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Kuipers, B.S.; Murphy, J.

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Published online: 09 Nov 2023.

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A Multi-Level Leadership Spectrum for Collective Good

Ben S. Kuipers[a] and Joanne Murphy[b]

[a]Leiden Leadership Centre, Leiden University, The Hague, The Netherlands; [b]Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

ABSTRACT

The complexity of today's local and global challenges requires us to look critically at both the concept and the practice of leadership in society, government, business and national and international networks. This article reviews recent critiques of leadership theory and practice and focuses on the significance of purpose as a central concern. It goes on to frame multi-level leadership for the collective good as a spectrum and identifies four angles or approaches of significance. These are defined as the Intra-Organizational angle, the Macro-Meso angle, the Distributed and Shared angle and the System Wide Change angle. The article briefly reviews articles in the special issue *Multi-Level Leadership for Collective Good* and their connections to these approaches and concludes with a future research agenda for further expanding our leadership thinking, research and practice.

MAD statement

Leadership, inherently being multi-level, requires us to understand, study and practice its multi-level nature more profoundly. Moving beyond leader-centric theories to consider leadership both as formal and informal, distributed and shared across organizations and societies, will help us to address the complexities and dynamics of societal challenges. By providing a spectrum for multi-level leadership, we do not make a plea for introducing yet another leadership style. Rather, we aim to broaden our perspective by providing new angles that can be studied in more depth to support leadership to achieve what we actually collectively strive for.

Introduction

The complexity of today's local and global challenges requires us to look critically at both the concept and the practice of leadership in society, government, business and national and international networks (Chambers et al., 2010; Ghoshal, 2005; Wilson & McCalman, 2017; Clegg et al., 2021; Crevani et al., 2021). The nature of the difficulties that confront us – whether they concern the environment and sustainability, health and wellbeing, equality and inclusion, or peace and safety – illustrate over and over again how these challenges are multi-dimensional, multi-faceted and multi-level. The many actors in the

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playing field, no matter if they are referred to as citizens, employees, civil servants, politicians, or stakeholders, all have their perspectives, experiences, needs, interests and – not to forget – role in the existence and approach of the challenges. Their behaviours and interactions are the common denominator for the issues at hand, and individual, organizational and system-wide leadership is pivotal in influencing and facilitating these behaviours and interactions towards our collective goals (By & Kuipers, 2023; Crosby & Bryson, 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2010). Both in the business administration and public administration literature, we can observe increased attention for the greater purposes of leadership, its contributions to creating public value and its importance for the common good (By, 2021; van Knippenberg, 2020; Bryson et al., 2021; Getha-Taylor et al., 2011). To develop a better understanding of such leadership for collective purposes requires us to apply the same multi-dimensional, multi-faceted and multi-level perspectives on leadership itself, as on the challenges it is engaged in.

This brings us to some of the important issues, which the study of leadership has been criticized for, and that we will need to overcome to consider leadership for collective good:

Being too concerned with formal leaders and too little with leadership (Rost, 1993). By doing so, the literature still is predominantly leader-centric, thereby focusing on dyadic leader-follower relations and the effects on followers (Higgs, 2022; van Knippenberg, 2020). Rather than focusing on a small and selective group of people who are sought to solve our problems, we are seeking to understand the leadership capabilities and behaviours of many to address the complexity of the collective issues at hand.

Being too focused on effectiveness as an outcome, rather than on purpose (By, 2021; Higgs, 2022; van Knippenberg, 2020). Or as van Knippenberg (2020) puts it; indicators for leadership effectiveness seem mostly selected for reasons of 'convenience […] than from a well-articulated notion of what the shared objectives are' (p. 6). To address the wicked challenges we are facing, such as environmental emergencies, or pandemic threats, both economic and social goals need to be taken into account when researching leadership (e.g., Maak et al., 2021; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of leadership itself can be put more towards the forefront (By, 2021; Higgs, 2022).

Lacking contextual considerations (Oc, 2018; Dinh et al., 2014; Higgs, 2022). Because of the lack of understanding of context, we know little about how those enacting leadership interact in the larger setting of actors and stakeholders (Higgs, 2022). In other words, without understanding the context in which leadership acts, are shaped and vice versa shapes context, we are groping in the dark about the true nature and use of leadership to contribute to collective good.

Lacking multilevel approaches and analyses (Batistič et al., 2017; Vogel & Masal, 2015). While we understand that the problems and challenges themselves are complex and multi-faceted, we lack a solid theoretical and empirical basis for viewing the leadership behaviours and practices that address these problems as multi-level issues themselves (cf. Kuipers et al., 2014).

