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What is effective research leadership?
A research-informed perspective

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Drawing upon findings from a UK-based funded study of academic leadership provided by (full) professors, this article focuses on research leadership as perceived by those on the receiving end of it. Research leadership is defined as the influence of one or more people on the research-related behaviour, attitudes or intellectual capacity of others. Three specific features of professorial research leadership are identified and examined: influence that enhances people's capacity: to make appropriate choices, to achieve requisite standards, and to effect processes within research activity. The author's conceptual model of researcher development is presented as an indicator of research leadership and its multidimensionality.

Keywords: researcher development, mentoring, researchers, academic leadership

INTRODUCTION

Within the neo-liberalist cultures that define the 21st century academy in the developed world, research performance is a dominant preoccupation for research-intensive universities and those with research-focused aspirations. Performativity measures such as Australia's *Excellence in Research for Australia*, New Zealand's *Performance Based Research Funding* exercise, and the UK's *Research Excellence Framework* (REF) have placed research quality and productivity at the top of institutional development agendas, prioritising research as a valued, pre-eminent activity to which personnel must be committed and which drives institutional goals and missions that are squarely focused on building research capacity and developing researchers.

Research leadership, then, would appear to be a legitimate – if not an essential – specialised form of higher education leadership. Recognition of its value is implicit in universities' formal leadership and management structures, with prominent designated research leadership roles evident at all levels of the institutional hierarchy, filtering down from senior management to faculty and departmental levels. Yet in one sense such leaders are inadequately equipped, for the knowledge base available to them is extremely limited. As

Edgar and Geare (2011, p. 2) observe, 'our understanding of research and research performance remains largely uncharted territory, despite its importance in institutional funding allocations' – a lacuna that I have identified as an under-developed scholarship of researcher development (Evans, 2011a, 2012). This lacuna is corroborated by Lumby (2012, p. 10): '[e]vidence of the impact of leadership and different forms of leadership on the extent and quality of research … is slim', and by Åkerlind's (2008, p. 17) observation: 'there is relatively little … literature addressing academics' understandings of research and being a researcher'. Åkerlind was able to find only ten 'key studies' relating to academics' understanding of research, and whilst the literature base may have been augmented since she published her review, there remain significant gaps in our understanding of research as an activity and of research leadership and its role - particularly leadership of academics as researchers.

This paper represents a small contribution towards filling this gap. Based upon the premise that effective leadership is dependent upon knowing how research is perceived and effected, and, by extension, how people develop as or into researchers, it draws upon research findings in order to examine the perspectives of those with first-hand experience – as its recipients - of research leadership in the UK's higher education sector. The discussion below incorporates consideration of my conceptualisation of researcher development and its componential structure in order to identify key features of effective research leadership. I begin with an outline conceptual analysis of research leadership.

THE SUBSTANCE OF RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

To research-intensive universities, effective research leadership is likely to be that which yields the optimum results, as measured by research funding capture and academic outputs that promise increased income and advantageous ranking within whichever research

performance or accountability measures are at play (Edgar & Geare, 2011; Wilson & Holligan, 2013). At the academic level, however, the question of what is effective research leadership has received scant attention; as I imply above, as a field of study, research leadership suffers from an acute 'attention deficit', leaving its scholarship underdeveloped and its knowledge base 'relatively emaciated' (Evans, 2012, p. 424). Somewhat ironically, then, those charged with promoting and developing research must manage without its findings in planning and effecting their leadership policies and practice, relying instead on common-sense and experientially-based reasoning and intuition. Considered alongside the expansive knowledge base that has accumulated in the broader umbrella field of educational leadership and management in the last four decades, and which has contributed much to policy and practice, this seems something of a 'hit-and-miss' approach that leaves much to chance.

