

Leadership across boundaries

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by

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Introduction

In this contribution to the panel and the EURA conference, we approach the challenges of improving living conditions in localities from the perspective of collaborative working at city or neighbourhood level. We see the rise of collaboration and partnership working as an expression of a desire to improve how localities are governed. Robin Hambleton in his paper yesterday outlined three approaches to municipal reform. Here we are interested in the third – collaborative working, and in the challenge this way of working presents for local leaders.

Collaborative working in local governance has been on the increase for more than a decade. These arrangements create particular challenges for leadership in relation to leadership capacities requiring a shift away from traditional understandings of how leadership is exercised (Sullivan & Williams 2008). All boundary-crossing collaborative action requires new forms of leadership from those found within single organisational structures. Yet a report from the OECD (2001) suggests there is a problem with public service leadership in many countries, and a lack of dedication to underlying public service values and the interests of citizens. Similarly, a report on leadership from the UK Government's Performance Improvement Unit (PIU) (Cabinet Office, 2001) started with the assumption that good leadership is too scarce in the public sector. Despite the rise in partnership working, there has been curiously little attention paid to the importance of third sector leadership within these arrangements.

Working within uncertain, complex and rapidly changing circumstances adds considerably to the challenges facing those in leadership roles. In addition, the new governance structures are emerging in situated contexts of state, market and civil society relationships which influence the expectations and requirements of leadership as do the particular dispositions of individual actors who take up leadership roles. Each context will generate particular leadership issues, and third sector actors face different degrees of power differentials in new governance settings. Leaders from the traditionally separate realms of politics, public sector management and 'community' must find new ways of engaging across these boundaries.

In section 1 we briefly discuss the shift from government to governance and the challenges for local leadership. We draw on Robin Hambleton's conceptual model for

civic leadership and on Gaventa and Cornwall's work on participation and power to argue that leadership for sustainable, people-centred and place-based development needs to work across the boundaries between the managerial, political and community realms of local leadership. This means listening to non-elite 'leaders', working in collaborative, empowering and facilitative ways which signifies a culture change for all involved. In section 2 we review some of the literature on public sector leadership in governance and draw out some key aspects of collaborative leadership. In section 3, we draw on our recent research into the experience of *third sector* leaders in collaborative settings, in England and Wales. We identify the key challenges they encounter, and the particular challenges of working 'at the boundaries'. In section 4, we return to our empirical research to draw out characteristics of third sector leaders who are effective in collaborative settings. We conclude with some recommendations for models of leadership that are appropriate for working across boundaries between the civic, managerial and political realms.

New governance: expectations and possibilities

The growing involvement of non-governmental actors in local governance is an increasingly global trend. Opinions differ however on the potential of these collaborative arrangements for enhancing the democratic process. In the global 'North', governance is understood as a response to complexity and 'wicked' problems that cannot be solved by government or market alone (Rhodes, 1997; Stoker, 1997). It is hoped too that governance will address the challenge of the 'democratic deficit' evident in both old and newer democracies both North and South, by bringing citizens into the political process.

Through collaborative working, governance is expected to produce a deeper understanding of complex problems and contexts and consequently more creative mutually owned and better attuned responses (Wilkinson and Applebee, 1999).

Governance is a means to generate shared understandings and common objectives through information sharing and improved communication, a better understanding of stakeholder contributions, mutual learning and, through dialogue and risk-taking, discover new approaches (Maddock and Morgan, 1997).

Civic leadership

Hambleton (2009) contributes to the debate on local governance with his model of civic leadership. Here he argues that place-based leadership can emanate from any of the three realms of managerial, political and community leadership. The ‘civic driven change’ initiative developed at the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague similarly argues that change in societies stems from citizens rather than states and markets, and that development models should promote civic leadership in all aspects of society¹.

