has often been presented as essentially a methodology of last resort - used primarily for obtaining information about groups and culture - usually 'deviant cultures' (sometimes stereotyped as 'nuts, sluts and perverts') - that are impossible to investigate in other ways. For us, however, the main virtue of ethnography is its ability to make visible the 'real world' sociality of a setting, producing detailed descriptions of the 'workaday' activities of FE Principals and Senior Managers. This approach runs counter to the temptation, common in the Social Sciences, when studying others' lives to read things into them. We would not be the first to note that the social world is not organised in ways that analysts and researchers want to find it. The phenomenon of leadership is no exception to this. We do not want to *impose* a framework on the setting but to *discover* the social organisational properties of leadership as it is naturally exhibited. However, we should not underestimate the difficulty of this methodological choice for things that are familiar - in this case everyday leadership and leadership work - are often extremely difficult to see clearly because of their very familiarity. In this paper we explicate two especially common and interlinked patterns - maintaining some kind of public face of leadership and the work involved in organizational audit.

Finding Patterns in the Fieldwork: Pattern One: The Public Face of Leadership

There is no single definition of what patterns are, how they should be presented, what their purpose should be and how they should be used. We started by considering that in finding patterns in the fieldwork we were looking for examples of repeated, grossly observable phenomena in our ethnographic studies of everyday leadership work, describing them in detail and seeking a way to present them as interesting and useful scenarios for leadership development work. What we are looking for when we analyse our fieldwork are patterns of observed behaviour and activity that draw on and reflect the experience of leadership, for as one college Principal commented:

"...the only difference between an experienced principal, for example, and an inexperienced one is you've just had more time to make more mistakes and to learn from them. The critical thing, I suppose, is to be able to know your mistake, because you don't learn anything, really, like as much until you find out. You like to try and convince yourself, on your better days, that something may have gone right, but you learn a lot more from this - from the things that go wrong. And it often is so frequently tied up with people who just aren't quite doing what you want them to do. ..."

One persistent, grossly observable, feature that emerges in a range of our fieldwork settings is the extent to which college Principals and their senior management teams engage in activities to manage the visible, the public face of their institution. This idea of working to maintain in some way the public face of the college takes a variety of forms and surfaces in a number of different contexts. Whilst there are clearly elements of Goffman's (REF) 'presentation of self' involved here – including notions of 'front-stage' where the performance is given and 'back-stage' where the performance is prepared – the work involved, concerned as it is with the perception of the institution often goes beyond such simplistic, dramaturgical analogies (dripping with insincerity). The fact that the organisation has some kind of image to defend and project is often the subject of powerful and persistent organizational sagas (Clark (1972). Such sagas generally involve stories of some form of organizational change, periods of great instability, instances of 'organisational nostalgia' (Gabriel REF), references to the 'good' or 'bad' old days of the college, or more recent periods of change such as incorporation in the early 1990's. As with all sagas, retelling it becomes yet another powerful means by which the public face of the college is both outlined and reinforced.

The following is one observed saga that combines what could be described as the 'ancient' history of the college with the more recent changes in the early 90's involving a major cultural change programme. This extract is taken from a speech given five times during one day by the college principal. Along with the retelling of the organizational saga, the audience – made up of staff and new students - are reminded of the college's set of core values which must (according to the principal) be 'lived' by all those working and studying at the college:

"When I first came to [this college] I was actually intimidated. Before I even got inside I had to push through a gang of students stood smoking near the main entrance, y'know, literally push my way through. I'm being honest here, I felt intimidated, and I remember thinking, if I feel intimidated and I'm the Principal then how are other visitors to the college going to feel? When I reached what is now the main reception area I was greeted by the sight of bodies – bodies everywhere – students standing around, lying around, chatting. It looked like what we used to call back home a 'doss house'. I remember thinking 'what kind of place have I come to?' For me a good college is not a youth club, it's a place of learning, it can be fun as well, but people have to take responsibility for that. We have to make each other feel valued. That's why we don't have strict rules here. We don't need them so long as we have mutual respect..."

The principal takes great pride in the change that has taken place in the college since his arrival over two decades ago. This is evident in the number of times the story of the

college's transformation was recounted to us and overheard over the course of the ethnography. A story not just told by the principal, but by the senior managers, middle management, administrative and teaching staff. It is a story, a 'war story' (Orr 1996), that people within the college draw upon to build and maintain a sense of professional identity. A story whose telling and retelling plays an important role in developing a projecting the public face of the organisation.