Following the above, we are keen to speak to the recent body of leadership scholarship which continues to emphasize the importance of 'purpose' within leadership theory and practice (By, 2021). The reestablishment of purpose as a central concern (Burns, 1978) sits at the heart of any focus on the connection between leadership and the complex, interconnected challenges we face globally as a society and the role and responsibilities of

leadership scholarship and scholars within that (Crosby & Bryson, 2018; Grint, 2010). Following, we embrace the perspective that the act of leadership is not monopolized by formal leaders but should – especially for the sake of the collective good – be considered as shared and distributed (By, 2021; By & Kuipers, 2023). Next, we recognize that addressing the societal issues at hand by the many stakeholders involved in the leadership process requires deeper contextual consideration (Higgs, 2022). Part of all this is to create better understanding of micro-, meso- and macro-level interactions in which leadership plays a role (Higgs et al., 2023; Vogel & Masal, 2015).

In addition, there has been much scholarship and debate over what 'multi-level' itself means in management and organizational studies more generally, and in the study and practice of leadership. We use a definition of multi-level leadership that has its origins in the work of Dansereau, Yammarino and Markham (1995) and Batistič et al. (2017) and outlines 'multi-level leadership' as theorizing and applying multi-level thinking around leadership, thereby including multiple levels of analysis such as individuals, dyads, groups, organizations and systems.

We see all of the areas of work coming together into a concern for the development of 'the collective good' – the theme of this special issue. Furthermore, we frame 'collective good' as activities, actions and outcomes that benefit most within society (see By & Kuipers, 2023; Bryson et al., 2021; Getha-Taylor et al., 2011. We see these collective goods as inclusive initiatives exemplified in agreements and ongoing developmental processes such as the United Nations Global Compact[1] and 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's).[2]

Towards a Multi-Level Spectrum for Leadership

To better understand and research the issues at hand we seek to frame multi-level leadership for collective good as a spectrum. Doing so allows us to do justice to the complex nature of leadership and the challenges it is engaging in, and at the same time create more clarity and grip for those studying and seeking to develop leadership practices and behaviours which better enable outcomes of collective good. We deliberately use the term *spectrum*, as we are not aiming to define yet another type of leadership, or another adjective to the endless list of shapes and forms of leadership dealing with the newest and latest challenges. Rather, we sense that the many types and characteristics of leadership are already understood and sit within this multi-level leadership spectrum. The development of a 'spectrum' of understanding also allows to better dimensionalize where different approaches cluster together, overlap and contradict and where gaps exist in both theory and practice.

Below, we explore the relevant angles in current leadership thinking that feed our understanding of the core components of a multi-level approach. We consider these angles alongside two dimensions; the *locus* of leadership and the *focus* of leadership (Figure 1.) (cf. Ospina, 2017; Ospina et al., 2020). The locus of leadership speaks to a concern for where the actions and responsibilities of leadership are located, i.e. in more formal and hierarchical settings or more distributed and even shared among various actors. The focus of leadership concerns its goals and purposes and whether these are more internally oriented (often within organizations) or more externally oriented addressing various stakeholder needs, or in between (more mixed). By combining these two
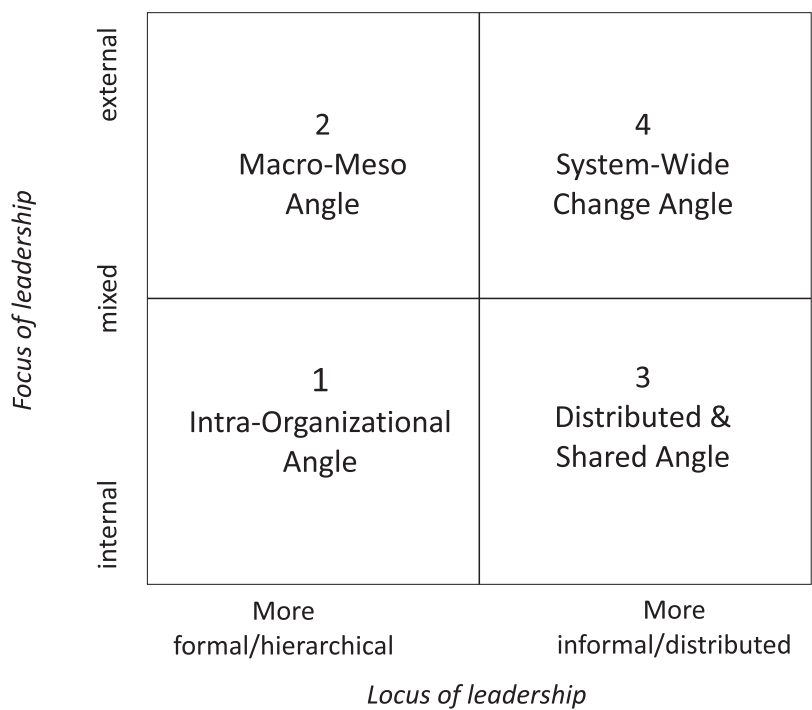
Focus of leadership