Hambleton goes on to argue that innovative ideas that can bring about sustainable positive change in the locality are likely to emerge through a conversation or series of conversations *between* these realms of leadership in the spaces of overlap. Similarly, Gaventa’s work on power and participation identifies the potential for transformation in the ‘interstices of power’ between state and civil society (Gaventa 2004). Leach and Scoones, in their analysis of citizenship and social movements (2007, p15), argue for a more complex and integrative vision of development which connects people through their ‘practised engagement’ of working towards common goals: this collapses the formal boundaries between the realms of civic leadership. Further, it provides an alternative to formal channels of legitimacy and accountability that can be built through practice and social solidarities. To adopt Leach and Scoones’ language, we are arguing that civic leadership requires working across the conventional boundaries and building new solidarities as actors come together to find sustainable and equitable solutions to local problems. These relationships will often be unstable and emergent, but it is through these relationships that new ideas – innovation – can take place.

¹ For further information: www.iss.nl/cdc

**Figure 4. Civic leadership
- a conceptual framework**



From Hambleton et al, 2009

Gaventa's work on power and participation is a useful complement to this figure, as his work highlights the different dimensions of power that are at work within collaborative or participatory spaces. Local governance processes bring people together from different backgrounds with different amounts of social, political and economic capital. They come together within a locality to have conversations which they hope can bring about greater equity in terms of access to services and resources, social justice and democracy.

However, such conversations may be difficult to sustain. In an age of increasing complexity, leadership in governance settings must negotiate competing drives from government and the community, diverse agendas and uneven commitment. Indeed, partnership working is more likely to be employed where the problems to be addressed are complex and the solution is unclear. Third sector leaders may in theory have equal authority in a governance space and arrive with expectations of their role from their community. However, once engaged they are often inhibited in their exercise of community leadership by underlying power inequalities. It may be that public sector partners are not comfortable with or don't understand the nature of shared leadership; the agenda is often set by public sector partners and third sector participants can be made to feel marginalized; key decisions may not be made in the collaborative setting.

The challenge in the context of the debate about leadership in this paper is: how might we promote these conversations *across the boundaries*, and what are the ingredients for

collaborative leadership from the community realm which can best facilitate dialogue despite these issues of exclusion, inequalities of power and institutionalisation?

This paper draws on research² that explored the opportunities and experience of governance from the perspective of non-governmental organisations in four countries: Bulgaria, Nicaragua, England and Wales³. Third sector organisations were the main unit of analysis in this study, and we gathered data on their experiences of participating in generic cross-sector collaborative spaces such as municipal strategic partnerships (LSPs), thematic groups (e.g. municipal health councils) and generic neighbourhood partnerships. We carried out semi-structured interviews and inquiry groups with up to six people in each organisation, over up to three meetings. We also interviewed local state and non-state stakeholders in each site. Each governance setting involved some or all of the following actors: public sector officers, public sector front line workers, local elected councillors, TSO managers, and community activists. In this paper we report on the England and Wales cases, but draw on insights from other countries.

Public sector leadership and governance

The literature on leadership and governance is predominantly about leaders in the public sector. In this section, we review some of this literature to identify key aspects of collaborative leadership that may also apply to the community realm.

A number of writers have previously recognised the impact of new forms of governance on traditional concepts of leadership (Sullivan et al, 2009, Sullivan & Williams 2007, Hartley, 2003; Broussine and Miller, 2002). This reflects the recent process of reflection and development within the leadership literature (Rost, 2008, pp. 94-9), and the search for models of leadership that meet the challenge of collaborative working (Pugh et al. 1997, Burns 1978). Improved leadership has also been identified as a significant underpinning of public service modernization and improvement in the UK (Hartley and Allison, 2000).

² The UK Economic and Social Research Council as part of its Non-Governmental Public Actors Programme funded the research. RES-155-25-0058.

³ While both England and Wales are part of the UK, the newly devolved arrangements in the UK gave the opportunity for further comparison.