In defining the future of leadership in HE we must ensure that those forms of leadership that are afforded much prominence – both in the practical-focused discourse of the academy and within the policy agendas of institutions and the wider academic community – are identified as valid foci of research-based examination and, by extension, as (sub-)fields of study in their own right. Academic leadership is one such example. The American – and, in some cases, Australasian – literature has for the most part tended to interpret academic leadership as denoting designated 'formal' leadership and management roles within higher education (e.g. Birnbaum, 1992; Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Debowski & Blake, 2004; Gallos, 2002; Hecht et al., 1999; Ramsden, 1998; Spiller, 2010), but the term has been interpreted considerably more widely in the UK. Implicit in its being consistently referred to across the UK's HE sector in job specifications and promotion criteria relating to all except early career academic or research posts, is recognition that providing academic leadership should be an aspiration of almost any academic or academic-related employee, irrespective of whether s/he

holds a designated leadership and management role. So interpreted, it has only recently begun to attract scholarly attention from what, as yet, remains a very small group of researchers (e.g. Bolden et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2013; Juntrasook et al., 2013; Macfarlane, 2011, 2012). Research leadership - which I consider an element of academic leadership - is even more neglected: an unanalysed concept; an unexplored domain that lies unnoticed below the radar of scholarly consideration. I therefore set the ball rolling with my own interpretation and definition of it.

Research leadership: examining the concept

I currently define research leadership as *the influence of one or more persons on the research-related behaviour, attitudes or intellectuality of another/ others*. There are important implications of this definition which may be at odds with everyday, functional interpretations of, and connotations conveyed by, the term, for it is generally perceived to be a positive, beneficial form of agency, practised consciously and deliberately. My definition denotes a wider conceptualisation. It incorporates recognition that the influence on others that constitutes research leadership may occur accidentally or deliberately and may be provided unconsciously or consciously, with what may be considered beneficial or unbeneficial outcomes. Correlating with the notion of distributed leadership (Gosling, Bolden & Petrov, 2009; Gronn, 2008), research leadership so-defined may potentially be provided by anyone, of any status. Another implication of my definition is that incumbents of formal, designated research leader roles may not necessarily exert the influence on others that equates to their enactment of research leadership, making them research leaders in name only; as Ball (2007, p. 474) concludes: 'the presence of formal research leaders in universities does not necessarily mean that the leadership of academics in research will occur. Furthermore … the actual leadership of university academics in research is often accidental'.

Research leadership as I interpret it is in many respects indistinguishable from researcher development – which I consider an element of professional development, or, more specifically, of academic development. Within a full conceptual analysis of researcher development presented elsewhere, I define it as: 'the process whereby people's capacity and willingness to carry out the research components of their work or studies may be considered to be enhanced, with a degree of permanence that exceeds transitoriness' (Evans, 2012, p. 425). The words 'may be considered to be' are intended to convey my interpretation of any form of development as subjectively determined, in accordance with different needs, interests and agendas; what a university's strategic management team may consider to be researcher development may be quite different from interpretations of it held by individual academics, or academic development professionals – yet, objectively, each is surely equally valid.

Research leadership, then, may incorporate the capacity to effect researcher development. Under such circumstances it involves a (consciously or unconsciously effected) developmental role or activity. Yet it may also be divorced from researcher development because – like any form of leadership – it may influence people's behaviour, attitudes or intellectuality with results that may not be considered beneficial or capacity-enhancing (one need only consider the nature of leadership practised in Nazi Germany to recognise the feasibility of such a scenario; moreover, the scholarship of leadership incorporates a substantial discourse on negatively-evaluated - including toxic and narcissistic - leadership [e.g. Bedein, 2002; Bolden, 2007; Kellerman, 2004; Pelletier, 2010; Pullen & Rhodes, 2008]). Such demeritorious or even malignant effects of the influence of one or more persons on another conflict with my definition of development, with its focus on capacity-enhancement. On the other hand, since within my definition what constitutes capacity-enhancement is subjectively determined, it requires only one person's recognition of it, affording enhancement more chance of being identified than if consensus were required.

