5 Leadership as a collective process

Chapter aims

- ☐ Introduce and critically discuss concepts of collectivistic leadership
- ☐ Explore the differences and similarities in terminology and the problems that creates
- ☐ Critically discuss the use of shared leadership in planned events and event tourism
- ☐ Introduce and critically examine the concept of team leadership
- ☐ Examine the role of social identity theory in leadership
- ☐ Focus on leadership as an enabling action: industry insight from Eamonn Hunt of VeryCreative.

Leadership as a collectivistic process

As we have seen in the previous chapters of this book, one of the criticisms of a large section of leadership studies is that they still mostly focus on the role of those in formal leadership positions. The majority of leadership scholars still tend to study leadership from the perspective of the formal leaders, and with the preconception that leadership stems from a single source. This perspective is referred to as an entity-led perspective – viewing leadership through the lens of the behaviour of one person. By taking this entity-led perspective, leadership studies are still very narrow in focus. However, some scholars have begun to recognise the limitations of 'heroic' or entity-led leadership studies and have instead turned their focus from leadership as something a leader does, towards conceptualising leadership as an influence process (Langley & Tsoukas, 2017; Northouse, 2017).

Some scholars working in this area have developed an understanding that leadership does not necessarily just reside in the nominated 'leader' but in fact may be enacted by multiple individuals, who work in both informal and formal leadership positions. They therefore offer a broad view of leadership, which sees leadership as a process. This means that leadership can be shared, distributed or collectively completed. This new perspective has resulted in yet another significant paradigm shift for leadership studies, which has seen the growth in studies that view leadership as a collectivistic process (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Badaracco, 2001; Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner et al., 2010).

Various terms have been used to describe these forms of leadership, including collectivistic, shared, distributed, team, dispersed (e.g. Friedrich, Griffith & Mumford, 2016; Pearce, Conger & Locke, 2007; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Yammarino et al., 2012). There are clear differences in most of these terms, but they all share the same emphasis on relationships and on the process of constructing leadership through the collective. The key difference is perhaps described as differing levels of dispersedness (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2018), each of which will be described in the sections below.

There is, however, conceptual crossover in these perspectives. These can be summarised as:

♦ They all tend to identify leadership as a social or relational process that emerges from interactions with multiple individuals, and resides in the network of relationships that exist in work groups.

♦ They recognise leadership wherever it occurs – it is not restricted to a single or small set of leaders but is a dynamic system, in which multiple individuals can carry out leadership activities and functions through collective behaviours, and influence both relationships and social processe).

♦ They largely agree that leadership activities can change over time and that they are also dependent on the larger context in which leadership is embedded.

The rise of collective leadership perspectives

At the core of these new collective leadership perspectives is the view that leadership is a social influence process and as such, organisational teams and individuals are seen as a potential source of leadership, despite having no formal leadership responsibilities. The connection between leadership and teams stems from the changes to the workplace and the increased complexity in the environment in which work is carried out.

For example, some scholars argue that the need to share leadership around an organisation comes from the rapid speed of external changes in technology, operations and strategy that we now see in the workplace. They suggest that organisations must be able to respond quickly to these changes through new job design, increased motivation, management style and rewarded remuneration. In addition, competition has driven organisations to consider new modes of organising and teams have become central to that perspective (Pearce, Manz & Sims, 2009). Organisational structures have therefore evolved to cope with the ambiguity and challenges that change brings, with flatter or networked structures becoming more common (itself a response to the problems with the top-down structures that were common in the past). These flatter structures are useful to organisations because senior leaders may not always have the right information to make decisions and, therefore need to rely on specialised workers who have the knowledge, skills or ability to share the load (Wendt, Euwema & van Emmerik, 2009). However, and given this increased complexity and interconnectedness of work, it has become apparent that individuals are unlikely to have all the skills and behaviours required to effectively perform all the required leadership functions (Northouse, 2017).

In addition, the way in which organisations can now respond to environmental pressures creates a need for changing workplace structures – the speed of which responses are now required, because of the conditions of global integration and competing stakeholder environments (Fitzsimons et al., 2011), means that organisations cannot wait for leadership decisions to be made at the top of the organisation. Instead, the person in charge at any moment is the person with the key knowledge, skills and abilities required for the job in hand – this ensures a faster