external

mixed

internal

2 Macro-Meso Angle	4 System-Wide Change Angle
1 Intra-Organizational Angle	3 Distributed & Shared Angle

More
formal/hierarchical

More
informal/distributed

Locus of leadership

Figure 1. Angles in multi-level leadership thinking (and their potential contribution to the greater good).

dimensions we get four different angles of understanding multi-level leadership that may support the achievement of collective goods in different ways.

The first angle, we will describe, concerns an intra-organizational perspective and builds on recent and more generic literature reviews addressing leadership on and between various levels within organizations (e.g. Batistič et al., 2017). The second angle is one pointing at the role of leadership in the interaction between macro and meso levels of organizations and their surroundings (e.g. Higgs, 2022). Third, we consider the angle of distributed and shared leadership within organizations to pinpoint the fluidity of formal and informal leadership across organizational levels (e.g. van der Hoek & Kuipers, 2022). Fourth, we take the angle of systems with a particular focus on system-wide change, where a multitude of actors and multiple arenas engage in delivering collective action to achieve purposeful change (Murphy, Denyer, & Pettigrew, 2021). For each of these angles, we identify their potential contribution to the collective good to further flesh out our multi-level leadership spectrum. In the following sections, we elaborate on each of these angles and their relationship with collective good. We also seek to illuminate some of the complex interconnections to practice which exist, using illustrative cases where possible.

1. Intra-organizational perspective

Despite the general consent that leadership by definition is multi-level in nature, the multi-level nature of leadership remains understudied (Dansereau et al., 1995; Batistič et al., 2017). In their review of about 25 years of multi-level leadership research, Batistič

et al. (2017) reveal a research focus that predominantly addresses the relationships and outcomes of leadership between formal leaders and their (so-called) followers, referring to e.g. individual subordinates or groups in organizations. From this review, we can learn that the majority of multi-level leadership studies apply a classical method of two levels within the organization; 'dual-level approaches that typically incorporate two levels of analysis, which we dubbed as *micro multi-level* and *organizational multi-level lenses*' (Batistič et al., 2017, p. 100). The first lens combines individual and team levels – 'yet tend to neglect incorporating higher levels, such as unit or organization' (Batistič et al., 2017, p. 100). The latter lens, however, primarily considers the group or organizational level (e.g. looking at effects of board room composition characteristics on organizational outcomes). Only very few cases pursue an organizational approach including trickle-down effects from leadership from top to bottom (e.g. Ruiz, Ruiz, & Martinez, 2011). As a result we still know little about the many interactions in the leadership process within and between levels from the angle of an internal focus with a more formal/hierarchical locus.

The dominance of dual-level studies within organizations also reflects our preference to think of leadership outcomes in terms of the sum of individual and group effectiveness, productivity or wellbeing on unit or organizational levels. To paraphrase our earlier citation of van Knippenberg (2020); both in science and practice we tend to use such leadership effectiveness measures for reasons of convenience, without bothering too much about more thoroughly defined shared objectives for the organization and their contribution to society. We may see some of this clearly in healthcare and educational organizations that over the past decades have been subject to almost continuous rationalizations to bring down costs and make services more efficient. By a constant focus on, for example, treating more patients or educating higher amounts of students for the same or – ultimately – less money, leadership in these organizations has an important oriented locus to reach managerial objectives, aiming at the shortest possible treatments and highest amounts of diplomas to be handed out. On the one hand, this contributes to some of the collective goals (keeping healthcare affordable in an aging society or delivering increasing numbers of higher educated graduates to the labour market to support a knowledge-intensive economy). On the other hand, it also increases standardization in both the work and the service delivery, providing less room for tailor-made solutions for patients or students with more complex needs, questions and circumstances. Employees (and in some way also patients or students in this case) are getting alienated from the primary service delivery process.

