

BECOMING A LEADER? A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE LEADERSHIP PRACTICE OF AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTRE ADMINISTRATOR OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN HONG KONG

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This paper presents a narrative inquiry into an English Language Centre Administrator of a higher education institution in Hong Kong, China. The participant of this narrative inquiry, Angel, was invited to take up a new role of the Department of English. Using narrative inquiry as a research method and intersecting the narrative analysis by drawing on Bush's (2010) three dimensions of leadership, the author evaluated Angel's role as an English Language Centre Administrator and made meaning of her perceptions and contested her assumed responsibilities and the responsibilities she has been assuming. Among the three leadership dimensions suggested by Bush – influence, values and vision, it was perceived that from the participant's personal practical experience, the three dimensions were not of equal weighting or did not emerge in a linear sequence. Values and vision may be the driving force of the participant's leadership practice whereas influence may or may not be intentional. It is hoped that the findings will facilitate readers to generate a new understanding of educational leadership, management and administration and gain an insight into the reconceptualisation of leadership. By bringing forth the participant's first-hand accounts, it is also hoped that this paper may have useful implications for those who are taking up a new role of an organisation, be it fledging or well-established, to excel themselves.

Keywords: Narrative inquiry, Educational leadership, Management and administration, Leadership practice, Higher education, Hong Kong

Introduction

There is a growing controversy about the similarities and differences among leadership, management and administration. This paper is a personalised account of an English Language Centre Administrator of the Department of English of a higher education institution who makes meaning of her leadership practice. The paper starts by offering a brief overview of the definitions of leadership, management and administration. Their similarities and differences are compared and contrasted. It is followed by the report of the narrative interviews with the English Language Centre Administrator of a higher education institution. Drawing on Bush's (2010) leadership dimensions, the author examined the participant's leadership practice in relation to her job title and actual job responsibilities and discussed how the participant saw her own position. The paper ends with a discussion on the leadership qualities of the participant and it is hoped that her leadership style can add knowledge and interesting insights into the discussion of leadership, management and administration in higher education.

Leadership vs. management vs. administration

A lot of discussions have been made on the distinctions among leadership, management and administration (Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2010; Bush & Glover, 2003; Yukl, 2010). By means of leadership, Yukl (2010) offers a full list of definitions, of which the following is found to be distinctive: "Leadership is about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which *things* [emphasis added] can be accomplished" (p. 3). According to Yukl, leadership is resonated with the articulation of visions and values; and creating a favourable environment for staff which is conducive to making contributions and progress; and accomplishing personal and organisational goals (things).

Another useful definition offered by Yukl (2010) is: "Leadership is a process of making sense of what people are doing together so that people will understand and be committed" (p. 3). By this definition leadership is taken as people-oriented and related to mobilising people to produce a synergy effect.

Apart from the above, Yukl also emphasises "influence": "Leadership is the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organisation" (Yukl, 2010, p. 3). This definition reflects the importance of influence and change on people, which echoes Spillane's (2006) definition: "Leaders are agents of change ... Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group" (p. 10). Similar contentions that leadership involves influence and change are further substantiated by Bush and Glover (2003). Spillane (2006) added that leadership is taken as a relationship of social influence.

All the above cited definitions are by no means exhaustive. However, there are some common key points – leaders aim at instilling visions and values in organisation, creating an ideal environment, influencing people and initiating change. Management, however, is viewed as a maintenance activity. As stated by Cuban (1988):

“Managing is maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational arrangements. While managing well often exhibits leadership skills, the overall function is toward maintenance rather than change.” (cited in Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 9)

It was suggested that managers are expected of maintaining current situations and putting organisational arrangements in an orderly manner. However, they are not always expected to make changes.

