



The 18TH International Studying Leadership Conference

16th-17th December 2019

Bristol Business School, University of the West of England

Call for Contributions

The International Studying Leadership Conference provides a forum for scholars and practitioners from around the world to share insights on the nature, processes and outcomes of leadership in contemporary organisations and society.

Theme: *Putting Leadership in its Place*

In contemporary tumultuous societal landscapes some commentators claim that answers for problems are located in heroic individuals, whereas others take a more holistic approach and call for an understanding of context, culture and *place* in leadership practice. Only through understanding the relationship between leadership and the environment in which it occurs, they argue, will we be able to develop more effective and sustainable forms in the future; forms that are responsive, flexible and sensitive to change. We will explain the concept of place in due course, but before note that researchers and scholars interested in studying place and leadership share some important similarities.

Most significantly, they challenge the notion that leadership is the sole responsibility of one individual who acts as if in a context-free vacuum. That is, mainstream approaches to leadership tend to valorise the quest for locating a 'magic recipe' of leadership attributes and behaviours that enable individual leaders to be effective in any situation. Very little attention is paid to other factors outside of the individual that may impact on success, largely because the ideal-type leader is seen to be so omniscient and omnipresent that place is deemed irrelevant. Despite the continued popularity of this simplistic approach (as evidenced in contemporary airport texts and 'how-to' guides), scholars from a diverse range of backgrounds take issue with such an a-

contextual perspective, claiming it to be overly prescriptive (Graeff, 1983), to represent a North American bias (Rost, 1991) and to fail in capturing the nuanced and fundamentally idiosyncratic character of day-to-day leadership practice (Denis et al., 2012). Instead, they ask questions such as: Why does leadership style vary from place-to-place? Why do certain leaders work well in some contexts and not in others? Why has the magic recipe of leadership not yet been found, in almost 100 years of formal leadership research?

We propose that focussing efforts primarily on individual leaders is problematic and reductionist. Instead, concentrating on the relationship between leadership and place can offer a deeper and more representative account of how leadership activity occurs. In some cases this may involve investigating how place influences leadership (e.g. how leaders have to conform to particular societal codes) and in others it may note how leadership influences place (e.g. the part that leaders play in shaping organisations and subordinates). Whilst we are reluctant to concretely define the concept of 'place' in relation to leadership, there are some broad strokes we can draw at this stage and would encourage those interested to submit work centered around the following questions:

What is place? What aspects of it are important to consider for leadership practice?

- ***Geographical place.*** Scholars interested in 'Wordly Leadership' (see, for example, Turnbull et al., 2011) have long spoken about the importance of considering national culture and context on leadership practice, noting that for too long leadership studies has assumed a predominantly Western slant. Rather, geographical place bears influence over possibilities and constraints for doing leadership and gives rise to a diverse range of forms and understandings.
- ***Societal values & beliefs.*** Leading on from the former point, within issues of geographical location come the associated values, beliefs and ethical assumptions. Indeed, if we view these as inherently socially constructed, it seems clear that there can be no overarching way of defining what 'good' leadership is constituted by. Rather, we must develop approaches that acknowledge the importance of local constructs (Western and Garcia, 2018).
- ***Organisational culture and space.*** Moving beyond the macro level, consideration must also be paid to the organisational environments in which leadership happens. In what ways do leaders influence culture (Schein, 1992)? In what ways are they influenced by existing cultures? What influence does the layout of space have on the day-to-day experience of doing leadership? (Ropo and Salovaara, 2018).
- ***Structure, power & politics.*** The imagined structure of organisations and enmeshed power relations also constitute a part of place (Hartley, 2011). Attention must therefore be paid to existing social relationships, roles and responsibilities, hierarchical assumptions and reporting relationships. Indeed, all of these aspects influence how effective certain styles of leadership may be. Do more autocratic styles of leadership work better in highly centralised organisations, compared with more fluid approaches in flatter groups? Does the structure of an organisation change with different forms of leadership, or vice versa?
- ***Historical developments.*** Leadership styles, types and leader-follower relationships are also determined by history. Human beings cannot separate themselves from the 'baggage' of experience, and from this perspective we might note that deeply enmeshed relationships have positive or adverse effects on future leadership possibilities (Carroll et al., 2018, Ospina and Foldy, 2009). Here then, we may focus on issues of time and identity, not just considering what we wish future leadership to look like, but how we may learn from present and past practices.

- *Discourse and language.* Given the socially constructed nature of leadership, local language, discourse and narratives play a central role in shaping and legitimising particular understandings and approaches. The linguistic turn has important insights to offer into the nature of and possibilities for place-based leadership and the inter-relation between leadership, language and context (Fairhurst, 2009, Schedlitzki et al., 2017).

How might we go about researching place and leadership practice?

