

# 1. Understanding Public Leadership: An Introduction

Paul 't Hart and John Uhr

## Aims of this book

'Leadership' often gets talked about in the world of politics and the public sphere at large. It is routinely admired, vilified, ridiculed, invoked, trivialised, explained and speculated about in media discourse and in everyday conversation. Yet, despite all this talk, there is surprisingly little consensus about how to answer some of the basic questions, for example, about the nature, place, role and impact of leadership in contemporary society. The idea of this project is to bring together academics from a broad array of social science disciplines in Australia and its near abroad who are interested in, and are contributing to, our understanding of (civic, political, bureaucratic) leadership in the public domain in Australia and beyond. We want to take stock of what we know and explore what we need to know about public leadership. In particular we want to explore — and put into a broader international perspective — the Australian 'state of the art' with regard to several key questions in the leadership perspective on social and political processes:

- Public leadership as an *object of study*: How do we know 'leadership' when we see it in different contexts? How we can conceptualise and study (public) leadership in a systematic fashion from the perspective of various social science disciplines and theories? What key questions ought to be addressed, what key insights have been obtained so far with regard to these questions, and which theories and methods have been employed to obtain them, and what research challenges lie ahead?
- Leadership as a *democratic design issue*: How can the three main forms of public leadership discerned here — civic, political, bureaucratic — be exercised, institutionalised and constrained in democratic polities? How do these various spheres of public leadership intersect, reinforce and/or conflict with one another and how can the 'creative tension' between them best be governed and utilised?
- Leadership as a *solution and a problem*: Pleas for 'more', 'better', 'genuine', 'transformational', 'authentic' or otherwise socially desirable public leadership are often heard in many different areas of politics and government. But what do people mean when they say that? How realistic are these pleas? Who should heed them? For example, what leadership philosophies and practices are able to accommodate the twin challenges of innovation and

conservation of public institutions, policies and values in an epoch of pervasive, yet complex, socio-technological changes and creeping crises? The widely perceived ‘hollowing out’ of classic nation state-centric politics under the twin forces of globalisation and individualisation implies that public leadership roles, such as agenda-setting and coalition-building, are increasingly being played by new, more fluid and boundary-less entities such as new social movements, think tanks, international government organisations and transnational alliances. What does this mean for the democratic accountability and legitimacy we have come to expect from those whose ideas and actions govern our lives?

In the discussion that follows, we first demarcate the key phenomenon of interest: public leadership. We distinguish between political, administrative and civic spheres in which public leadership is exercised. Each of these spheres entails a number of specific leadership challenges awaiting holders of public offices as well as others aspiring to exercise leadership in the public sphere. Then we briefly survey different academic approaches to studying public leadership, identifying their general thrust and highlighting some key international as well as contributors to each. We conclude by asking some general questions about public leadership in Australia and beyond that we hope will stimulate further reflection as readers attend to the debates and discussion shaped by the contributors to this book.

## **The nature of public leadership**

Aristotle is said to have originated the dictum that we want a government of laws not men. And, to an important extent, that is what we have got — the established democracies in particular. Yet men can never be factored out of the equation of governing. In fact, many contemporary commentators in Westminster style democracies such as Australia claim to observe an increasing ‘personalisation’ of politics (usually deemed due to the decline of ideologies, parties and the rise of television), or an increasing concentration of what once was dispersed and/or collegially shared power in the office of a single individual, for example, the head of government (Poguntke and Webb 2005).

People matter in governance, and some people matter a lot more than others. Perhaps because of this, the bulk of studies of public leadership are essentially studies of the lives and/or particular characteristics and behaviours of individuals occupying high public offices. These studies are part of a much broader effort to identify, describe, understand and evaluate the behaviour of elites — the few who exercise power and influence over the many. Elites can be studied in many different ways — by interviewing them, by ploughing through their speeches and writings, by administering surveys to them, by looking at their CVs and collating and comparing their demographic, social and professional

characteristics, or by observing them up close as much as possible (cf. Rhodes, 't Hart and Noordegraaf 2007).

Yet while essential to our present endeavour, studying leadership by looking at individuals in positions of power is not sufficient for our purposes. We want to understand *leadership*, which is a particular set of activities and interactions that people in position and power as well as other people engage in. Moreover, we want to explore the nature of a specific, self-conscious interest in *public* leadership as something distinctive, not as some derivative of corporate leadership, nor narrowed down to executive political leadership.

In order to do so, public leadership is conceptualised here in terms of a number of distinctive functions that need to be performed in order for a polity to govern itself effectively and democratically, but which are not performed spontaneously by a polity's public institutions, organisations and routines. Crucial though they are, institutions, organisations and routines constitute but a skeleton of the body politic. It is the people living in and with them that provide the flesh and the spirit that bring it to life. The answer to the classic question of 'who governs?' cannot be: 'nobody' — and not just for logical reasons. However elaborate and complex the institutional fabric of government is and, however overwhelming the situational pressures and contextual (historical, international, legal) constraints, at the end of the day it is down to individuals and groups taking up the strategic challenges and dilemmas of 'managing the public's business' (Lynn 1981) to give direction to governing. They do so by devising, deliberating, interpreting, challenging and changing the institutional rules and practices of government (and, increasingly, 'governance,' Rhodes 1997), which exist to deal predictably, reliably and efficiently with the much greater number and variety of routine tasks that day-to-day governance entails.