As for administration, it is, in fact, defined as “the work of managing the affairs of an organisation” (Longman English Dictionary Online). By this definition, we realise that administrators, like managers, are expected of managing the present situations in a manageable manner. The cruel fact is that it is seldom given any significance in literature as most authors are concerned about leadership and management, which are believed to be higher-order. Dimmock (1999) gives the following distinctions among the three roles:

“Schools leaders experience difficulty in deciding the balance between higher order tasks designed to improve staff, student and school performance (leadership), routine maintenance of present operations (management) and lower order duties (administration).” (cited in Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 9)

Yukl (2010) made similar claims, he contends that “Managers value stability, order and efficiency, and they are impersonal, risk adverse and focus on short-term results. Leaders value flexibility, innovation, and adaptation; they care about people as well as economic outcomes, and they have a longer term perspective with regard to objectives and strategies” (p. 7). Although the distinctions are rather arbitrary, we can come to see authors’ favouritism towards leadership and their bias against management, not to mention administration.

Based on the above body of literature, the following table showing the differences among the three roles is formulated:

Table 1: Differences between leadership, management and administration

	Leadership	Management	Administration
Status	High	Medium	Low
Accountability	High	Medium	Low
Task requirements	High-order	Medium-order	Low-order
Scope of influence	Wide	Medium	Narrow
Level of change expected	High	Low	Not applicable
People motivation	High	Medium	Not applicable
Responsible domain	Vision Values Quality	Implementation Technical issues	Support

Regarding the similarities, all the three roles involve certain management skills, but at different levels. Bush (2008b) suggests that managers would exhibit leadership skills and administrators demonstrate both management and leadership skills but he has not specified clearly to what extent these skills might be shown.

Rationale for the study

Even though the term “administration” is more common in North America and Australia (Bush, 2010, p. 8), and the upper case “Administration” of a country, especially that of the United States, is its government (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learners English Dictionary), “administration” has not enjoyed much standing. Many authors even explore a paradigm shift from educational administration to educational management, and then to educational leadership (Bolam, 1999; Bush, 2010; Gunter, 2004), implying that administration is pitched at a lowest level and considered to be of lower order than management or leadership. Bush (2010, p. 8) even uses a word “evolve” to show the different levels, of which “administration” connotes a bottom level among the three.

Based on this proclaimed perception, I wanted to explore how an administrator makes meaning of the given and self-ascribed title. I am also curious about whether a person’s leadership practice will be circumscribed by a job title. The research question guiding this narrative inquiry is as follows: How does an administrator make meanings of her leadership practice?

Literature review

Whitchurch (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2010) has contributed a great deal to research into the field of leadership, management and administration in higher education, Whitchurch (2008a) conducted a qualitative study by interviewing 35 senior and middle-level administrators and managers in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. Using a theoretical frame of “soft” and “hard” administration versus “soft” and “hard” management, Whitchurch gained a new understanding into how her participants’ professional identities change through their voices. Whitchurch (2008a) suggests that soft administration points to the one-to-one approach to staff. It emphasises care for the individuals. Hard administration focuses on the system, which is formal, contractual and standard-driven. Soft management, on the other hand, serves the institution. It looks at the broader issues such as policy-making and resource allocation. It allows negotiation and compromise. Hard management, however, is concerned about the market, income generation and competition. Distance between managers and the managed is observed. In another study, Whitchurch (2008b) carried out empirical research into the changing roles and identities of professional staff in higher education in the United Kingdom. The study drew on the narratives of twenty-four interviewees illustrating the shifting identities by means of a conceptual framework in which three categories emerged – bounded, cross-boundary and unbounded professionals. According to Whitchurch (2008b), bounded professionals refer to people who locate themselves within the boundaries of an organisation that they have either constructed for themselves or that have been imposed on them. They act on what have been prescribed. Cross-boundary professionals “actively use boundaries to build strategic advantage and institutional capacity” (p. 377). They are ready to extend their scope of responsibilities and interact with the external environment. Unbounded professionals, however, are those who do not take boundaries into consideration. They take an open-ended and exploratory approach towards broadly-based projects. Whitchurch (2008c) extended the scale of her study by interviewing 54 professional managers in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. Drawing on the framework of bounded professionals, cross-boundary professionals, and unbounded professionals, Whitchurch additionally introduced blended professionals – a blurred boundary

known as the third space between professional and academic domains. These studies are relevant and useful references to me as they offer an insight into how professional identities change according to the lateral movement of staff members, but they have not explained any changes in response to a vertical movement. Indeed, in the course of reviewing this literature, I discovered that the issue of job title in relation to leadership practice in higher education, had been under-researched, hence the originality of my study.