In analysing these mundane observations of various forms of presentation of a public face of leadership and the college, we particularly draw on Yates' notion of 'control through communication' (Yates, 1989); particularly the argument that there is a link, an interrelationship, between technology use and changing managerial philosophies. The education sector in the UK has undergone radical change and restructuring over the past decade. In particular, this has produced a 'customer driven' approach to further education where entrepreneurial ideologies challenge more traditional and increasingly outmoded notions (e.g. the professional autonomy of teaching staff.) Instead, in order for colleges to thrive they are adopting the language and presentational practices of business: one key element of this being the engineering of new cultures, systems and technologies that promote, practice and present these new managerial and customer focused philosophies. However, as Yates (1989) suggests new technologies alone are insufficient: what is required is the vision to use it in new ways. This is clearly seen in the proliferation college newsletters, to staff, students and the wider community and the way they are used both to communicate to customers and staff and to promote a 'brand approach' to education. Consider, for instance, these details from a college newsletter:

"During 2003 SMT recognised that, with increased individual use of IT, there was a need for more consistency of style in College documentation. Examples of the range of diversity in practice were evident in papers that went to Governors' meeting, in letters from different parts of the College to the same external organization (e.g. the Learning and Skills Council) and in memos from different departments. Font sizes varied from 8 to 14 point size and a variety of typefaces were used... .. this inconsistency potentially 'dilutes' the 'brand value' of the College ..

A group of 'professionals' was formed to develop documentation standards or 'house style' guidelines for use by all College staff. These guidelines should now be followed:

Develop and maintain a consistent identity for the College so that all readers will quickly recognise a document as being from the College.

Ensure documents portray a consistent high quality, attractive, modern image that accords with the College's vision, mission and values etc. etc."

These 'technologies' are then clearly used by principals and senior managers to promote and disseminate specific

leadership visions and objectives. Such technological accomplishments represent and draw upon specific 'genres' of communication (REF), genres that evolve over time as new technologies are employed to generate, process and disseminate information in new and innovative ways across organizational domains. These are not isolated incidents but part of a pattern – a series of activities and incidents – that have at the heart of them the desire to project a particular image of the college. This is clearly seen in the next set of abbreviated fieldnotes where a College Senior Management Team are considering how best to present a proposed 'merger' of two colleges.

Looking for forms of words and motivating ideas – how best to present this. Meeting begins, discussing a recent presentation by the HR Director . re: collaboration etc.. Says they need to put their stamp on it, tone down some of the phrasing etc

R: "What we want is high quality provision across the curriculum for our students"

B: "I like the language there .. its direct... I think there's another one which I want for the college about sustainability. At the moment we're living hand to mouth from year to year, which is quite demoralizing for staff.. so how do we say that then? .. give me some words.."

.. agree other actions to move things forward .. think of strategies for moderating the language used

R: "Are you OK for the staff briefing tomorrow?"

B: "Nearly.. this is where we earn our money, in how we put it to staff. And my instinct is not to say too much."

Pattern Two: Leadership and Audit - Audit as an Organising Device

Our second, and associated, set of patterns comes from observing and understanding a range of activities associated with various notions of audit. It is hardly 'news' to anyone in the FE sector - accustomed by now to the ritualised nightmare of the Ofsted inspection - that the managerial philosophy that currently dominates issues of leadership in FE is evidently one of 'audit' and the need to demonstrate competence, compliance and effectiveness. As Strathern (2000) argues, 'audit cultures' are increasingly common in both public institutions and private enterprise, reflecting the need to practice and perform a new kind of accountability based around the twin goals of economic efficiency and good practice. These new kinds of accountability have generated new managerial and organizational forms and technologies (the Ofsted inspection; the Quality audit; the Exel spreadsheet) through which they can be expressed. The concept of the audit, previously constrained within financial applications, has now expanded to become a ubiquitous element of daily life, with the education sector being no exception. The result is a raft of 'technologies of accountability' which "*do as much to construct definitions of quality and performance as to monitor them*" (Power,

1994:33). Audit in this sense represents less an evaluative tool than a means of indirect control over work practices through monitoring and regulation.