Leadership often seems to be focused on securing effectiveness and efficiency targets and compensating negative effects by focusing on motivation and contributing to meaningful work within organizations (e.g. Tummers & Knies, 2013). As a result of the way leadership and its effects are being studied, we lack deeper understanding of how multi-level leadership within organizations may contribute to more collective goals and purposes. One way to cover this is by including the meaning and purpose of organizations into our definitions and study of leadership and its effects on multiple levels (van Knippenberg, 2020; By, 2021; Higgs, 2022; By & Kuipers, 2023; Higgs et al., 2023).

For this, we may rely on a growing population of companies that takes an, often activist, approach in defining a bigger purpose as the core of their primary processes. For instance, Patagonia, an American outdoor clothing company, draws attention to the environmental impact of clothing and aims to improve recycling and labour rights.

Tony's Chocolonely is a Dutch chocolate brand that strives for a slavery-free cocoa-industry and actively feeds debates to motivate other chocolate brands to do the same. We see a rise in what have been termed B Corps – companies who actively demonstrate high social and environmental performance by meeting a set of impact assessment criteria and baseline requirement standards, as well as a legal commitment to changing their corporate governance structure to be accountable to all stakeholders, not just shareholders, and exhibit transparency by allowing information about their performance to be publicly available.[3] In many of these examples, we often see CEO's operating as ambassadors for the collective good. However, we still lack studies to understand the role leadership plays on multiple levels within such organizations.

2.   Macro-meso interactions

In the same way that leadership is relational, it is also contextual. Work on the importance of context has been significant in allowing organizational scholars more generally and leadership scholars in particular to identify the interactions between layered or laminated levels within organizations and institutions and the socially constructed environment in which they reside (Pettigrew, 2003; Bhaskar, 2008; McLaren & Durepos, 2021; Antonakis et al., 2003). However, this complex interaction between organizational leadership and its external environment is continually shifting and changing in response to both organizational concerns, external pressures and social changes. To illustrate this we may draw upon a number of examples, but one of the most pertinent at the moment is the recent international debate and concern about the changing role of police services in society and the multi-jurisdictional calls for police services to be held to account for their actions externally but also to address their long standing internal issues of misogyny, racism and homophobia (Heatherton et al., 2016; Kingshott, 2013). Despite changes in the understanding of leadership and organizational decision making, police organizations remain traditional in their decision-making structures and their adherence to rank-based hierarchies. Police leaders have struggled to address the complex interactions between these hierarchical organizational structures which often still conform to traditional 'command and control' policing customs (locus) and the need for those structures to better reflect the challenge of managing both diverse police services internally and policing diverse communities externally (focus). One case in which this has become increasingly challenging is that of the Metropolitan police in London whose well-publicized difficulties in managing the tension between locus and focus have resulted in a fundamental review of the organization (Casey report[4]) and calls for the Metropolitical police to be broken up or subject to the outcomes of an independent commission, mirroring the scale of the challenges faced by the police in Northern Ireland (Murphy, 2013). For organizational leaders in such circumstances, managing the interaction between meso and micro levels of organizations and their interactions with macro surroundings which are themselves in flux is an ongoing challenge (e.g. Higgs et al., 2023).

3.   Distributed and shared leadership within organizations

One of the most interesting developments in how we think about leadership over the last decades has been an increasing interest and scholarly development into shared

(Pearce and Conger, 2003) and distributed (Gronn, 2002) aspects of leadership. This shared, distributed, or complexity lens seeks to conceptualize leadership away from a person centric construction to something which is fundamentally relational and a 'social influence process through which emergent coordination (e.g., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new approaches, values, attitudes, practices, ideologies) are constructed and produced' (Uhl-Bien 2006: 668). From this perspective, the top-down *administrative* aspects of leadership and informal, adaptive and *emergent* aspects are managed and balanced by *enabling* practices (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). A recent study by van der Hoek and Kuipers (2022) shows how both formal managers and non-managerial employees engage in leadership behaviour under the condition of environmental complexity. However, they face different effects of bureaucratic constrictions. Based on this literature we need to stress that a distributed locus within organizations involves both vertical and horizontal dimensions of leadership, but they may face tensions that need to be addressed to achieve collective goals.