Neary (2014) looked into how the job title has had an impact on people's professional identities in her paper *Professional Identity: What I Call Myself Defines Who I Am*. It was found that for many the use of job title was an important factor in defining who they are professionally. "Those defining themselves through a job title often felt they had a stronger professional identity than those whose job title was perceived to lack clarity" (p. 14). Another factor contributing to professional identity rested with the engagement in continuing professional development. The findings are interesting but would have been more interesting if Neary had presented the discrepancies between the social identity (one's perceptions on their "selves" in relation to others) and the role identity (job title, job nature and responsibilities). I also wanted to understand whether my participant's leadership practice is determined by his job title and therefore Neary's study was useful to me, in spite of the limitations that I identified earlier.

A study conducted by Ylijoki and Ursin (2013) into the construction of academic identities in the changing context of Finnish higher education can be considered to be the closest research to mine. They collected nine narratives of academics and explored how they made sense of the transformations of higher education. Ylijoki and Ursin (2013) divided the nine narratives into three storylines – regressive storyline, stability storyline and progressive storyline. The regressive storyline reports on deterioration of work, while the progressive storyline tells about improvement and movement towards a promising direction. The stability storyline describes a state in between the two opposites. It was reported that the identity constructions embedded in the nine narratives presented in the study include "polarised notions of academic roles, duties, commitments and status" (p. 1147). Ylijoki and Ursin (2013) claimed that being a rebel, a loser or a member of the precariat is totally different from being a winner, or a change agent and the identity constructions as a loser and a winner are "mutually exclusive" (p. 1147). However, I am puzzled by Ylijoki and Ursin's (2013) conclusion:

"Identities are not fixed and stable with clear-cut boundaries, but instead constantly rebuilt, reshaped and renegotiated in social interaction. Not all narrative combinations, however, are available for academics" (p. 1147).

With this understanding, are certain identity constructions really "mutually exclusive" as Ylijoki and Ursin claimed? Besides, if there are no clear-cut boundaries, are there any blurred boundaries, blended-boundaries, or cross-boundaries proposed by Whitchurch? These are the very areas that informed my present narrative inquiry.

In reviewing this body of literature, I noted that there appeared to be an omission in the narrative research on how job title is understood in relation to leadership practice in higher education. My present study thus contributes to the literature, adding to our knowledge of what it means to be self-ascribed and contingent titles in higher education in relation to leadership, management and administration.

The study

Context of study

The study context was an English Language Centre of the Department of English at a self-financed higher education institution in Hong Kong (henceforth the Institution) that offered degree programmes. The Institution's Department of English offers a Bachelor of Arts in English programme and an English Language Teaching (ELT) Unit. The ELT Unit provides a wide range of credit-bearing English courses for the whole Institution, such as General English, Academic English and Business English. In collaboration with the English Language Centre, it also runs non-credit-bearing courses such as English Enhancement Course, English Summer Course and IELTS Preparation Course.

The English Language Centre was established in 2013. It works under the Department of English and runs regular English-related workshops such as grammar workshops and IELTS study groups, activities such as Conversation Cafes and English Lunches. It also holds competitions, for example, Short Story Writing and Dramatic Duologue.

Participant

The participant in this study, Angel (pseudonym), is an English Language Centre Administrator of the Institution under study. Angel joined the Centre at its inception in 2013. At the time of the study, Angel had been taking up the role for five years. In accordance with the Institution's job descriptions provided by Angel, she was responsible for, but not limited to, the following:

1. Administer the English Language Centre;
2. Lead and organise English-related activities, such as competitions, workshops, short courses, consultations and so on;
3. Explore the acquisition of external funding; and
4. Conduct an annual self-evaluation and planning exercise, and provide evidence of quality performance.

Angel was considered an ideal research participant for this study as she is literally in charge of the English Language Centre of a higher education institution. However, the job title conferred to her – English Language Centre Administrator – was, according to what Table 1 indicates, rather basic. This dichotomy has formed a very strong research background for me. I am interested in collecting my participant's practical personal experience and understand how she made meaning of her given and self-ascribed job responsibilities, and whether a job title forms an impact on people's leadership practice.