If, then, research leadership can be located at any point on the effective-ineffective continuum, what does it look like in its most effective form? I devote the bulk of this article to addressing this question. To advance the development of interest in researcher development and research leadership from a practical to an academic level, by promoting their scholarship (albeit with the ultimate aim of informing practice and policy), I build my discussion and analysis around relevant research findings, focusing particularly on one of my own research projects. I present details of this research in the next section, before then applying its findings to addressing the question.

THE RESEARCH: GIVING A VOICE TO 'THE LED'

Effective research leadership, I argue, is subjectively determined. But there is one constituency whose subjective views deserve to be heard, yet whose voice has been consistently under-represented within the study and scholarship of educational leadership and management: the 'led' (Evans 2011b). In the context of research leadership, 'the led' are those on the receiving end of it: those whose research-related behaviour, attitudes or intellectuality have been influenced. It is their perspective that was sought in *Leading professors? Professorial academic leadership as it is perceived by 'the led'* - the study whose findings I draw upon.

Leading professors? Professorial academic leadership as it is perceived by 'the led'

The *Leading professors* study – as it is hereafter called – was a one-year-long project directed at examining the nature and quality of academic leadership provided by university professors, as perceived by non-professorial academics, researchers and university teachers. It is important to emphasise that my use of the term 'professor', and its etymological derivatives, such as 'professoriate' and 'professorial', are consistent with usage in the UK (and, less

consistently, Australasia), denoting a minority group representing the HE sector's most senior academics who, in most cases, have been promoted to professorships on the basis of distinct achievement in research and scholarship. This differs from the North American convention of referring to all academic staff as professors.

The *Leading professors* project was funded by the UK's Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) and was carried out by a research team of three (two qualitative researchers and a statistician), led by me. Data were gathered using an online questionnaire and follow-up semi-structured interviews, with the purpose of delineating the perceived nature and quality of academic leadership demonstrated by professors. (Full details of the research design and method, including a list of the research questions addressed by the study, may be found in Evans et al., 2013.)

Designed to be completed in less than 10 minutes, the questionnaire incorporated 40 items, most of which required respondents to select from a set of four- or five-point Likert-scale options (e.g. ranging from 'often' to 'never', or from 'definitely agree' to 'definitely disagree'). There were also several open-ended items, allowing respondents to add comments on their perceptions of the professorial role and their experiences of professors and professorial academic leadership. The questionnaire sample was selected by university website searches, with the aim of requesting the participation of as many respondents as it was possible and manageable to contact during the life of the project. 1,223 largely complete responses were obtained, amongst which was a small proportion (<1%) of missing responses to some items.

From responses to an optional questionnaire item requesting contact details (from respondents who indicated their willingness to participate in follow-up interviews), it is evident that at least 94 British universities were represented. 66.1% of respondents were based in pre-1992 institutions (i.e. those that enjoyed university status before the binary

divide was abolished in 1992) and 33.5% in post-92 universities (former polytechnics and colleges of education). (0.3% failed to respond to the item asking respondents to indicate at which type of institution they were employed). Institutions in all four UK nations were represented. 48.3% of respondents were males and 51.3% females (0.7% failed to indicate their gender).

Respondents were asked to indicate their specialisms from a list of the 67 subject categories used in the UK's 2008 research assessment exercise (RAE). Every one of these subjects was represented in the responses, with the highest number (18% of responses) inevitably coming from education, where the research team is well known. Business and management – the second most represented subject - accounted for 8.2% of the responses; business school respondents were deliberately targeted with a view to yielding enough responses to examine whether or not this sub-sector – one that specialises in management and leadership expertise - was distinct in its pattern of responses: effectively, whether it practises what it preaches.