Recent work on the implementation of large public sector change projects in both housing and health has illustrated some of the processes by which enabling practices were able to manage such tensions. These include the almost contradictory 'dualisms' of both buffering of tension/conflict and the injection of it into organizational processes, the need to give meaning to events and also disrupt existing patterns and assumptions; the coordinating and formalizing of networks and the facilitation and enabling of informal networks; and both the removal, exclusion and alienation of dissenting actors and protection of other actors from external politics and top-down directives (Murphy, Rhodes, Meek, & Denyer 2017). With a more internal and mixed leadership focus in combination with a distributed leadership locus in organizations we see how organizational purpose is build in within teams and collaborations to provide societal value to clients and other stakeholders.

In a comparative case study about youthcare reform in The Netherlands, for instance, Higgs et al. (2023) report how a youthcare organization managing to connect the purpose of the reform to the purpose of the organization seems better at embedding change implementation within teams of care professionals. Leadership behaviours on all of the hierarchical levels appear consistent with each other and combine both an external orientation to cooperate with other stakeholders as well as internal engagement to stimulate involvement of the care professionals with the change (Higgs et al., 2023). The result is that care professionals are more inclined to participate in the change and experience that they are better able to take care of their clients, compared to an organization where leadership behaviours are much more top down and less engaging with care professionals and external stakeholders. The complexity of change processes and leadership as an administrative, adaptive and enabling force allows us to better understand how complex good can be delivered with the engagement of multiple actors and agencies internally and externally.

4   System-wide change

One of the most challenging leadership dilemmas is that which involves not just group or organizational level change, but change which must engage system-wide with a multitude of actors and multiple arenas. Often system-wide problems are intractable,

complex and of long standing. They can have 'wicked' characteristics which make it difficult to adequately determine and agree upon both the nature of the problem and routes by which it may be rendered less significant (Grint, 2010). Such problems often have no stopping point and therefore no real means by which to declare the problem solved (Rittel & Webber, 1973). They are also often seen within the context of grand challenges (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015) and include issues as diverse as climate change, poverty, obesity, conflict reduction and inequality. System-wide change has been variously defined, but for our purposes, we will delineate it as 'purposive and emergent actions that address issues of scale that straddle multiple arenas (Evans and Kay, 2008) and transcend multiple field boundaries (Fligstein, 2001)' (Murphy et al, 2021: 2). System-wide change is challenging because it involves the mobilisation of individuals and groups into processes of collective action (locus), which necessarily involves both combinatorial and dynamic complexity (Sterman, 2006). Unsurprisingly, such change is difficult and empirical examples are often characterized by limited success and ongoing struggles. One recent example looks at the role of 'framing' as one mechanism within successful system-wide change and utilized the historic and wicked problem of the Northern Ireland conflict as a case study of relatively successful change. The violent, internecine, zero-sum conflict known as the 'Troubles' saw the deaths of over 3500 people in Northern Ireland and further afield. The conflict was traditionally framed as a struggle between Irish republicanism who campaigned for a united Ireland, and loyalism and the British state, who sought to preserve the post partition link with Britain. Recent work has illustrated how a determined, multi-actor effort and the leadership of multiple individuals, organizational units and ultimately governments succeeded in 'reframing' the conflict away from its conceptualisation as 'zero-sum' and towards a problem of interlocking relationships which could be resolved (focus). This shifted the conflict away from its intractability and created an opportunity for a less violent process of resolution. However, as with all historic processes, other contextual factors remain at play and in this case a change in the relationship between Britain and Ireland as a result of Brexit forced a new process of frame defence, to preserve the gains of the new frame. Focusing on framing and reframing as one aspect of system-wide change illustrates the Sisyphean challenge of such change where both individual agency and collective action combine to create change, which itself must be managed and maintained.

Towards Collective Good Through Multi-Level Leadership: This Special Issue

This special issue and the symposium which preceded it have sought to investigate the macro, meso and micro level characteristics and interactions of leadership and the ways in which such perspective may help our understanding to make a difference for the collective good of society.

We sought articles that investigated leadership empirically and theoretically across and within societies, sectors and organizations (public and private). Our particular concern was the ways in which leadership, as a relational phenomenon, sought to address collective problems at multiple levels – both by the locus and focus of leadership within and between organizations and societies. We invited authors from a variety of fields and disciplines to present their empirical and theoretical contributions to allow for comparison

and theory development regarding reconceptualization's of multi-level leadership and its potential to create purposeful change for collective good. As we set out on this endeavour, we hoped to better understand a number of concerns. Chiefly among them were the multi-level, multi-facet and multi-dimensional characteristics of leadership in addressing global and societal challenges. We saw leadership within this challenge as 'a process rather than a role' and related to the collective exercise of agency to address complex and intractable problems (Clegg et al., 2021). We were also interested in the ways in which leadership emerges at multiple levels in society, organizations and networks and how it interacts with other contextual phenomena. Most importantly, we were concerned with the relationship between understanding leadership behaviours on the one hand and influencing practice within and between institutions, structures and individuals on the other. In this we positioned 'purpose' or the 'collective good' at the centre, and made particular reference to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. We believe that in setting out these questions and concerns we would attract interesting and motivated articles and we have.