Sullivan and Williams (2007) review the work of scholars of leadership, and note that the requirements of leadership in new forms of governance contrast sharply with more traditional forms of leadership. Following Luke (1998), they find the demands on leadership in non-hierarchical settings to be significantly different from traditional modes:

Figure 1: Contrasts between Traditional and Collaborative Styles of Leadership (based on Luke, 1998, cited in Sullivan and Williams, 2007)

TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP	COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP
Hierarchical	Non-hierarchical and inter-organisational
Evokes followership	Evokes collaboration and concerted action
Takes charge; seizes the reins of an organisation	Provides the necessary catalyst or spark for action
Takes responsibility for moving followers in certain directions	Takes responsibility for convening stakeholders and facilitates agreements for collective action
Heroic; provides the right answers	Facilitative; asks the right questions
Has a stake in a particular solution or strategy	Has a stake in getting to agreed-upon outcomes but encourages divergent ways to reach them

Luke (1998) illustrates the key differences between traditional forms of leadership and collaborative leadership (Figure 3) and argues that:

These popular approaches often prescribe a set of skills that help executives to pursue organizational excellence, take charge, stimulate extraordinary performance by employees, or change an organization’s internal culture by being transformational. However, because these approaches are fundamentally based on hierarchical authority, they cannot be transferred easily to the interconnected and non-hierarchical contexts of public problems” (Luke, 1998:2)

While traditional models of organisational leadership may help to make organisations more performance and customer-oriented they are inadequate when addressing

boundary-spanning public issues in a context of fragmented authority. Sullivan & Williams (2007) argue that partnerships tend to deal with complex problems that have no identifiable cause or solution. Within traditional models leadership is conceived predominantly as, first, the attribute of an individual person or role, and second, as a 'top-down' process. But while the role of individual leaders in shaping events is clear, the 'lionization' of the individual assumes that she or he has pre-eminent capacity and power (Hartley and Allison, 2000:36; Hartley, 2002). What is strikingly different about collaborative working is the absence of an authorised role that can be both the basis of leadership claims and a defence against leadership challenge. Where no 'one' is in charge, 'dispersed' or 'distributed' forms of leadership are put forward as more appropriate in collaborative settings, rather than concentrated in the single 'heroic' leader (Spillane, 2004; Bolden, 2008).

Chrislip and Larson (1994) use the term 'collaborative leadership' to describe a form of leadership that they consider is necessary to be effective in contexts where public policy issues are complex and ambiguous and where particular efforts are needed to negotiate a 'broader good' amongst competing local interests. Sullivan et al (2009) trace the emerging body of literature on collaborative leadership. Such an approach draws on notions of dispersed or distributed leadership, where collective leadership means that expertise and knowledge are dispersed amongst a range of professionals and agencies; where much activity takes place in groups and teams; and where mutual learning, shared understandings and inter-personal relationships are paramount. In these accounts, the values of interdependence, connectivity, and the empowerment of others are emphasised.

Slater (2005) however sounds a note of caution, observing that there is an important emotional dimension of collaborative leadership. She argues that, far from being a peaceful rational process, it is: 'fraught with discomfort, ambiguity and uncertainty'. Slater concludes with the view that 'collaboration requires leaders to develop a new compendium of skills and adapt new "mind-sets" and "ways of being"' (331-2, cited in Sullivan et al 2009). Connections between leadership and organisational learning become more important for empowering others within the organisation (Miller, 2004), such as mentoring new leadership within the organisation. In such contexts, Bolden and Kirk

(2007) have argued, 'the majority of leadership acts are most likely to be small and incremental rather than large and transformational'.

Certainly, in partnership settings, positional power is diminished. In the study by Vangen and Huxham, partnership managers (public sector officers) appear to have a significant role in leading the work of collaborations, but while their formal position is at the centre, they are appointed as a *resource* for the collaboration to facilitate its functioning, and not as a member of it. They are therefore strictly required to report to members of the partnership rather than direct them and cannot exert formal positional power to make things happen (Vangen & Huxham, 2003; S63).