Fifty interviewees were selected on the basis of providing representation of a range of variables, including: professional role/generic job category (i.e. academic, researcher or teaching fellow); gender; seniority; mission group of employing institution; discipline and subject; and geographical location (to ensure coverage of all 4 UK nations). A semi-structured schedule guided the interview conversations but incorporated the flexibility to pursue relevant unanticipated topics. Most interviews took place, face-to-face, at the interviewee's university, but some were conducted by telephone. All were audio-recorded and transcribed to facilitate analysis

The process of data analysis was inductive and involved several levels of coding, each of which related to a specific research question. First-level coding simply identified data that were relevant to the selected research question. Subsequent levels of coding were directed

towards identifying and/or considering: patterns, similarities and atypical cases; the bases of commonality, disparity and atypicality; potential interpretation of and/or explanation for incongruence and correlation; theoretical perspectives that provide universally applicable and hence general, rather than specific, explanations for why or how something appears to have occurred.

THE FINDINGS: THE NATURE OF EFFECTIVE RESEARCH LEADERSHIP AS DELINEATED BY 'THE LED'

Addressing the issue of what makes for effective academic leadership practised by professors, questionnaire respondents and interviewees alike shed much light on the more specific issue of research leadership, for it was most often in relation to the research-related components of their work that they invariably hoped for or expected professorial leadership. In extrapolating from the dataset those data that indicated the nature of any perceived influence on people's research-related behaviour, attitudes or intellectuality, it became clear that, from the perspective of 'the led', positive influence – which I categorise as effective research leadership - was identified as that which potentially enhanced people's capacity in relation to one or more of three issues: *processes*, *choices* and *standards* in doing research. These addressed, respectively, *how?*, *which?* and *to what level?*-focused questions.

Processes

For relatively inexperienced academics, breaking out into their research communities and establishing themselves as researchers involves what are often protracted 'journeys' of disciplinary acculturation that include 'getting to know the ropes'. Many of the *Leading professors* research participants referred to positive professorial influence on their capacity to carry out specific research processes, enhancing their effectiveness as researchers. Four such

processes were highlighted: research design and method, analysis, grant application writing, and – the most frequently mentioned - writing for publication. The nature of the influence – and hence of the research leadership – was common across all cases. It involved supportive intervention in the form of suggestions, and in some cases, demonstration, of an alternative approach.

Research fellow, Tamara[1], outlined how a professor's constructive criticism had influenced her to adopt a more critical stance to the theoretical framework that she had chosen for her research:

> 'I'm basing my work on animal studies, and I don't know much about animal studies, and he [the professor] said, "Well, what do you know about animal studies? How do you know these studies are good enough to base your research on?" And I said, "I *don't* really know, and maybe I *should* know" – so, that kind of thing. … I just need to be more critical, maybe, of what I'm basing it on. … And so, I think that's a really important point that he made, yeah.'

Similarly, Ben – an early career law academic – acknowledged the developmental contribution to his data analysis made by the law school's professorial director of research:

> 'We'd discuss the individual cases that I'd come across that were in my sample, and he [the professor] would often come back with questions of "why?". Often he would ask the questions that perhaps I should've asked myself, that maybe I hadn't … er … or maybe I *had* but he was checking that I had. Er … there was an awful lot of questioning about … er … coming at it from a different angle.'

Another research fellow, Ursula, spoke of the professorial line manager who had developed her grant application writing skills:

'… he [the professor] gave really helpful advice when I was writing a grant bid, you know, and good, critical, kind of … really, "Turn this around this way" or "Think about this" , even down to the word: "use this word instead; it's better, I think, for this reason …" (laughs) … you know … but also asked questions: "Are you *sure* you wanna do this?"'

For principal lecturer, Ken, it was academic writing for publication – a process that is integral to researcher development (Murray & Cunningham, 2011) - that had been the focus of leadership he had gratefully received in the earliest days of his career. He described key aspects of this development process, facilitated by a professorial colleague who, he acknowledged, 'had an enormous influence on me intellectually':

'he [the professorial colleague] taught me to write. … The first thing I ever wrote for him, he came into my room when I'd finished the first draft and – I'm exaggerating when I say, "he threw it at me"; he didn't – but he gave it me back and said, "When are you going to learn to write about one thing?" And I was a bit disappointed about that – the first thing you ever write, you expect … well, I asked him about it and I said, "What am I doing wrong?" and he said, "Well, there's a million ideas there. None of them are bad ideas, but you've got to write one paper, so you've got to learn the business of getting rid of all the ideas that aren't central to this paper. Pick a topic … pick what you're going to write about, you've got ten thousand words for this journal article … write ten thousand words. And all the rest of it you put into another folder –another file – and you say to yourself, 'I can use that some other time'." And that was great advice! And it's the same advice that I give to people that I work with now.