If we accept the general proposition that public leadership evolves as an adaptive response to the non-routine, strategic challenges in a society, we can begin to map out the specific challenges awaiting people whose jobs are primarily located in three constituent (and admittedly overlapping) spheres of public governance: the political, the administrative and the societal.

## Political leadership

Political leadership tends to be exercised around a number of strategic, recurrent challenges facing societies and their governments.

### Us and them: mediating identity, dealing with 'others'.

Leaders of government are also leaders of political parties. In most cases, they are leaders of parties well before they become leaders of government. Political parties perform many functions, one of which is to mobilise social and cultural partialities that support their cause. In this quite fundamental sense, leaders of

governments promote an ‘us and them’ mentality, contrasting their own party against competing political parties. But this creative tension goes far beyond the polite forms of party competition: heads of government frequently define their government, their nation and indeed their society in terms of a set of differences between ‘our world’ and ‘other worlds’, trying to reinforce a sense of national or social identity by marking out differences or contrasts managed by competing leaders.

### **Attention and neglect: defining problems in/out, (re)directing institutional agendas.**

Not only heads of government, but all political leaders are in the business of problem-definition, which is another way of saying that they are also in the business of problem-denial. This mode of leadership is illustrated in the competing postures of political leaders over threats posed by ‘climate change’, some of whom are deep in denial while others are high on fears for the immediate future. Immigration is another good example of a policy area which illustrates the way some leaders frame issues as ‘problems’ requiring ‘solutions’, while other leaders seize on the supposed ‘solutions’ as the real ‘problems’. Another good illustration emerges when we look at a prominent public institution, such as a national public broadcaster, and note the remarkably divergent policy agendas devised as appropriate to the public management of that national broadcaster by competing political leaders. For some, the very existence of the public broadcaster is ‘the problem’, while for other leaders the urgent problem is the threat posed to the broadcaster’s future by its opponents.

### **Stability and change: ‘creative destruction’ of public choices and policies.**

Every aspiring political leader sees opportunities for policy change, even if they are persuaded that it is more fruitful to speak reassuringly of ‘continuity’ than of change. Conservative political leaders have mastered the art of disguising the extent of change that their party or government might be determined to effect. Sometimes conservative leaders are vulnerable to internal criticism from party members that the leadership team has ‘sold out’ the historic mission of the party. So too, many progressive parties and governments have leaders who draw attention away from the discontinuities that they have planned for their political organisation. Internal party squabbles over ‘party policy’ can reflect quite fundamental rifts over the manner and form of change being mobilised by the ruling group. Modernisers do battle with traditionalists, both of whom want change but often in different directions and for very different reasons.

## **Power and responsibility: insuring and embodying public accountability.**

Political leaders are defined by power. At one extreme, there are leaders who so firmly adhere to the power of abstract doctrine that they can never quite embrace the power of mundane politics: in Gough Whitlam's immortal (if puzzling) words about his leadership rivals in the Australian Labor Party: 'only the impotent are pure'. At the other extreme, there are political leaders who embrace populism because that is the sure path to popular support and public power, regardless of what political doctrine to which they might have originally been attracted. In between, political leaders pursue the responsibilities of power with more or less acceptance of the burdens of public accountability. Leadership involves balancing the *responsibilities* of rule with the *accountabilities* of office: seizing the policy initiatives that come with the power of rule while knowing that a variety of public reckonings loom down the electoral track. And, of course, between elections there are plenty of opportunities for various accountability agencies to test, investigate, check, scrutinise or query the trustworthiness of those exercising the responsibilities of power.

## **Crisis and emergency: evoking and containing collective stress.**

If crisis management is considered 'the big test' of leadership, then we should be prepared for the bad news that leaders are crisis-prone (Boin *et al.* 2005). It is not simply the case that 'great leaders' solve or resolve crises; some of the very greatest leaders provoke or at least seek to exploit crises (Boin *et al.* 2008). As Murray Edelman (1977: 43) argued: 'any regime that prides itself on its capacity to manage crises will find crises to manage'. Political leaders of the 'strong' type thrive in emergency conditions, as we have witnessed in the career of John Howard who sensed the enduring political value of yet another public crisis, including the self-proclaimed 'national emergency' in the Northern Territory and the crisis of national conscience associated with the unfinished business of the constitutional preamble. But they can also be destroyed by them, for example, Anthony Eden and the Suez crisis, Jimmy Carter and the hostage crisis and, less grandly, Malcolm Fraser and the economic crisis of the early eighties.