To anyone who spends any length of time with College Principals or Senior Managers, the extent to which notions of audit dominate their everyday lives is blindingly obvious. But there are different forms of audit and it impacts on everyday working life in different ways - ie. there are different patterns whereby Principals and their Senior Management Team can be seen to be visibly oriented to notions of audit. 'Doing' audit in an accountable fashion requires different, observable, patterns, of work. Our interest here is then in how and in what ways 'audit' drives the everyday work of college Principals and how this may be of interest to those wishing to learn such 'skills of leadership'. An example of the importance of such audit work is presented in the abbreviated fieldwork transcript below:

X Tidies papers ahead of 10:45 meeting with SMT - final run through of scripts for LSC meeting to make sure they are all clear and all telling the same story

SMT arrive - X leads the meeting by identifying an error in the student numbers which have been sent to the LSC - leading to an error in the financial calculations which have been made subsequently

X: "...and we need to get the numbers right, dont we? ' - (looking at Z). Tells Z the right figures to insert

X works through the numbers on a calculator - rehearses argument in terms of funding implications

Z gives a clear walkthrough of the financial data..

X: " .. and we want a clear indication that we're going to get Premium Funding.. that's the key outcome we want from the meeting"

X now concerned about whether college will get premium funding due to a change of emphasis in the criteria.

X: "We need to present the numbers in a way that makes it easy for them to tick the criteria.."

Later.. X is finalising update paper for LSC (re progress against strategic targets) 'thinking on screen and playing around with content'... Has found a way of using the numbers re: student recruitment and retention selectively to strengthen their case for premium funding.

In the example above, the Principal is observed manipulating management data to consider how best to present important information to their funding body, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The existence of various categories within which colleges can calculate recruitment, retention and results, and the differing funding formulae provided by official

bodies, mask the way in which reasoning is shaped by contingencies and the 'skill' that goes with recognising, identifying and addressing such contingencies. These circumstances influence how the 'formula' is applied in specific cases, what determines the extent or limitations of its applicability, and the requirements for making any formula 'work' and, *be seen to work* - "*grappling with the sheer practical difficulties of determining which figures are wanted, pulling them out, and then knowing how to manipulate them and assess their product.*" (Anderson et al, 1989:105-6)

An understanding of 'leadership' within the learning and skills sector must also include an appreciation of the role of the new accountabilities in rendering organizational information and accounts of everyday practice visible. Much of what counts as everyday leadership work within UK FE colleges appears to consist of producing, sharing and manipulating accounts of events, producing a number of subtly different versions. These versions of events are constructed to conform to the new accountabilities of audit in that they consist of conscious displays of compliance and effectiveness (Neyland & Woolgar, 2002), and yet they can also serve as forms of organizational communication and accountability that allow other kinds of 'ordinary' work to be done within the college (Button & Sharrock, 1998; Suchman, 1993). For example, the components of a successful Ofsted inspection may be recycled as the justification for a Beacon Status/premium funding application, an indication of quality provision to entice students to apply to the college, an opportunity for the public praise of staff and as the motivational basis for exhortations to further achievement. In each case, the mode of delivery and the specific choice of content will serve to construct a version or account suited to the leadership work it is required to perform. As this example suggests, we could make the case that organizational life within post-incorporation FE colleges in the United Kingdom is increasingly characterized by a need to construct accounts and make oneself, other members of staff and the college accountable to a variety of internal and external audiences.

Our observations indicate how and in what ways organizational life within post-incorporation FE colleges in the United Kingdom is increasingly characterized by a particular managerial pattern of activity - the need to construct accounts making the college accountable. 'Leadership' work here consists in the selection and calculation through which activities on the ground, as understood through the management information collected, are made to visibly fit the requirements imposed upon the organization by external agencies. It is not simply a question of seeing what is 'in the figures' and then working out what should be done since, as the transcript documents, 'what is in the figures' has to be worked out. As one Principal told us:

"...the data's clean, but in terms of can you use it, is it good enough to use, would you rest your life on it today? - that's more tricky ... it's so complex, in a way you have to manage that ambiguity ... I know how many students I need to achieve overall at the college ... but that's probably got no relationship to enrolments because, you know, somebody can

be enrolled on 8 things, or you can break the course up into four."

In such activities, there is a need for "*managing the interplay between precision and interpretation in calculation*" (Anderson et al 1989:121) in order to produce an appropriate, and defensible, account of events. Thus the documents produced and the accounts which underpin them also represent 'gambits of compliance' (Bittner 1965) in respect of the perceived rules of conduct imposed by external agencies, such that the process through which decisions are made can be seen as "*extending to the rule the respect of compliance, while finding in the rule the means for doing whatever needs to be done.*" (Bittner, 1965:273) As one Principal said:

"...you play the game, you see, y'know ... You see, theoretically what happens is you should put all the figures in and out the end pops what level of support you need. But the reality is you never bloody win! We were told actually if we try to get a thirty-five percent grant that we would never get it, so what we did was we made the figures show that we could just do it on thirty-five, but it is a very tough squeeze..."