… I wanted to learn. I mean, that's the short answer. I don't think I've got so much ego that I thought, he's wrong. I thought, if he's right then I need to learn. And

> when he took it away and gave it back to me – rewritten – I could see why. It was *so* much better. I mean, I just had to accept this was so much better than what I did. And I guess for, maybe six months, he slowly – I mean, I guess, basically, I improved – but he slowly did less and less in terms of redrafting my stuff, until, after a year or so, he never touched it; he just left it to me. And I found that to be a very, very positive experience. What it did for me was, when I came to this university … I had no fears about just getting on with it. Er … so I just wrote.'

These examples illustrate the mentoring-type nature of the leadership interventions. The common thread tying them all together was that each involved the proposal or suggestion of what the 'recipient' or 'beneficiary' recognised as a 'better way' – recognition that is an essential stage in the development process (Evans, 2011c) - and which s/he then adopted on the basis of its perceived superiority over the approach or situation that it was intended to replace and improve upon.

Choices

An important aspect of development as a researcher involves making choices about a wide range of issues and tasks, such as: which funders to apply to; which calls for tender to pursue and which to let go; which journals to target; which conferences to attend; which tasks to prioritise and which to place on the back-burner. Whilst senior academics have generally acquired the requisite experience to make the optimum choices for enhancing their profiles, performance and productivity, it is evident from the *Leading professors* findings that their junior colleagues often struggle with many of these 'which?' questions.

Senior lecturer, Viktoria, recalled finding herself unexpectedly faced with competing deadlines, creating a dilemma that prompted her to consult an overseas-based professorial mentor for advice:

'…I had an article which I submitted to our number one journal and I got a revise and resubmit, and I was, like, "Oh, revise and resubmit!", and, you know, "it's almost in there!". But then I had so many other articles to revise, and a very strict deadline, which I know is absolutely non-negotiable, so I sent her [the professor] an email and I said, you know, "What can I do?" or "What d'you suggest?" and I said, "Look, I've got all these other very good articles as well that have a deadline, you know. Should I do this?" And she said, you know, "Just drop everything else; do that one", and she said, "Send it to me and I'll give you some feedback." And that's what she's done, and, I mean, it got in! … And I know it's *my* article and *my* work, but she's played such a crucial role in, kind of, just pushing me and saying, "Now, I know you've got everything else, but forget everything else and focus on that."'

Whilst Viktoria's case illustrates leadership that enhanced decision-making capacity, in some cases the nature and focus of effective research leadership were delineated by default, through examples of where it was perceived to be absent or ineffective, resulting in what were identified as missed opportunities for research capacity enhancement. One such example was provided by a lecturer who identified shortcomings in his institution's research leadership in relation to guidance and advice about available choices. Left to his own devices, he complained, without the benefit of advice from more experienced senior colleagues, he had made what - with the benefit of hindsight - he now considered ill-judged decisions about which kinds of activities to prioritise. This left him vulnerable in terms of being enterable for REF 2014 since his university's policy was to enter only those with publication profiles deemed to average at least 4x 3*-rated outputs:

'I've found that, as a junior lecturer, I've been offered things that for various reasons I thought I should say "yes" to … and that they've probably spread me a bit more thinly than I would've liked to have been. I could probably have said, "no" to

a few articles and chapters … and ended up with four really strong items for the REF, rather than what I'll probably find, which is that I'm struggling to finish the book, and have maybe up to eight article-length items which are all more or less the same quality, so … on the kind of 3* scale – possibly even 2*.