Vangen & Huxham (2003) go on to offer some observations of what leadership for collaborative advantage might look like. In their study, they identified two opposing perspectives on leadership in governance. One type of leadership activity they describe as a supportive approach which constitutes 'embracing, empowering, involving and mobilizing', 'in the spirit of collaboration'. The second type of activity they call 'manipulating the collaborative agenda' and 'playing the politics', adding up to a pragmatic leadership role that is not consistent with collaborative working, and which they define as 'collaborative thuggery'. This latter approach describes leaders who impose their understanding of issues, influence the agenda by stealthy behaviour, find out, who is 'worth the bother' and sideline those who are not. Their research identifies 'the need to lead in a facilitative and supportive manner' in governance settings, yet 'this in itself is not sufficient to generate collaborative advantage' (p.S72) They conclude that the essence of the enactment of leadership for collaborative advantage 'would appear to involve the ability to lead contingently in the spirit of collaboration whilst simultaneously drawing on "collaborative thuggery"'(p73) – i.e. holding the tension between the two approaches and able to operate from both and switch between where appropriate.

Others consider leadership in governance from the perspective of observed behaviours (leadership styles). Hambleton et al (2001) drew on style perspectives to develop a three-fold typology of leadership styles in partnerships – designed and focused, implied and fragmented, and emergent and formative. They argue that these styles are influenced primarily by the policy environment, partnership arrangements, personal characteristics and relationship with followers. Hambleton (2007) defines collaborative leadership as

‘shaping emotions and behaviour to achieve common goals’, resonating with Slater’s observations. And in his paper for this conference he notes that leaders working collaboratively will engage in a wide range of activities aimed at generating both new insights and new ways of working together. This mode of leadership prizes respect for the feelings and attitudes of others as well as a strong commitment to collaboration.

Challenges for third sector leadership in new governance spaces

The literature discussed thus far has focused on the challenges of leadership for public sector leaders – political and managerial. But many of the tensions and dilemmas identified by Vangen and Huxham are also experienced by third sector managers. In governance settings, leaders from the traditionally separate realms of politics, public sector management and ‘community’ must find new ways of engaging with each other across these boundaries. Third sector actors in particular must find ways to engage collaboratively in situations of differential power. This will in many cases involve a balancing act to achieve collaboration without the neutering or depoliticisation of their broader agenda.

There are additional challenges for third sector leaders in new governance spaces. Their experience is often that, despite the rhetoric of partnership, they continue to be marginalised, excluded, or ignored (Taylor 2003). To take up a leadership role in what can be an intimidating context in which the actor feels uncomfortable or unwelcome immediately presents a further challenge. Typically, conflict arises over the organisation and processes of governance and especially over issues of legitimacy, accountability and representativeness. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that all partners operate in complex local environments and are subject to external pressures. There is often a very strong steer from central government that demands that partnership budgets are ring-fenced and tied to specific objectives. Representatives from different agencies will prioritise their own performance targets or push for compliance with agency-specific models of quality assurance. Community leadership will try to represent what may be dispersed, diverse and competing community voices.

Based on interviews with third sector leaders who are engaged in collaborative working, we can identify three key barriers to collaborative leadership from their perspective:

i) lack of understanding in public sector

In our research, we have identified a generalised problem experienced by third sector leaders, which is that their public sector counterparts sometimes lack understanding about how collaborative working means taking a different approach to planning and delivering local services. This requires less directive control and authority, listening skills and an awareness that partnership working is about the co-construction of ideas to deal with local issues.

‘...they see too much in terms of the surface structures of the way things are and trying to resolve engagement conundrums through simply kind of setting up different bureaucracies really, rather than understanding how it all works and coming up with solutions that work with just the messiness of it really rather than trying to make it all fit neatly with one another.’ (TSL⁴, English site)

I think it is that thing about getting through cultural barriers of the way that they’ve always done things, putting themselves in a position of listening and putting themselves in a position of not feeling that making a concession is about giving away ground if you see what I mean. (TSL, English site).

ii) marginalisation of community leaders

As well as dealing with the lack of skills and awareness amongst the political and managerial leadership involved in collaborative settings, for third sector leaders there is the enduring problem of unequal power relations which can in extreme cases render their participation meaningless. There is often a statutory lead organisation which carries a particular role as convenor or chair of a particular collaborative space. Third sector leaders need to manage this tension between the aspired to horizontal relationship and shared/dispersed leadership, and the reality which may be more traditionally hierarchical. This is further entrenched by the need for some delegates in the space to refer any decision back to senior management in their organisation rather than practice clear, transparent collective transactions within the space.