## **Administrative leadership**

The most characteristic dilemma that senior public administrators ('bureaucrats') face is that of having to serve (their political masters, the democratic process, and the 'citizens as clients') and being expected to lead (namely big and complex public organisations) at the same time. In the American tradition in particular, the leadership expectations attached to senior administrative positions are strongly emphasised, and in part embedded in the Constitution. In other places — such as France and to some extent Germany — a remarkable degree of officially sanctioned 'hybridity' between political and administrative leadership

roles and cadres exists. In the Westminster system, official doctrine almost exclusively, and sometimes quite narrowly, emphasises the ‘servant’ aspect of administrative roles (‘the government of the day’), but the realities of modern governance are such that senior department and agency officials cannot help but also be exercising leadership — leaving them more vulnerable than their US counterparts to charges of being ‘unresponsive’. Distinctive challenges of administrative leadership include the following:

### **Serving the government and the democratic process.**

Classic civil bureaucracy derives from earlier military bureaucracy: a machine of state designed to carry out orders when managing and protecting political territory. Democracy is a late entry into this story, as we see in Max Weber’s (1922) account of civil bureaucracy with its emphasis on the military precision of hierarchy and order, files and records. Administrative bureaucracy is consistent with democracy but it is not itself modelled on democracy: bureaucratic impartiality respects the political partiality of the government and, in its Weberian rendition, bureaucracy places its own hierarchical leadership at the service of the government. Or is it simply (but ominously) ‘government’, in the sense of ‘the state’ as distinct from the governing party? Following Eden (1983), we can interpret Woodrow Wilson’s (1887) approach to this problem as a complement to Weber’s approach by attempting to show how the public service can be democratic but not, in and of itself, political. What Wilson saw as ‘the merit system’ allowed the public service to look to its own internal leadership on issues of public administration but defer to political leadership on issues of public policy: the so-called separation of policy and administration. Having no legitimate power over the determination of policy, the public service leads the execution or implementation of government policy. Wilson (and remarkably few other theorists) attempted to ‘constitutionalise’ bureaucracy not by defining away its discretionary powers but by framing these considerable leadership powers in terms of business-like or entrepreneurial policy implementation: with tensions over responsibilities and accountabilities that we live with even to this day (Rohr 1978).

### **Crafting, sustaining and adapting public organisations.**

Public servants manage public organisations. Managerialism is a doctrine that holds that the art of management has its own distinctive practices and values. When applied to public organisations, managerialism suggests that public servants have a set of distinctive managerial responsibilities that supplement the policy responsibilities of political officials. Below we will say more about the art of ‘public management’ that has overtaken the traditional art of public administration, but in this section we note an intermediate form of managerial organisation that attracted a leadership seal of approval from the likes of Philip

Selznick (1957). This intermediate form emerges historically later than the original validation of public service in the accounts of Weber and Wilson, and our reference to Selznick should be enough to suggest that mid-twentieth century experiments in quasi-autonomous public corporations like the Tennessee Valley Authority, the vast US public utility studied by Selznick, or the US Forest Service studied by Herbert Kaufman (1981). Of course, the public officials managing these valuable public enterprises exercised, writ large as it were, the family of administrative crafts also exercised in more modest profile by their bureaucratic cousins in the core public service. But the advantage of noting the scale of managerial mastery delegated by politicians to public managers in public corporations ('statutory authorities' in Australian parlance) is that we see all those business-like skills predicted by Wilson on public display by the original generation of public entrepreneurs, exercising leadership over the management of very large public assets placed by politicians in public trust beyond the immediate political interference of elected officials (Terry 1995).

### **Making government work: delivering public value.**

Harvard scholar Mark Moore (1995) is credited with the slogan 'Creating Public Value' as a descriptor of the type of public leadership exercised by administrative officials. The emphasis in Moore's account is on the creative element, which can be seen as the contemporary restatement of the delegated discretionary power so valued by Wilson a century earlier. What is new in Moore's account is the explicit recognition that those who 'implement' the law have a legitimate role in shaping and forming the policy that supposedly informs the law. Even where the officials have had very limited input into the formal policy being authorised and implemented, they have substantial control over *how* the policy will be implemented, and that discretionary capacity over the mechanisms of implementation marks out the legitimate expectation of officials that they will 'create public value' out of the often incomprehensible, sometimes incoherent public law that is handed to them. Of special importance in Moore's framework is stakeholder negotiation: the many ways that public servants can lead the implementation process through their management of who gets to be heard when policy is translated into administrative practice. Crafting consultation is the name of this leadership game: and Moore has his gallery of exemplary public negotiators who can bring public legitimacy to policy implementation by exercising the sort of leadership that can be wielded through adept processes for public hearings. Environmental Protection Authorities at their best often illustrate these processes. There is robust debate on how applicable this interpretation of public service leadership is in Westminster settings (Rhodes and Wanna 2007; Alford 2008)