Methodology

I sought to explore the practical lived experiences of Angel, an English Language Centre Administrator, and to understand how she made meaning of her job responsibilities in relation to her job title and leadership demonstration, if any, and connected these meanings with the social world around her. When

collecting data from Angel, I also sought to gain not only her lived experience but also to observe the study context to collect useful information.

Narrative inquiry was adopted as a research method. Narrative inquiry, nested under qualitative research, is defined as the study of experience as story (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). However, I define narrative inquiry as “the study of experience *through experience* as story” (Yu, 2017, p. 60, original emphasis). “In narrative inquiry, experience, rather than theoretically informed research questions ... tends to be the starting point” (Trahar, 2011, p. 48). This explains why I put strong emphasis on first-hand personal experience but I did not form very explicit research questions at the onset of the paper. Narrative inquiry is usually appropriate when studying a small number of participants, as it allows the researcher to study the participant up close and personal (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003), and pay more attention to subtleties and nuances. This research methodology also enables the researcher to form “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) – sensuous detailing of real-life events occurring in natural settings, portraying in a vivid way so as to leave a strong impact on readers. It also offers the readers a feeling of “verisimilitude” (Webster & Mertova, 2007) and a sense of “being there” (Geertz, 1988). I, however, did not set out this study to make generalisable claims from Angel’s first-hand data.

Data collection

I explained the objectives of the narrative inquiry to Angel face to face. She expressed her interest in the study as she was very excited about the idea that her story would be made known to a wider community. Soon I sent her a formal invitation listing the tentative research title, objectives and details of the interviews. To observe the research ethical issues, Angel was assured that she would be given a pseudonym and some sensitive information would be either removed or masked. She was also informed of my adherence to research ethics. Her anonymity and confidentiality and her freedom to withdraw from the study would be protected throughout and after the research. Angel signed an informed consent form afterwards.

I conducted two formal one-on-one face-to-face interviews with Angel at her workplace with six on-site visits and small talk before and after the interviews. Each interview lasted for around two hours. The interviews were audio-recorded. They were in the form of narrative interviewing. Narrative interviews are unstructured in-depth “open-ended” interviews (Punch, 2014, p. 147) with specific features (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000), seeking “*to understand* rather than *to explain*” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 706, original emphases). The merit of this approach is that it does not impose an “a priori categorisation which might limit the field of inquiry” (Punch, 2014, p. 147). I did not prepare many questions to ask or seek to elicit certain answers. At times, I just listened attentively to Angel’s stories and sought to re-present as many rich and valuable stories as possible.

Data analysis

Riessman’s (2008) dialogic/performance analysis was used to present, or re-present to be more precise, the co-constructed stories. Our dialogue was presented in a conversational format. When conducting dialogic/performance analysis, I played an important role in the interview process and became an active presence in the text. Whilst many researchers claim to be objective, I honoured my own subjectivity in this narrative inquiry.

Data analysis is carried out by drawing on Bush's (2010) three dimensions of leadership to evaluate Angel's role as an English Language Centre Administrator and the corresponding scope of responsibilities in relation to her given and self-ascribed job title and examine whether she complied with the central elements of leadership. Bush's definitions on leadership are in accord with the ones I wrote in the first part of this paper, and also substantiated by many authors such as Dimmock (1999), Spillane (2006), Yukl (2010), and so on. They are, in short, "Leadership as Influence", "Leadership and Values" and "Leadership and Vision". In the following section, I will discuss them one by one.

Findings

Leadership as influence

As contended by Bush (2008a, 2008b, 2010) and supported by Cuban (1988) and Yukl (2010), leadership involves a social influence but devoid of authority whereby the influence process is intentional and it may be exercised by groups as well as individuals. When examining Angel's work, she was in line with some aspects of the above notions.

Angel: It was in April when I was interviewed ... signed the contract in May ... I remembered in June when I was working on my Ph.D. thesis ... I was invited to be the ELC Administrator ... I would be responsible for the ELC ... I know the Centre was just open in March ... I asked myself, "Do they want me to run the Centre? Do I have this duty?"