Collaborative has the nuance of being equal and cooperative, and actually collaborative spaces aren’t always cooperative and they aren’t always equal. In

⁴ Third Sector Leader

fact I'd say none of them are equal because of the discrepancies between size, capacity, contracts and so forth. So there is no equal arena. (TSL, English site)

I mean I'm constantly confronted by the fact that I have the ability and the power to say something at a meeting but if actually decisions end up being taken elsewhere, I'm not in those quarters, I'm not in the Local Authority. (TSL, Welsh site)

In other (rarer) cases, a third sector organisation may convene the partnership, and come up against the problem that they do not have the authority to require their partners to carry out actions agreed in the partnership:

A good partnership relies on good infrastructure and unfortunately you can't put it into place after the event. Nobody's going to turn round and say, "Oh yes, let's commit ourselves to something when we don't have to". And the fundamental issue within the Centre was that there was no partnership agreement. Not a proper one and when people turned round and said, "well I don't want to do that" - how do you force them to? (TSL, English site)

iii) Institutionalisation

A third significant challenge for third sector leaders in collaborative settings is to maintain their legitimacy, which is often understood to be that they represent local constituency views, either on a geographical or issue basis. As partnership has become institutionalised in the UK, it has demanded more and more of the TSOs that participate in it. Partners are critical of the 'usual suspects' and seeing the same faces around the table, but as community participation becomes a requirement and governance spaces proliferate, public sector partners increasingly rely on professionalised intermediaries as channels for community voice. In theory, the state wants to engage 'real people'. In reality they tend to be impatient with those who do not know how to 'play the game'. One person in our Welsh case study site spoke about feeling that she had been subjected to 'a lynch mob' when statutory partners in the partnership didn't like the criticism she had tabled on behalf of a local resident. Unable to represent her constituency views, she left the partnership.

In both the English and Welsh sites, we encountered TSOs that were also partnerships or governance spaces. In the Welsh site, a loose grouping of community organisations that had been working together under a previous community regeneration programme had set itself up as a community development trust. The partnership manager who had been seconded from the local authority, continued to be employed and accountable to the council, but now also became the chief executive of the Trust. He therefore now holds the posts of both public sector manager AND a third sector leader, and is accountable in both directions. While in some ways this is simply a device whereby an initiative can gain development trust status and seek its own funding as a non-profit limited company, in other ways it indicates a shift towards new forms of hybrid third sector organisations which can meld together some of the best aspects from several sectors whilst diminishing some of the well-known drawbacks of each form of sector organisation (see Howard & Taylor, forthcoming). It may be that organisations are moving towards hybridity, but if this is to be the future – and especially in the transition between the world in which we currently operate and this new phenomenon - then the tensions we have described around management and authority, representation, accountability and control are likely to become commonplace. And our research suggests that even on this small scale, the implications of hybridity are often not acknowledged by stakeholders from any sector.

In the light of the particular challenges we have identified for TS leadership in collaborative settings, what makes for effective leadership across boundaries from the third sector?

Effectiveness in collaborative settings

In our research, we looked at key third sector actors in our England and Wales research sites with a view to identifying what it is about their background, their personalities and what they do, which makes them effective leaders in collaborative settings. Are the skills for collaborative leadership innate? Do these skills generated by particular kinds of experience, and can they be nurtured? We judged effectiveness according to several criteria: i) perceptions:- what third sector actors said about their experiences of collaboration, and how they and their organisations were perceived by other stakeholders; ii) membership of a given partnership, their attendance, their assigned role in the partnership and iii) accountability - how they fed back to their constituencies.