## Civic leadership

The third sphere of public leadership focuses on actors/roles outside the governmental system. Most studies of political/public leadership ignore this sphere altogether, which is a gross omission since societal leadership is quite often what animates innovation, controversy and change in politics. It will be argued that societal leadership comes to life in explicit relation, and in opposition, to the power of governmental elites (Kane 2001). Three key leadership challenges on the societal side include:

### Monitoring and evaluating politics/bureaucracy: the watchdog role.

Many interest groups act as watchdogs over government. What tends to be distinctive of the civil society role is the use of publicity as leverage over government. Many of the established commercial and policy interests prefer to operate 'behind closed doors' where they can try to extract concessions from governing authorities. They share with watchdogs the potential to bite, but they tend not to share the potential to bark. It is more the mark of civil society watchdogs that their public bark *is* their bite: such organisations contribute to public leadership by drawing public attention to the strengths or weaknesses of government action. These organisations also demand that politicians pay close attention to the electoral support that such organisations can mobilise for or against them. Public interest groups can do a lot to generate their own publicity but, ultimately, they are dependent on the power of the mass media to carry their message. So, the leadership available to public interest organisations comes down to the power over opinion formation: using publicity to shape and manage elite or public opinion in ways that support their cause.

### Challenging and exhorting politics/bureaucracy: the advocate role.

Watchdogs are typically defensive, barking when they sense a threat to what is their own. But civil society organisations are often far more proactive, barking also when they sense that others might be awakened to help form a useful public coalition to generate a desired response from a cautious government or public authority. By definition, advocacy involves the use of 'voice', often to push the interests of quite vulnerable or marginal groups. Advocacy refers to many forms of policy leadership, only a few of which need have any public display or notice. That is, the voice exercised by effective advocacy groups need not be a voice heard in public. Many governments or public authorities will prefer to listen to external advocates in private 'behind closed doors'. This preference for secrecy is itself evidence of the power of those advocacy groups to get the ear of ruling powers and often rests on prior campaigns indicating the clear potential for wider public mobilisation of the sort feared by ruling authorities. But a common



element on all effective advocacy by external groups is the threat of public leadership through the exercise of ‘moral authority’, typically involving the ‘moral capital’ (Kane 2001) — credibility and public trustworthiness — of the institution, organisation, or indeed the person (think of the recent spate of celebrity advocates such as Bono) engaged in advocacy.

### **Circumventing and replacing politics: the self-government role.**

Civil society organisations have unusual capacity for ‘forum-shopping’: if they do not like the deal they are getting from government, then they tend to go in search of another government! This mode of authority-escalation occurs even in local or state levels of government, where effective social interests can circumvent a junior official and seek out the chief administrator or chief minister who has power to override the decisions of the officer or minister duly-authorised to manage the policy or issue in question. But this process does not stop there. At the national level, similar organisations can even bypass the national government and seek to enlist the aid of a relevant international authority, as Australian indigenous groups have done by entreating United Nations authorities to override Australian governments from time to time. At one level, this process is simply a form of ‘forum-shopping’, as when civil society interests move up the chain of public authority from local to national to international, seeking favourable treatment from any authority prepared to hear their case. But at another level, this same attitude can give rise to protests of autonomy and self-ownership, as when professional, or for that matter, religious (or confessional) groups contend that they are self-regulating and beyond the reach of governmental action and are prepared to ‘lead from within’.

In our view, public leadership is what breathes life into the institutions that inhabit and constitute the world of Australian public governance: parliament and cabinet, state and federal levels, the courts, government departments and agencies, the Reserve Bank, the mass media, foreign governments, non-government organisations and international government organisations, and so on. These institutions run our lives, but leadership is involved in the (re)design, birth and termination of these institutions, critical choices that get made by them, and the policies they promulgate. Opportunities to exercise such leadership are vested particularly in the holders of certain pivotal public offices. *Inside government*, the key offices and their holders are readily discernible: they include heads of state, heads of government, leaders of parliamentary political parties, heads of the judiciary, and the top layers of the civil service. *Outside government*, the term office is less of a reliable torchlight, but it is clear that public leadership can be exercised by chief executives of non-government organisations, major corporations, social movements, organised interest groups, churches, trade unions — in short, key figures in ‘civil society’ who care about and/or have a clear stake in the course and outcomes of the political process,

and whose formal or de facto position provides them with a following, a broad audience, and/or some degree of public authority to speak and act on behalf of significant segments of society. Note that this includes actors who, legally or technically, are commonly defined as ‘private sector,’ such as executives of firms, artists or journalists.

Given that they all act in the public sphere aiming to address social problems and public policy issues, there are more commonalities between politicians, senior bureaucrats and societal leaders than there are differences. Let us now examine the tools which we might use to examine public leadership.