To Angel, she was not looking at the literal meaning of the title, or perhaps the official job responsibilities stated on the contract, but the perceived responsibilities she was going to take on. In accordance with Bush (2008b), the central concept of leadership is "*influence* rather than *authority*" (p. 277, original emphases). Bush believes that although both influence and authority are dimensions of power, authority is concerned with formal positions whereas influence can be exercised by anyone in an organisation. Bush further explains that "leadership is independent of positional authority while management is linked directly to it" (p. 277). Bush's interpretations may not be widely accepted, but it echoed Angel's perceptions in terms of her job position:

Angel: I have not thought about what meaning the title has brought about ... I have not thought about authority ... I only thought that I should be responsible for a new Centre ... later I realised that I should also be responsible for staff deployment ... I should make the Centre as successful as possible ...

When Angel was told to be the Centre Administrator, she was rather confused. She studied the given job descriptions but not sure how much she should do, or if the title or the job responsibilities are major. However, she came to realise that the post was a major position when she received the following response from her doctoral supervisor:

Angel: I told my thesis supervisor about the new job and the title ... my supervisor then said "I am proud of you"... then at the viva... my supervisor told everybody "My student has found a job... and also take up the ELC Administrator"... another professor at the viva said, "Really? So proud of you!" ... I was embarrassed...

If identity is defined as “who am I?”, this interview extract led me to think that identity indeed implicates “who am I in relation to others?” because self and society are inextricably intertwined – “self mirrors society” (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009, p. 389). Angel’s identity is ascertained when her supervisor congratulated her on the new title. Her identity is further enhanced when the new job title is associated with the pride offered by another professor.

Lasky (2005) defined teacher professional identity as “how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others” (p. 901). To Angel, it may mean that her professional identity is defined by her self-ascribed job title and the recognition from others.

In the first departmental meeting, Angel presented her draft ELC framework in front of all the departmental members. The Centre was to support English language learning of the Institution and the work would be revolving around three broad domains – language, cultures and careers. Angel formulated clear vision, mission and goals for the Centre and a long-term plan which fit into the framework. After rounds of deliberations at departmental meetings, the framework was eventually finalised. For quality assurance, she assigned experienced teachers to pair up with new teachers. She conducted visits to workshops to ensure that the workshops are in line with the Centre framework. She also designed the online peer visit form. To Angel, her job duties exceeded regular administration work. At the interview, she confessed that she had not expected to have an influence on staff deployment:

Angel: I remember, after the meeting, a teacher came to ask me what he should do for the Centre. I was confused ... I was thinking why he asked me ... he seems to be more senior than I am ... I didn’t understand why he asked me ... I am still thinking whether I was too high profile as a new member ...

This thought is suggestive of Angel’s internal conflict between her given job title and her self-ascribed responsibilities. It is also a conflict between her awareness of being a new and young member of the Department and her leadership practice as a Centre Administrator.

Leadership and values

In accordance with Bush (2010), “leadership is increasingly linked with values” (p. 6). By values, they can mean personal or professional values, “self-awareness and emotional and moral capability” and “values are asserted, chosen, imposed, or believed” (ibid.). This idea contained much truth when I examined Angel’s existing role.

In the interview with Angel, she repeatedly mentioned that she is serious about her work.

Angel: I am serious about work ... I have been very serious about work since my master’s degree course ... all my course mates were serious about work... they will reprint out the paper even there was a punctuation error ... all people I met were serious...

Angel’s seriousness about work can be exhibited from the way that she took a proactive role as a Centre Administrator. Before she took up the new role, she started to analyse the Centre position in the Department and the Institution and developed a clearly-defined Centre framework to ensure that all the activities fall into the Department and Institution’s long-term plans.

Angel did not only work hard, she also worked smart. Understanding that there is a good mix of staff in the Department, she instilled a sharing culture into the Department.

Angel: Some are go-getters but rather impetuous; some are proactive but pushy; some are creative but seem to work well on their own; some are conservative who always play safe and refuse to go beyond their comfort zone ...