With this in mind, attention must also be paid to the methodologies employed for investigating leadership. Indeed, if we are to welcome the notion of place, then we must (re)consider how leadership is studied. To date the most common method continues to be the questionnaire and survey (Bryman, 2004), and whilst interviews are increasing in popularity we argue that further steps can be taken to understand the complexity of leadership practice, including but not limited to: ethnography; collaborative inquiry / action research; historiography; narrative inquiry; sensory methods. Headway is being made with this recently, with Sutherland (2018) arguing for deep participant observation as a way of understanding organisational discourses and leadership work, and Shortt and Warren (2019) promoting creative and visual methods to capture the day-to-day experiences of organisational actors. Whilst these approaches vary considerably in philosophy, style and outcome, all allow for deeper appreciation of the interrelationship between myriad concepts of place and leadership. This stands in stark contrast with a more traditional approach of simply examining *one* piece of the puzzle: an individual leader and their personality.

What are the benefits of including place on the leadership research agenda?

In addition to reflecting on the place of place in leadership research, and the ways in which it may be studied, we also encourage thoughts on the various opportunities and potentialities that a place-based approach to leadership can bring. For example:

- That it allows us to move away from the wild goose chase of mainstream approaches, and rather than seeking to find a 'one best way' of doing leadership that works in any situation, understand that leadership is an inherently context-dependent process that requires a deep appreciation of individual situations.
- This may in turn lend to a greater appreciation for 'alternative' styles of leadership. Indeed, in casting our gaze beyond the conventional singular heroic individual, we may observe that this dominant narrative may become challenged by currently marginalised alternatives. That is, more compassionate, collective and inclusive configurations of leadership may receive more attention and gain traction as actionable and practical alternatives to the ideal-type individual leader.
- A place-based approach can also promote a general appreciation of continual reflection and organisational learning. In situating place as central on the research agenda, we acknowledge that flux is inevitable and situations are in constant transformation. Therefore, a significant part of leadership effectiveness is being able to keep up and respond positively to change. Through accepting reflection and being open to learning, leadership may become more socially responsible and sustainable.
- Finally, a place-based approach could be central in fostering connections between communities. Rather than seeing organisations as separate from their environment, Hambleton (2015) remarks that this perspective can allow leadership to "play a significant role In advancing social justice, promoting care for the environment and bolstering

community empowerment”, challenging the legitimacy of ‘placeless’ leaders who have no vested commitment to the places in which they do business.

We hope that these ideas will spark your own reflections on the deep interconnections between leadership and place and to articulate new and creative approaches to ‘putting leadership in its place’.

For more information please see our [ISLC 2019 Web-site](#) and [Conference Blog](#)

Keynote Speakers

- [Professor Sonia Ospina](#), Professor of Public Management and Policy at the NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, USA
- [Professor Elena Antonacopoulou](#), Professor of Organizational Behaviour at the University of Liverpool Management School, UK
- [Professor Peter Case](#), Professor of Organisation Studies, Bristol Business School, UWE, UK and Professor of Management and Organisation Studies, James Cook University, Australia

Other highlights

There will be a conference dinner in central Bristol on the night of 16th December to which all delegates are invited.

Following the conference delegates will be invited to submit their work for a special issue of the international peer-reviewed journal [Leadership](#) on the conference theme of ‘Putting leadership in its place’.

Additional activities and opportunities will be confirmed nearer the time.

Submissions

Whilst we encourage submissions linked to the conference theme we will also welcome abstracts on any theme linked to research on leadership and allied fields.

Submissions to the conference should be in the form of a 750-word (excluding references) abstract and should be forwarded to the conference organisers **from 1st June to 1st September 2019** at blc@uwe.ac.uk. The conference committee will consider abstracts as and when they are submitted and a decision communicated to authors soon after submission.

All submissions should include on the cover page:

- Title
- Name of author(s)
- Organisation affiliation/position(s)
- Address
- E-mail address

The submissions should be:

- A word or PDF file
- Written in English
- Indicating word count clearly on cover page

Conference fees

- **Early bird rate** (inc. conference dinner) by 30th September 2019 - £295 per person
- **Standard registration** (inc. conference dinner) from 1st October 2019 - £345 per person
- **Student fee** (subject to availability) - £245 per person

Please note: conference fees do not include accommodation which should be arranged separately by conference attendees. Links to local accommodation can be found on the conference website above.

Key conference information

Conference Organisers:

The conference is organised by the following team at [Bristol Leadership and Change Centre](#) at UWE, Bristol

- [Dr Gareth Edwards](#)
- [Dr Neil Sutherland](#)
- [Dr Doris Schedlitzki](#)
- [Professor Richard Bolden](#)
- [Josie Englishby](#)

For general queries about the conference please email bhc@uwe.ac.uk.

For specific advice on your submission please contact Dr Gareth Edwards at Gareth3.edwards@uwe.ac.uk.

Conference Venue:

Bristol Business School
University of the West of England
Frenchay Campus
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol
BS16 1QY
United Kingdom

Please see the [UWE website](#) for information on how to get here and a [map of Frenchay campus](#).

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