## **Understanding public leadership: analytical perspectives**

### **Leader-centred approaches**

The bulk of publications about leadership worldwide comes from proponents of a leader-centred approach to leadership analysis most common in applied psychology, management studies, and — although in rather different guise — the field of history and (psycho)biography. Leaving the vast and rapidly expanding number of prescriptive, exhortative ‘how-to’ studies of (business) leadership aside, in the more empirical leader-centred studies, leadership is simply equated with whatever it is that people in high positions do: how they perceive the world and their role in it, and how they choose to use the latter to elaborate the former. Leadership is thus explained by looking at the personal characteristics and life histories of the individuals involved. The main source of variation and dispute in the field is: which characteristics and which parts of their histories? The number of leader-centred explanatory variables thrown up by decades of fundamental and applied research is quite staggering: personality traits, cognitive abilities/style, early childhood experiences, birth order, inner motivational drives, personal value systems, mental stability, interpersonal style, rhetorical skills, early career experiences, crucial mentor relationships and so on (Kellerman 1984; Blondel 1987; Ludwig 2002).

In the interdisciplinary field of political psychology, the behaviour of political office-holders has been described, compared, and explained with reference to psychological theories of personality and leadership style. Famous if controversial examples of this tradition include Harold D. Lasswell’s (1930) and James David Barber’s (1972) typologies of political leaders and leadership styles and Dean Simonton’s (1987) work on explaining and predicting presidential ‘greatness’. More recently, respected political psychologists such as Margaret Hermann (1980) and Jerrold Post (2003) have presented more empirically grounded clusters of personality traits which are said to be the basic components of a politician’s leadership style, whereas Fred Greenstein (2003) has induced six key components of presidential leadership style that may explain the performance of different holders of that office. In Australia, various scholars associated with the so-called

Melbourne School of political psychology — notably A. F. Davies, Graham Little, James Walter and Judith Brett have produced innovative and internationally (if not locally) recognised typological and psychobiographic studies of Australian as well as foreign political leaders (cf. Brett 1997; 2007; Walter and 't Hart, forthcoming). Likewise in both Australia (cf. Arkley, Wanna and Nethercote 2006) and New Zealand (Clarke 1997; 2001; 2003; 2004; Gustafson 1986; 2000; 2007) there is a sustained interest in and pursuit of (auto)biography of political and to a lesser extent administrative and civic leaders.

## Relational approaches

Secondly, from sociology and social psychology, a core contribution to leadership analysis lies in the idea that leadership is really, first of all, in the eye of the beholder, for example, those that 'follow' (comply with, believe in, support) leaders. Understanding public leadership thus requires a switch of the analytical lens away from the preoccupation with the leaders themselves and towards the nexus (the 'bond', the 'contract') between followers and leader, and, within that, the emphasis being more on the former than the latter. *The relational approach* — of which Max Weber's typology of authority and James McGregor Burns's (1978) distinction between transactional and transformational leadership form classic and enduringly relevant examples — is highly relevant to understand key forms of civic leadership such as social movement leaders. But it also goes deep within the executive branch of government to shed light on the nature of the vital yet delicate 'pact' that may or may not exist between political and administrative office-holders at any given time (Peters 1988). It is a much more productive way of understanding the special case of 'charismatic leadership' than any leader-centred approach can possibly be (cf. Tucker 1978; Bryman 1992).

If anything, the relational perspective shows that 'followers' in many cases do much more than just that. Followers are not mere 'sheep': they, in fact, often quite deliberately observe, weigh, test, choose and, indeed, 'deselect' leaders — thus determining the fate of leaders as much as leaders determine theirs. From this perspective, leadership, like any other feature of social life, emerges as a symbolic, negotiated order. When explaining the construction of this order, there is no prima-facie reason to privilege the words and deeds of leaders. In many ways, only those individuals who effectively mediate the ideas and feelings of the group or community they belong to, or seek to lead, will be 'attributed' the kind of authority necessary to lead. Political parties know this situation only too well: party leaders are prisoners of their followers. Patrick Weller has noted this when examining the comparative prominence of cabinet processes in Australian national government (Weller 2007). One reason is that Australian party leaders (Australian Democrats are an exception) are selected by a relatively small group: by their parliamentary colleagues and not, as in so many comparable

nations, by a larger party convention. Australian party leaders can be dumped without notice or even ceremony. Heads of government like to keep cabinets in session as one way of managing their followers: keeping them at close range precisely because the power rests ultimately with the followers who can make and unmake the leaders.

Paradoxically, ruling elites rarely have the luxury of elitism. Elites have to manage relationships with their followers. They also have to manage relations with other competing elites, who can swing followers away from one elite guard to another. There is a long social science tradition of studying political organisations in terms of elite-mass relations. Elites get their reputation as wily rulers not because they take ruling for granted but because they know that their rule can only be sustained through careful organisation of their followers. Higley and Burton illustrate a contemporary version of this long tradition going back to Michels and Pareto examining the ways that competing elites manage both the vertical lines of support within their camp and the horizontal lines of opposition between competing camps (Higley and Burton 2006). Social structures matter: class, religion, region, ethnicity all influence the social composition of elite-follower relationships.