She understood that it will benefit the Department if a channel is provided to draw out their strengths since “collective learning is more than the sum of individual learning” (Leithwood et al., 1999, p.167). In this respect, a “Sharing Session” was always put on the agenda item of the Centre meetings to serve as a platform for professional exchange and to develop a culture of sharing expertise. Good practices were shared and communicated to the teachers. Many teachers remarked that they enjoyed the sharing sessions as they were free to express their ideas no matter how airy-fairy they were and they enjoyed listening to people’s ideas, many of which were intellectually challenging and, most importantly, attainable and feasible. In addition, she particularly honoured initiatives where members were highly encouraged to take risks and try out innovations (Harris, 2008).

A number of initiatives were put forward by Angel, as the engineer of many new projects and events. First and foremost, she submitted the first proposal to the Hong Kong Education Bureau to apply for a language enhancement grant worth Hong Kong \$2 million (equivalent to £200,000), aiming to enhance the facilities of the newly-established English Language Centre and to appoint a full-time Centre Officer to assist in enriching students’ language learning experiences. The first proposal failed to capture funding but failure, however, was taken as “a learning experience” (Yukl, 2010, p. 467). Angel understood that “much of the skill essential for effective leadership is learned from experience rather than from formal training programmes” (ibid.). In the following year, a taskforce was formed and based on the experience gained from the write-up of the first proposal, they improved and enriched the content and wrote a more impressive proposal. The team managed to earn the funding in the second submission.

Angel values initiatives but her approach is practical. She added the following: “I am a serious person... but my approach is down to earth... I don’t insist on change for the sake of change...” She managed to mobilise and motivate her colleagues, and produced a synergy effect within the Centre. Her personal and professional values are vivid, be they “asserted, chosen, imposed, or believed” (Bush, 2010, p. 6). If Bush is right in suggesting that values is an important element for leadership, Angel has exhibited her leadership through the core values she believes.

Leadership and vision

Many authors point to the relationship between leadership and vision (Bush, 2008a, 2010; Harris, 2003; Leithwood, et al., 1999; Yukl, 2010). Though some authors, such as Fullan (2001), are critical of visionary leadership, vision is “increasingly regarded as an essential component of effective leadership” (Bush, 2008a, p. 3). Yukl (2010) gives a thorough idea of vision:

“A clear vision ... helps people understand the purpose, objectives, and priorities of the organisation. It gives the work meaning, serves as a source of self-esteem, and fosters a sense of common purpose ... The vision should be communicated at every opportunity and in a variety of ways.” (Yukl, 2010, p. 289)

The crucial element of vision is that it helps portray “a better future” and more importantly, it links up “past events and present strategies to a vivid image of a better future for the organisation” (Yukl, 2010, p. 310). In this regard, it is important that a clear vision will take people to work according to a longer foreseeable path and timeframe – from the past to the present and then to the future – and the path is made known to all members clearly. At the interview, Angel explained that the vision statement of the English Language Centre has been spelt out as “To be one of the widely-acclaimed English language service centres in Hong Kong and be a centre for self-directed English learning”.

Angel: I wanted to turn the Centre into a self-learning hub... when students think about English self-regulated learning, they think about our Centre...

This vision has been communicated to the departmental members very clearly in almost every meeting. To work towards this vision, the Centre provides self-access learning materials on various learning items. Hard copies are provided at the Centre and online versions are available on the Centre website. The development of massive online open course on grammar practices is in the pipeline. To ensure the services offered are comparable to the ones offered by other universities in Hong Kong, Angel benchmarked against the service natures and scopes of activities in other universities’ English language centres.