… I think the other key area in which I really think there's just a total absence of direction … real leadership … is funding applications. I mean, basically, you must apply for things … you must secure funding. That's fine, but there's no one formally assigned to sit down with any level of staff member – junior or senior – and say, "Well, how about going for this particular grant?" or "Let me have a full look at your proposal before you send it". … The university doesn't have any sort of systematic network for … for internal review … for mentoring … for shepherding … for thinking strategically … . And there are some people, I'm sure, who probably spend far too much time going through this sort of thing, when it might be worth, again, a quiet word, y'know: "You've applied for enough … you're in danger of not getting your REF outputs ready". So, yeah, it's that kind of discussion that's lacking.'

In relation to making choices, the research findings revealed effective research leadership to involve mentoring or guidance in decision-making and prioritisation, thereby developing people's capacity to make appropriate (in the context of their own career trajectories) judgement calls about different options available to them. A key component in making such decisions is appreciation of the level of performance expected and understanding of the standards against which outputs and achievements will be evaluated.

Standards

Acceptable research performance in much of the UK's pre-1992 university sector does not simply involve high productivity; the *quality* of output is more important. Though it is by no means associated exclusively with or defined narrowly by performativity measures such as the REF (in relation to which, within the most research-intensive universities, 4x3*-rated outputs generally represents the standards threshold for all expect early career researchers), researcher development clearly incorporates a qualitative-related dimension, with a focus on continued improvement to scholarship, theory generation and depth of analysis. In the specific context of the REF this translates into a culture whereby:

> Everyone needs to raise their game and move up a gear: those not entered in the 2009 research assessment exercise (RAE) because they failed to produce enough publications of the requisite quality must be enterable in the REF; those whose output averaged less than 3* need to reach or exceed a 3* average; and those with 3* averages should pull out all the stops to strive for 4* quality output (Evans, 2012, p. 424).

The *Leading professors* study revealed that professors were often perceived as what are effectively quality yardsticks, by indicating standards of performance to aspire to. Sometimes this occurred explicitly and consciously, through guidance and advice. More often, through the example of their own work and achievements - which often included world-leading, ground-breaking work that was highly rated - professors unconsciously or indirectly set standards of excellence that impressed junior colleagues, in some cases motivating them to work towards emulating such performance.

Several interviewees spoke of the impressive or, in some cases, inspirational examples of scholarship provided by specific professors. For modern foreign languages lecturer, David, the standard to strive for was defined as the gap between his own current

capacity and performance and those of professors whom he considered to be world leaders in the field:

> 'it's in the area of research where I, with the very best professors, can see the daylight I think one needs to see between where I am as a junior lecturer … and the sort of work I'm producing … and the sort of work that I think a professor should be putting out … . [T]he very best in the field put out work that you think, "that's really something to go for; that's … work that builds on thirty years of knowledge and expertise … a breadth of reading that, as I say, by definition, I can't have done".'

He referred specifically to the example set by his former professorial PhD supervisor, and to his quest for a similar role model whom he could now try to emulate:

> 'it was the elegance of his [the PhD supervisor's] language, and it was the analytical insight, and it was making the material work … and sheer breadth of cultural reference and cultural knowledge.
>
> … I often feel in some ways that I've reached a kind of ceiling, and I'm very much looking outside of this university for … for people to imitate. You know: who's had a career that I'd like to achieve in, sort of, 10 or 20 years?'

Similarly, senior lecturer, Viktoria, identified as her role model a female professor with whom she had once worked:

> 'Oh! She's just … I mean, she is probably … I mean, at least one of the three most well-published … famous … you know – in terms of, you know, being "up there" with her research! I mean her publication list is endless … also the ways in which she's brought the field forward, essentially. She's *the one*, I would say – but I'm biased. She's clearly among the top three in the field out there.
>
> … I know I'll never be like her, but, you know, I'm trying hard (laughs)!'