## Institutional approaches

Thirdly, the institutional approach to public leadership analysis owes much to the fields of political science and public administration. Sets of rules and conventions are designed in every polity to somehow resolve the tension between democracy's need for holding the power of public officials in check and efficiency's need for strong executive and professional leadership at the heart of government. Different polities resolve that trade-off in different ways (and may change their ways of doing so in response to traumatic experiences, such as breakdown, crisis and war). They thus harbour different systems (structures and cultures) of public leadership. John Uhr's (2005a) work on the so-called 'lattice of leadership' (the institutionalised dispersal of leadership roles and opportunities throughout the political system) looks at the features of the institutionalised nature of the offices political and administrative leaders hold, and the formal and informal rules for acquiring, consolidating and losing public office and the authority that comes with it (Elgie 1995; Elcock 2001). Such an approach is clearly complementary to the two previous ones. It helps us understand, for example, similarities in leadership behaviour and leadership relations (for example ways of managing cabinet) of ostensibly rather different political personalities occupying the same office over time. It also documents how changes in the rules of office give rise to new patterns of behaviour in office-holders (cf. Weller 1985; Rose 2001; 2007). Examples include the move from parliamentary to presidential government in France in the fifties, and the oft-observed changes in senior civil servant behaviour (from 'mandarins' to

'managers') following the introduction of fixed-term contracts, output steering and performance pay in various countries (Weller 2001).

## Contextual approaches

Fourthly, contextual approaches to understanding public leadership look at the role of situational and temporal factors. Leadership is often exercised most visibly and decisively at certain critical junctures ('occasions', 'crises' etc.). Political systems, with their routines and rhythms, typically throw up such occasions in patterned ways (electoral cycles, political business cycles), as do the ups and downs of national economies and fiscal positions. In addition, unscheduled events such as disasters, scandals, and so on, create the proverbial 'windows of opportunity' for 'policy entrepreneurs' inside and outside government to do business and exercise leadership, and at the same time may place severe, stress-inducing performance pressures on key office-holders (Holsti 1972; Janis 1989). Reading these various 'signs of the times' and acting upon them proactively, therefore, becomes an important leadership challenge. A key example of such a contextual approach is Stephen Skowronek's (1993) study of presidential leadership in the United States, which systematically uses a theory of political time to map out the leadership possibilities and constraints facing every holder of the US presidency since Adams, and to thus explain their success and failure from the (mis)match between this contextual opportunity structure and the individual's role conceptions and political stances.

## Performative approaches

Leaders are actors. They need an audience. Some favour niche audiences tailored to their 'off-Broadway' versions of localised leadership. Others favour global audiences for their mission to mobilise transnational followers. Most operate in-between, playing to a national audience in a public theatre showcasing leaders' talent to appeal to audiences interested in issues of civic identity, sovereignty and national purpose. Carnes Lord's (2003) *The Modern Prince* is subtitled 'what leaders need to know': the chapter on communication traces the critical analysis of the stagecraft of public leadership back to Greece, taking Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as the most convenient point of analytical entry.

Uhr's *Terms of Trust* attempts to apply a similar framework of rhetorical analysis to Australian public leadership (Uhr 2005a: 65-78). Uhr draws on recent US scholarship on 'the rhetorical presidency' which investigates the careful and deliberate way that US national political leaders, like all good actors, manage through their mouths. This is echoed in the suggestive title of but one revealing US study: *Deeds done in words: presidential rhetoric and the genres of governance* (Campbell and Jamieson 1990). Despite considerable scepticism about rhetorical ruses (see for example, Edwards 1996), scholarship marches on. One of the latest publications deals with the hard reality of US economic policy: Wood's *The*

*Politics of Economic Leadership* which is subtitled: 'the causes and consequences of presidential rhetoric' (Wood 2007).

Researchers' interests in the 'cunning' of public speech matches public interest in the 'craft' of 'great public speeches'. This popular interest in 'great public speeches' is an important clue to the rhetorical construction of leadership. Leaders themselves frame their leadership in words addressed to followers, in a carefully orchestrated display of 'follow the *leider*' (apology for the pun). As with so many theatrical displays, the words alone do not tell the whole story: much depends on the setting, the scene, the show itself, including the body language of gesture and suggestion, often conveyed by silence as much as by explicit statement. Leaders have many tools at their disposal, many of which are forms of power and persuasion that are deployed only 'behind closed doors' out of public view. But one of the most valuable of their persuasive tools is their tongue, especially when used to provide a sustaining narrative to reassure followers that all are on the right path and heading in the right direction. This performative capacity does not have to come across in Oscar-winning polished routines: indeed, for all his lack of stage glamour, John Howard is a good working model of the effective public leader who knows the importance of his every word in holding his audience. In common with his predecessors Menzies, Whitlam, Hawke and Keating, he knows that his most important 'leider-script' is about the nature of citizenship, of Australian civic rights and responsibilities and of the place of Australia in a global world (cf. Uhr 2002).