Angel did not only articulate vision for the Centre, she also connected the vision of the Centre with the Institution’s vision. The Institution has always put students’ English language proficiency as the prime concern. To further accomplish the broad vision, a new policy on language exit requirement has been in place at the Institution in which students are required to attain at least Band 6 in International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test upon graduation. It is hoped that the new language policy can prove the students’ English language competence to the wider community. Foreseeing a surge in students’ language needs, Angel has started offering an IELTS Preparation Course to students on a non-credit-bearing basis since the Centre inception. The development of the online self-access learning programmes as additional language support is fully in line with this broad vision. The newly-established Help Desk in the English Language Centre is another add-on service to offer face-to-face assistance to students. In addition, she also arranged IELTS training course for new teachers and refresher course for experienced teachers. What is more, an IELTS pre-test has been offered to the students free of charge. Students who take part in it are offered a preliminary band score so that they can have a better understanding about their strengths and weaknesses and better prepare themselves for the IELTS test before graduation. Angel tried not only to articulate an appealing vision, but also to translate the vision into feasible and attainable strategies. Most importantly, the vision is in line with a broader vision spelt out by the Institution.

Discussion

Bush (2010) suggests three dimensions of leadership: leadership as influence, leadership and values, leadership and vision. The three dimensions are the cornerstones of any leadership practice or leader practice (Spillane, 2006). However, Bush has not specified whether the three elements are of equal weighting, or whether which element would come as a prerequisite to others. In this respect, the three dimensions can emerge as follows:

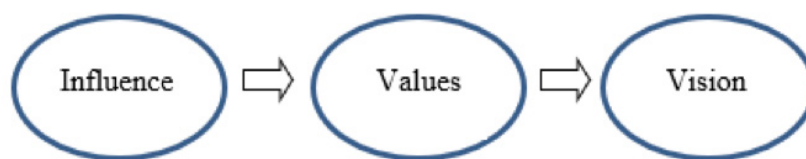


Figure 1. Linear representation of Bush's (2010) three dimensions of leadership.

Since the sequence and the inter-relationship of the three dimensions are not specified by Bush (2010), they could go hand in hand in an inter-connected manner with one element affecting the others as follows:

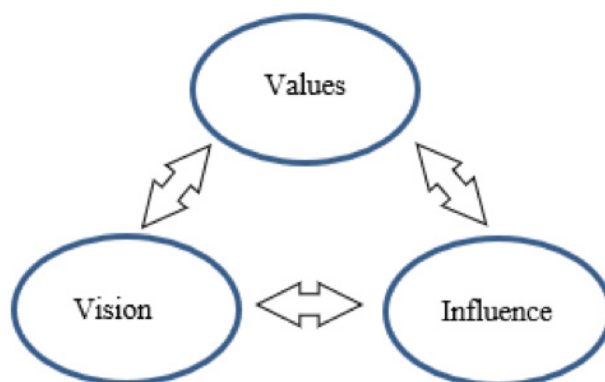


Figure 2. Interconnected representation of Bush's (2010) three dimensions of leadership.

Besides, certain element can appear to be more dominating than others and therefore it engulfs the other elements, as displayed in the following figure:

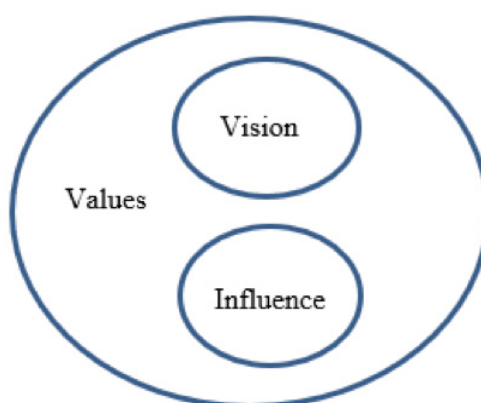


Figure 3. Inclusive representation of Bush's (2010) three dimensions of leadership

In addition, the three elements can also be displayed in a way that certain dimension appears to be an outcome of the team-up of the other two dimensions, which can be displayed in the following representation:

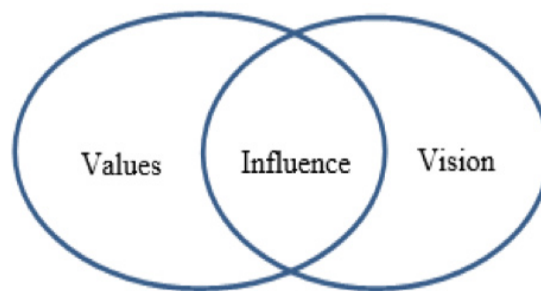


Figure 4. Mutually-inclusive representation of Bush's (2010) three dimensions of leadership.