A key feature of effective research leadership, then – as the *Leading professors* findings revealed – is that it conveys an indication of the quality of research activity and output that might reasonably be expected of researchers at different stages of their development and careers. It potentially influences the research activity of 'the led' by indicating standards that are attainable and realisable for them and providing examples of achievement against which they may measure their own performance. This is an important acculturation mechanism; without such indicators of prevalent standards, neophytes will fail to appreciate the value of the currency with which they must work if they are to accrue economic and social capital as researchers.

DISCUSSION: A WIDER PERSPECTIVE ON RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

The *Leading professors* study has uncovered several features of effective research leadership: it enhances the knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin specific research processes; it develops capacity to make judgements about choices; and it conveys an indication of aspirational levels of achievement and performance within the contexts of different epistemic and disciplinary research communities. With the effect of increasing research capacity, it thus communicates expert and experientially-informed views about how to do research, to what standard, and what elements of it are important and should be prioritised. Whilst this paper has highlighted examples of research leadership provided by professors, it is important to emphasise that questionnaire respondents and interviewees alike were quick to acknowledge the influence on their work and development as researchers of colleagues of all levels of seniority. Research leadership is evidently not the preserve of professors.

The issue of standards-setting as an aspect or element of research leadership, however, is a thorny one. It is a fine line that separates the motivational features of exemplars

such as the professors referred to above from the potentially harmful effects of their setting the bar at too high a level for most people to reach. In order to excel, many professors set themselves ambitious targets and goals and endure or inflict upon themselves punishing work schedules consistent with the notion of 'hyperprofessionality' (Gornall & Salisbury, 2012). Irrespective of the health and well-being issues that may arise from the work-life imbalance arising from such practice, it could, on the one hand, inspire and energise others to emulate it and it could foster their self-actualisation and job fulfilment as they step up to the mark. On the other hand, it could provoke more negative attitudinal responses, leading to stress, lowered self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy in those who find themselves sinking rather than swimming. Such is the difference between effective research leadership and that which is damaging or corrosive – the latter being illustrated by interviewee, Adrian, who, recalling a 'dark', period in the history of his department, was scathing in his criticism of two professorial colleagues:

> 'professors who worked all hours of the day and night themselves and actually were quite good scholars … but then expected everybody else to do the same. I've got no complaints if somebody wants to work 70 hours a week - that's fine; but it's quite inadmissible to expect other people to then go and do the same thing. And it certainly led to the departure of, I think, at least two members of staff, if not more. … And, you know, I'm very pleased if people want to make names for themselves and do all kinds of interesting, whizzy things in research … that's fine. But the knock-on effect it had on other people was … fairly dismal.'

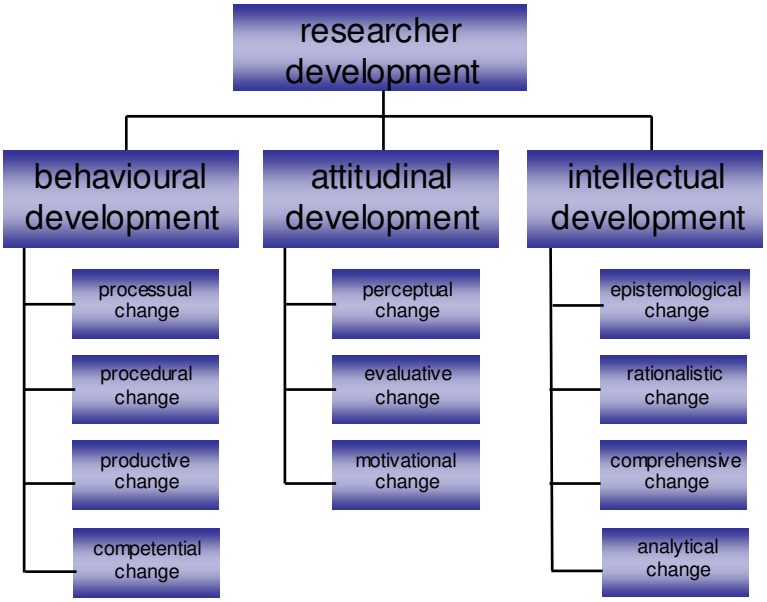
It is important to recognise, too, that, whilst the perspective of 'the led' is an immensely valuable source of knowledge on, and a valid basis for delineating, leadership as it is received - insofar as it provides insights that would otherwise be obscured - as with any single perspective it nevertheless represents an incomplete picture. The landscape of