## Ethical approaches

Finally, there is the *ethical approach* to understanding public leadership. This asks the question if public leaders should, and can afford to, observe ethical standards, if not codes of conduct. This is an old question, harking back to Greek political philosophy and forever highlighted by the work of Niccolo Machiavelli. In this Machiavellian spirit, Lord Acton famously observed that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, adding in the next line that 'great men are always bad men'. If that is the case, leadership in a democracy such as Australia becomes inherently problematic.

The primary task here is not to overlay a framework of ethics on top of leadership practice, as though we could clamp down on unethical leadership. Instead it is to try to reveal the ethical orientation of leaders themselves, to try as best we can to understand what leaders understand by 'the ethics of leadership'. Uhr suggests that Australian political leaders see their own role as inscribers of a civic ethic conveyed in the 'terms of trust' that leaders devise as a sort of contract between citizens and their political representatives (Uhr 2005a). In this approach, ethics emerge as an important element in the order of mutual obligation devised by political leaders who compete for the subscription and support of followers. Leaders are thus prepared to be judged according to the public estimate of their

trustworthiness, which is among the most important of the ethical qualities requiring their constant political management.

As ever, Weber caught much of the meaning of this political management of ethics in his evocation of the calling or profession of politics (Weber 1994). Even democratic political leaders appreciate the value of excusing themselves from the ethical order properly accepted by their followers, and the value of abiding by a separate ethical order Weber termed 'the ethic of responsibility'. Under this leadership ethic, power holders put themselves forward for public judgment free from any constraint of traditional ethics of what Weber calls 'absolute conviction' or pure intention. The ethic of leadership responsibility is something of a call to arms: leaders do 'whatever it takes' in the knowledge that, if they have their way through their chosen terms of trust, they will be judged by the results of their rule, and not by their compliance with 'the rules' of any legal or ethical order. Call this a form of 'results-oriented ethics' if you want to place it in the content of new public management, where compliance with traditional rules of process is down-valued in favour of getting on with the job and delivering results.

Much of the recent surge in writing about political leadership is explicitly and self-consciously (neo-)Machiavellian (for example, Lord 2003; Keohane 2005), whilst at the same time there is a strand that is explicitly advocating moral fibre, public integrity and active responsibility as hallmarks of true leadership (Hargrove 1998; Dobel 1998; Uhr, 2005b). Clearly, there is a debate here that needs to be waged. The nature and terms of the debate vary markedly when it comes to political, bureaucratic and civic leadership. The tensions identified by Weber apply more generally: across the leadership scene, leaders manage the competing interests of the absolutist ethics of 'clean hands' and the relativist ethics of 'dirty hands'. There are many variations of these competing ethical obligations. Weber himself paints an image of decisive political leadership against a background of very dark and threatening colours: 'decisionism' becomes a privileged feature of this model of opaque leadership. Partly in response, Wilson changes the colours to convey a more democratic image of transparent leadership, working the system of dispersed constitutional powers by enlisting all the distinctive powers of what later scholars came to call 'the rhetorical presidency'.

A more measured version of this dialectic emerges in the classic Friedrich-Finer debate over democratic leadership, with Friedrich identifying the compelling ethic of executive leadership exercised by political and bureaucratic officials, and Finer defending the traditional ethic of legislative supremacy to rein in the leadership pretensions of 'big government' (Rosenthal 1990). This old debate continues to play out in contemporary governance where we see two opposed clusters of public ethics: one following the path of Friedrich in promoting the value of discretionary powers exercised by executive officials; and another

rallying around the barricades erected by Finer to protect the rule of law from executive officials no longer overawed by traditional obligations of due process. The initiative clearly rests with the Friedrich cluster which sees leadership in terms of taking personal, as well as official, responsibility for public decision-making. The Finer cluster is more reactive but also, in some ways, more dutiful. They too have their distinctive take on leadership which they see in terms of an ethic of public accountability with duties to account to elected representatives for the manner, as well as the results of, the exercise of delegated public power (Uhr 2005a).

### **Australian public leadership in comparative perspective**

Finally, a few questions about important unknowns in the Australian scene. What really is distinctive about the Australian setting of public leadership? Are there characteristic forms of leadership cultivated in Australia and not elsewhere? Do Australian leaders employ a particular range of leadership repertoires, or a particular blend of leadership strategies? How does the underlying political economy of Australia support some types of leadership and curb other types of leadership? Is Australia any different from other nations in its mix of institutional and individual leadership properties, and is our focus too biased in favour of 'great individuals' and blind to the greater role of institutions and social forces?