In this way, the work of principals and senior managers when they engage in decision-making and analysis of management information involves an observable (and teachable) pattern of continuous (and often ingenious) struggles with the technology and the data

3. Conclusion: Patterns and the Shock of the Familiar

In tackling leadership (and specifically leadership development) as a design problem our approach differs somewhat from that taken by Alexander (and the software design community) since we follow Erickson (200a; 2000b) in suggesting that our principal and rather different emphasis is on the use of pattern languages as a descriptive device, a *lingua franca* for creating a common ground among people who lack a shared discipline or theoretical framework. Given the varied background from which educational leaders are drawn such an interdisciplinary approach is both essential and inevitable. Our patterns attempt to capture actual lived experience rather than abstract principles: "*abstract principles require users of the principles to understand some conceptual framework, and to be able to map the principles onto their domain of concern, the concrete prototypes in pattern languages make direct contact with the user's experience*" (Erickson 2000a). Nevertheless our exposition does abide by some of Alexander's central concerns since, whilst not using patterns prescriptively (rather as 'aids to a sluggish imagination') we are attempting to use patterns to capture accepted practice and support generalization. We are also suggesting the value of this perspective, this way of looking at the problem of and the solution to 'leadership' in this sector, for the pattern language is *not* intended to be a book of patterns that is followed by rote. This is not a crib sheet - rather we are presenting a number of 'sensitising' issues that can be modified and re-presented according to local circumstances. Any college Principal or Senior Manager who has experience with the situation can quickly understand, discuss, and contest these patterns. As Erickson (2000a) argues: "*It is actually a meta-language which is used to*

generate languages for particular sites. For any particular situation a subset of existing patterns is selected; in addition, designers modify existing patterns and create new patterns that reflect the culture, environment, history, customs and goals of the site's location and inhabitants. These patterns - old, modified, and new - form a site-specific language which is used to guide reflection and discussion about the relationships among the site, the proposed design, and the activities of the inhabitants”.

Like Erickson we wonder what advantages and benefits this approach to leadership development might afford. Like Erickson we suggest firstly, that patterns, ‘are more concrete, more tightly bound to the situation at hand, and thus more accessible to an audience that lacks a common disciplinary framework”. Secondly, that presenting empirical studies of leadership in action, the ‘doing’ of leadership, “results in the modularization of workplace knowledge, and thus makes it easier to take a subset of a pattern language and apply it to a new type of workplace”. Thirdly, that this approach “makes pattern languages more amenable to generalization across workplaces”. Finally that there are some important advantages stemming from this particular representational approach, this way of moving from research finding to practical implementation that is linked to the recognition that researchers and practitioners often have different audiences and different needs. Leadership development is a pragmatic activity. In designing leadership development programmes the needs of ‘users’ – Principals and Senior Managers – are paramount and the use of patterns offers a ready means of establishing a dialogue with such users: “communicating effectively with their users, noticing connections between activities and artifacts that would have been otherwise missed, or simply decrease the time between encountering a workplace and being able to ask useful questions”.

We have long been suspicious of the special, almost mythic, status (and hype) accorded to ‘leadership’. If there is anything special about leadership it is simply that researchers have yet to realise the importance of the largely unexplicated and seemingly invisible ‘work’ that is essential in the doing of educational leadership. Good leaders are competent and skilled in Bittner’s (1965) gambit of compliance. They know what stories to tell at the right times, they know what figures to produce, how and when. They are skilled in managing performances, images and interpretations. These seem to be teachable yet rarely taught skills. We are not uncovering or revealing secret or esoteric skills. If there is any shock value in the fieldwork extracts above it comes from their very familiarity – the ‘been there, done that’ experience, the rueful shake of the head that accompanies painful memories. It is exactly this quality that makes this work and these patterns useful for leadership development. And such skills are not the esoteric preserve of ‘leadership’. These are skills available to just about anyone working in an organization and used everyday. But because of the miasma of believes and conceptual approaches to leadership (see REFS..) in the absence of any shared conceptual framework, knowledge, if it is to be teachable and transferable, must be embodied in a concrete, recognizable form – and for this we advocate ‘patterns’ as a representational mechanism for design.

3.1 Acknowledgements

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