leadership in higher education – shaped, as it is, by the multi-agentic, socio-cultural environment within which it is located – is constantly shifting, and when asked to describe it, any one agent or constituency of agent will inevitably focus on her or his own experiences and priorities. But there is more – much more – to effective research leadership than the three representations of it outlined above: influencing people's capacity for dealing with choices, meeting requisite standards, and effecting the processes that are central to research activity.

A more expansive perspective recognises that research leadership is a conduit for effecting researcher development, therefore its features and dimensions correlate with those of researcher development. Elsewhere (Evans, 2011a, 2012) I present a conceptual analysis of researcher development that delineates its componential structure, identifying three main components: behavioural, attitudinal and intellectual development. Within each of these are sub-components, or dimensions, of which I currently identify eleven: the processual, procedural, productive, competential, evaluative, motivational, perceptual, analytical, comprehensive, epistemological and rationalistic dimensions, as depicted in Figure 1. I contend that these components of researcher development are also components or features of research leadership – though not necessarily its *only* features. As such, they delineate its range of potential foci. Consideration of how each of them shapes the nature of research leadership indicates the complex multidimensionality of it - whether carried out consciously or unconsciously, actively or passively.

Briefly, research leadership conceived of in this way encompasses – in its most expansive form - the influencing of: the processes that make up research activity (research leadership's processual focus); the procedures involved in doing research (its procedural focus); the skills and competences required in research (its competential focus); research output and productivity (its productive focus); researchers' values and the things that matter

Figure 1: The componential structure of researcher development



to them (its evaluative focus); researchers' motivation, satisfaction and morale (its motivational focus); researchers' perceptions – including self-perceptions, which determine identity (its perceptual focus); researchers' analyticism and analytical capacity (its analytical focus); researchers' understanding (its comprehensive focus); the bases of researchers' knowledge and their knowledge structures (its epistemological focus); and researchers' capacity for reason (its rationalistic focus). Fostering research cultures that facilitate and encourage researcher development across this whole, wide spectrum of foci represents research leadership at its most ambitious, most inclusive, and most effective.

To a large extent research into and analyses of leadership in higher education have tended to focus on the big picture that represents macro or meso levels; policy has been scrutinised and trends critiqued, but the ecologies of people's lives – the lived experiences of those working in HE and how they, as leaders and managers, or as 'the led' or 'the managed', enact their evolving roles within the discourses and interactions that make up the relational situation that is leadership – have often been overlooked. As long as they remain overlooked,

our understanding of them will be incomplete and inadequate, and our ideas and proposals for change and development will be as precariously constructed and ill-conceived as houses built upon sand.

Referring to the study of leadership in higher education, Lumby (2012, p. 8) observes:

> Our views are from a distance and refracted, like looking at an object in moving water. We can discern its general shape, but not its exact contours. We can see its view from above, but not what lies beneath.

The future of research and scholarship in HE leadership lies in its closer examination. Whilst keeping its overarching shape and dimensions in our field of vision, we now must also start viewing its detail, with all its intricate and inter-related components and aspects, including its many sub-fields. Academic leadership is one such component; intellectual leadership is another; research leadership is yet another. This article has offered a glimpse of one of the contours that defines the shape of leadership in higher education. We need to view many more contours before we may discern that precise shape.

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Note

[1] Pseudonyms are used in all references to the research sample.

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