If institutions trump individuals, which institutions really matter? One place to begin an Australian audit is with the formal constitutional setting which is one of surprisingly dispersed leadership. The federal division of power between national, state and territory levels of government means that even the most powerful of the heads of government has to share many powers with competing heads of government. Similar divisions disperse public service leadership. Thus, there is no one governmental supreme. But even at the national level, there is a corresponding dispersal of powers: the separation of powers across the three formal branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial. Further, within the first or legislative branch, powers and hence potential leadership are distributed between the two houses of parliament. The 'lattice of leadership' (Uhr 2005a: 78-81) is alive and well, with a great many opportunities for a great many public leaders to contribute to, or try to undermine, co-ordinated national leadership. It is unrealistic to expect anything like 'joined-up' or consolidated or even cohesive public leadership. The governmental system blends elements of Westminster and Washington into a 'Washminster' mix, so that it is also unrealistic to expect Australian public leadership to match that of the UK or the USA, or any other prevailing model (Thompson 1981). It might be that this formal constitutional setting is compatible with more recent practices of 'networked governance', so that the public leadership from across Australian federalism can be seen as a valuable international case study of networked leadership.



The Australian polity has its own 'regime values' associated with public office and public trust. Leaders ply their trades in a particular social setting where, or so we are told, the grain runs against 'tall poppies'. Australia might stand out as a distinctively anti-leader society. But even if true, this distinction does not necessarily mean that Australia is anti-leadership. Australian social values might locate leadership in unusual social spaces: think for example of how often the leadership of the Australian cricket team is described (often by prime ministers) as 'the second most important job in the country'. The facts about contemporary Australian social values are difficult to establish: is Australia as democratic as many of its early investigators thought or even feared; or is there a particular mode of elitism favoured in Australia that is compatible with popular acceptance of an egalitarian self-image, one perhaps floated by the very elites who exercise so much power behind the scenes? We really do need much more cross-national comparative analysis of Australian social values and what we here call 'regime values'.

And what about emerging modes of public leadership exhibited by younger Australians that break out of conventional institutional forms? Why focus so unrelentingly on the ways of the past when, for all we know, the ways of the future might expect different things from leadership: rewarding and punishing leaders according to a quite different scale of public honour? It is not all a matter of new social values, it is also a matter of new communications media. How will informational technologies transform tomorrow's landscape of leadership? This note of the unknown future is probably a good note on which to end this Introduction and turn the discussion over to the experts who have their own views about what really matters in the field of public leadership.

## **This volume**

We will resist the temptation to preview each of the many individual chapters that follow. The authors can speak for themselves. Each chapter is relatively brief and accessible. It is important to note, however, that we have grouped the chapters purposefully in five parts. Part I 'Democracy and Public Leadership' tackles what is, perhaps, the central problem of public leadership analysis: the awkward place that 'leadership' takes in the wider fabric of democratic theory and practice. Three chapters explore the reasons behind this awkwardness, describe the *modus vivendi* that various theorists have tried to construct between the two, and signal trends in leadership thought and practice that challenge conventional wisdoms. All three chapters offer original takes on how to reconcile the need for leadership in politics with the equally deeply felt need to prevent leader dominance and dictatorship.

Part II 'Understanding Public Leadership: Emergent Approaches' consists of chapters that seek to make a contribution to leadership analysis. They do so in different ways, for example, by raising new questions for leadership research;

reviewing and/or challenging existing analytical traditions; and proposing and illustrating new frameworks and theories. This section highlights, in particular, the multi-disciplinary nature of leadership analysis, as it ties together contributions from an historian, a cognitive psychologist, a group of social psychologists, a student of business leaders and a political theorist working in the rational choice tradition.

Part III ‘Spheres of Public Leadership Practices’ contains empirical chapters that each move away from the often dominant preoccupation with political leadership. Taken together they display the ‘lattice’ of leadership at work, showcasing leadership in the public service, the police, the national security establishment, Indigenous communities, and the mass media. All of these chapters take a self-consciously critical and reflective approach to these various spheres of public leadership. Each of them asks if the key protagonists are up to the specific demands and dilemmas of leading in that particular sector.

Parts IV and V take us to the political science core of leadership analysis: trying to describe, understand, compare and assess the behaviour of senior political office-holders such as party leaders, prime ministers and premiers, as it takes shape in the nexus between individuals, institutional settings, cultural traditions and key issues of the day. In part IV the spotlight is on Australian political leadership, and in part V on political leadership in New Zealand, the latter following on from the recent Miller and Mintrom (2006) volume. In many ways, it is the combination of (and particularly the contrasts between) these two bundles of national practices chapters that cast light on the different sets of opportunities and constraints that both political systems offer to their senior political office-holders. Australian federalism and New Zealand’s move to Mixed-member Proportional Representation in particular are key forces rendering generalised talk about ‘Antipodean political leadership’ rather useless.

In sum, this volume gives us a rich picture of current ways of understanding public leadership by scholars living and working in this part of the world. But much of what is being said here does not pertain exclusively to the two countries at all. Hopefully, therefore, this volume will find its way not just to Australians and New Zealanders studying or practicing leadership but also to leadership scholars and practitioners far beyond these shores.

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