A large degree of tact, patience and humanity are necessary for working across the boundaries. Many respondents described taking a ‘drip drip’ approach, or finding ‘many ways of skinning a cat’. Another described collaborative leadership as relating to leaders from other realms as individuals not just as representatives of a sector. This approach is suggestive of Hambleton’s collaborative leadership which shapes emotions and behaviour to achieve common goals (2007):

it’s an approach I take when I meet with a council officer, or I meet with somebody from a different agency, that I’ve seen them as another human being and I try and engage with them on that level ... In the end, what’s good for you is good for me in many ways, and to take that as the starting point and look for those areas of agreement and consensus, rather than seeing that there’s a potential conflict there. (IS Chair of community partnership, Wales).

And it is an approach which is likely to promote a sense of dialogue among equals.

However, while patience and tact are important for collaborative leadership across the three realms, we should recall the barriers for third sector leaders – lack of public sector understanding, marginalisation, institutionalisation. To be heard and yet to work effectively across boundaries is a particular challenge for leaders in the community realm. We can identify three key characteristics amongst the third sector leaders in our research which set them apart as effective at working across boundaries:

Courage:

Third sector leaders commonly had a strong value base and a passionate belief that inequality and injustice should be challenged. This motivated them to be persistent even when statutory partners were not receptive to their concerns, and to keep focused on the needs of their constituencies.

You can ignore one person, you could probably ignore two, but when you’ve got seven people all saying the same thing, by golly you’d better listen to them.
(community leader, Welsh site)

This value base needed to be accompanied by the confidence to stand up for what they believed in and the language and ability to make their case:

We haven't always succeeded in getting our representatives on groups, so we haven't always won those battles and others we have, but in a lot of cases, it's persistence and building up trust within communities (TSL English site)

Legitimacy:

A second characteristic was that third sector leaders had powerful legitimacy born out by their life experience, both personal and through work (such as living and working in the area, being a service user or member of a particular disadvantaged group). They perceived themselves as legitimate participants in collaborative settings, and were perceived by others in this way:

... when they think of this organisation, they think of XXX, the director. She's been around for many years ... she's hugely well respected, nationally, locally, regionally, because of her life experience. (Local government officer, Welsh site).

The legitimacy of individual TS leaders thus lends authority to their organisational presence in a collaborative setting.

A further source of legitimacy and a resource for collaborative leadership was evident in those leaders who had good networks across sector boundaries and linkages with different constituencies within the third sector. Collaborative partners are motivated to work with third sector leaders are clearly connected to one or more constituencies, or with whom they have informal ties stretching back in time.

I very much believe that you need to have a base, a constituency, a following in order to... if you're going to have any authority in dealing with ...parts of government, because that's... they use that as their argument (TSL, Welsh site)

He'll go to meetings, he may know somebody who he's known fifteen years or twenty years ago. The relationship is still there and if you've got a good relationship with partners, that's half the battle solved (TSL about another TSL, English site)

Skills:

A particular skill that some of the most effective leaders displayed was their political awareness and experience, linked with the degree to which they are/have been involved in local politics.

Yeah and it is, it is the game isn't it. So you do have influence, you can ask difficult questions and all you've got to do is when you're... if you're politically aware in a group, you've got to assess whether asking a really difficult question is going to screw up the alliance for the future, but there are ways and ways of doing that I think. (TSL, Welsh site)

I think experience is very valuable, but I do think you can do a lot... do training for representatives and lay people for things, but the political nous role is very much one that is kind of a way of playing the game and if you don't, and a lot of people in this sector are about being open and honest and saying "Well if I say it like it is, then that ought to be good enough" and of course, it should in an ideal world, but it's just not quite like that is it (TSL, Welsh site)

Two of the third sector leaders are ex-councillors, and come across as the most experienced and confident in working across the boundary between the third sector and the public sector. This experience brings political 'nous' which, as the quote above illustrates, brings with it the ability to 'play the politics' – a version of Vangen & Huxham's collaborative pragmatism.