When examining Angel's role as an English Language Centre Administrator, I started to think that the three dimensions are not in a form of linear line as stated in Figure 1. To Angel, her values, her seriousness about her work, her abiding love of her job, and her unwavering belief in initiatives and risk-taking came first and has become the driving force of her work. She is determined to articulate the core values to all members, gain the collective wisdom of members and form togetherness. Her core values help her move forward towards a big picture – the vision for the Centre – turning the Centre into a self-directed learning hub for English. She wanted to bring the past success of the Centre to a more successful future and to create “a better future” (Yukl, 2010, p. 310). This better-future journey lays a fountain for Angel's work. All the work done for the Centre revolves around the shared values and clearly-defined broad vision. In this case, her leadership practice could be understood by Figure 3 – inclusiveness dimensions.

However, when referring to Bush's (2010) three dimensions of leadership closely, Bush proposed that the influence process is intentional. From the interviews, it was understood that Angel did not set out to influence people in the first place. She was not too eager to influence people, not to mention exercising her authority, if any. She even felt that it was inappropriate to impose her ideas on others. She was confused when an experienced member approached her to ask her for job assignments. She kept on asking herself if she was “too high profile”. The process of influence seemed to come as a natural process, or in Angel's case, as an outcome, when the core values and broad vision are articulated clearly, and above all, agreed upon members. In this regard, contrary to Bush's (2010) notion, the process of influence in Angel's situation is unintentional rather than intentional. Influence may emerge as an outcome of the joint venture of values and vision. It led me to think that Angel's practice could be more appropriately represented by Figure 4 – mutually-inclusiveness dimensions.

Title wise, Angel is an Administrator, but when examining her actual responsibilities, she is literally a leader with leadership practice involving values and vision. The influence on people and/or the Institution may appear as a perk in Angel's practice. We understand that title inflation exists in many organisations, for instance, the current titles Vice-President and President of certain commercial firms were formerly known as Manager or Senior Manager. However, title deflation is practised in Angel's situation. If “leadership is thought of as a behaviour rather than as a role or position in a hierarchy” (Morrison, 2002, p. 72), it is fine to consider what Angel has performed to be “leadership practice” but not “leader practice” (Spillane, 2006, p.14). It is also fair to regard Angel as an administrator with leadership style.

Limitations and further study

The narrative inquiry studied only one participant, Angel, in one higher education institution in Hong Kong. Due to this small number of sample size, I did not seek to make generalisable claims. I did not wish to oversimplify the interplay between factors either. Some factors affecting leadership practice such as personal traits, education background and institutional policies could be taken into account. Future research concerning exploration of leadership styles could be carried out by interviewing the participant's colleagues to gain various perspectives from different parties.

Conclusion

In this paper, a narrative inquiry into an English Language Centre Administrator of a higher education institution in Hong Kong was conducted. The Centre Administrator's assumed responsibilities and the responsibilities she has been assuming were compared and contrasted. By drawing on Bush's (2010) three dimensions, there is evidence to suggest that the participant has displayed leadership in many contexts – she instilled positive values such as a sense of responsibility and a sharing culture into the Department and articulated the Centre vision to members. Consequently, she saw changes and innovations from her; and she saw herself, the departmental members and the Department collectively thrive. She did not only receive orders and execute them, or just maintain the status quo. If Tony Bush was right in saying “Administration should be regarded as a function that supports, not supplants, the educational purposes of the school” (Bush, 2008a, p. 41), the title “Administrator” might not have done my participant justice. In this regard, her actual job responsibilities and her performance are not commensurate with the title and general expectations. Leaders are not all about “what your title is”, but more about “you are who you see you are”.

This paper also explored Bush's three dimensions of leadership through a narrative inquiry into Angel's first-hand accounts as an English Language Centre Administrator. It argued that the three elements may not be of equal weighting or exhibited in a linear sequence, if there is concept of weighting or a sequence in Bush's leadership dimensions. Values and vision may be the driving force of leadership whereas influence may or may not be intentional.

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