This lived experience of having worked 'on the other side' is the subject of David Lewis' work on boundary crossers who travel between the third sector and the public sector (Lewis 2008). Lewis finds the 'topic of cross-over', a term which he takes from the Philippines where it is used to describe people who move into government from the third sector, relatively under-researched. Little and Rochester (2003) find that crossovers play a role in mediating issues between government policy and the third sector, but are unable to influence the agenda itself. Lewis' own work identifies greater complexity and contingency in the movement of people between the third and public sectors. He found that some respondents did not identify with sector at all: the boundaries we draw between state and the third sector should not be too rigid as they are after all, ideas not

fixed realities (Lewis, 2008:574). Evers (1995) conceptualisation of the 'third sector' as an intermediate area or 'tension field' is helpful in this sense, as it lends a sense of fluidity and temporality to the term. In this logic, third sector actors adopt hybrid roles and identities which are constructed by interaction between state, market and household.

In our own research, we find that third sector 'boundary crossers' do indeed develop 'hybrid' or 'hyphenated' professional identities in the 'in-between spaces' (Benmayor and Skotnes 1994, cited in Lewis 2008) or in the 'interstices of power' (Gaventa 2004) in which new perspectives can be articulated. In Wales, an ex-councillor is a key player in the third sector with enough clout to be invited to chair inter-sectoral partnerships. A local government officer seconded to run a community partnership becomes the executive director when the partnership takes on third sector status. In England, the ex deputy leader of the city council becomes a community development worker for a TSO. Unlike Lewis' examples, these individuals have moved from the state to the third sector, or in some cases continue to straddle both. They maintain their informal links and networks, and bring to collaborative settings their knowledge of working 'on the other side', and a strong commitment to working with both sides to contribute to broader goals, rather than trying to find how to best advance one's own interests. They express this diversely as 'playing the politics' or simply the ability to see things from others' perspectives:

It's little things, that's what sometimes experience teaches you doesn't it. It's ... you have to think yourself in somebody else's shoes and I think that's a big issue that we ought to teach people about partnership. We really do have to be able to not see it like they see it, but put yourself where they are and think about what you're saying and the way you're saying it (TSL, Wales)

In sum, while generic public sector collaborative leadership skills are important for third sector leaders, what we find is critical is the skills, courage and constituency support to work in the zones of overlap between the realms of political, managerial and community leadership. The risks are greater, the tensions and uncertainties are more intense, but it is where the effective leaders are working together to develop new linkages and practices.

Conclusion

Our brief review of the literature on collaborative leadership identified that in collaborative settings, positional power is diminished, and ambiguity and complexity of roles, problems and potential solutions are common. The literature focuses on challenges for public sector leadership, and identifies the appropriate enactment of leadership to be dispersed, and on the one hand empowering and involving and on the other pragmatic and politically aware. We have found that these are also characteristics of 'effective' third sector leaders. Third sector leaders face slightly different challenges of unequal power relations and the threat that institutionalisation poses to their legitimacy as autonomous and representative non-governmental actors. Effective collaborative working for third sector leadership therefore requires the courage to embrace ambiguity as an opportunity for innovation. It requires the legitimacy built up over time with partners and constituencies that creates trust and allows leaders to take the risk of working in the 'zone of overlap'. Finally, a number of key third sector leaders have gained valuable learning and skills from previous 'cross-over' working in a different 'realm' of leadership which builds political and social understanding and solidarities.

Can our observations of third sector leadership provide lessons for the public sector? Third sector leaders may be better at handling ambiguity and uncertainty, because of the often highly ambiguous and hybrid nature of the sector (or 'tension field' as Evers aptly calls it). In practical terms, there are some obvious pointers in this research about how to build skills for collaborative leadership across the three realms. Within organisations, mentoring and apprenticeships build dispersed leadership capacities. For cross-sector working, capacity-building programmes can bring actors from the three realms together in learning processes. Ideally, this learning could be embedded through action research and systemic approaches. Finally, exchange/secondment programmes could encourage movement between local government and the third sector. We have seen that experience of local government has brought significant benefits to third sector leaders. It follows that secondments for local political and managerial leadership to gain experience of working in the third sector could also bring benefits and stimulate more and better cross-boundary working.

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