The first research article of this issue by Bolden et al. draws on systems leadership, complexity and paradox theory to elucidate the tensions that organizational actors experience when practising multi-level leadership. These issues are explored through a study of the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders within an Integrated Care System (ICS) in England. The authors have found that in developing multi-level leadership practice, leaders experience contradictory expectations and outcomes, including paradoxes of identity, place, purpose and change. They conclude by suggesting that leadership in multi-level contexts requires oscillating between competing polarities in a dynamic equilibrium with attention to localized interactions, and thereby adding to our understanding in particular about the system-wide change angle of our spectrum (Figure 1).

The second article, by Moore et al., follows on from this theme. Focusing on the extreme context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the article looks at a case study of collaborative leadership which maintains a focus on relationships and purpose rather than solely on outputs or outcomes. Conceptual in focus, it explores how health and social care integration has been offered as one potential solution to the challenge of health and social care transformation. In particular, it focuses on three key aspects: the macro-level global policy context; the meso-level organizational behaviour and culture; and the micro-level practice of individual leaders and managers. It is found that, whilst the organizational structure of Integrated Care Systems offers great promise, collaborative leadership is critical to realize truly resilient and sustainable collaborative relationships. As such it provides to our further understanding of the distributed and shared leadership angle of our spectrum (Figure 1).

Our third article *Van Den Oord et al.* draws attention to how network leadership recognizes and responds to network-level tensions. Using a Social Network Analysis of Antwerp Fire Service crisis response network, the article provides insights into network leadership practices to recognize and respond to network tensions that arose during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic due to internal network characteristics and the organizational field's environmental and population dynamics. It provides relevant insights on the macro-meso angle of the spectrum, in combination with a distributed and shared angle concerning within-network collaborations (see Figure 1).

The fourth article is an insightful practice-based Opinion piece by the retired Irish diplomat David Donoghue who in 2014 alongside his Kenyan counterpart Machiara Kamau led negotiations between world governments on a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were due to expire at the end of 2015. Donoghue provides us with a birds eye view of these negotiations, the processes of organizing around them, the difficulties and blockages as they moved forward and the eventual bringing together of diverse viewpoints and interests to provide a framework which reflects the essence of multi-level leadership for collective good at the far right upper corner of the systems-wide change angle (see Figure 1).

All of the articles address the challenge of multi-level leadership from different angles with a focus on creating real-world change. Our reflection addresses a much more global challenge and one which requires a different viewpoint on leadership, particularly for angle 4, drawing on diplomatic skill, persuasive techniques and a great deal of confidence building. For this, Donoghue provides us with ten useful and experience-based lessons for those engaged in negotiated or persuasive processes for collective good. The last of these is a reminder that self-interest is often the most persuasive argument of all. With a recognition that change, even if it is difficult to our own benefit, the battle is as Donoghue suggests, 'half won'.

Multi-Level Leadership for Collective Good: Future Research Agenda

As we have seen above, there is a great deal of existing and ongoing research around multi-level leadership and its connections to collective good. Within this article, we have aimed to sketch out some of the dimensions of multi-level leadership for the collective good, with a new emphasis on the twin concerns of locus and focus. However, while good work has been done, much remains to do. All of us are aware that we live in a world which is facing new and unprecedented threats and instability. The combined impacts of rapid climate change, net zero energy transformations, health pandemics, human migration, economic change, AI, trans-frontier labour markets, identity politics, increased political insecurity and war in Ukraine and the Middle East are creating a new leadership context that is often uncertain and presents great and interconnected challenges. There have been many calls for leadership research in particular to address the realities of this contemporary environment and make a contribution to its betterment (By, 2021; Tourish, 2019). As guest-editors, the process of thinking, developing and collaborating on this Special Issue has encouraged us to think further about what a research agenda for multi-level leadership for collective good might look like and what areas it might coalesce around. Upon reflection, we have identified three broad themes. These themes are not new to scholarship on leadership or studies of management and organization. Rather, they are perennial concerns but ones which appear to be particular pertinent as we face into system-wide challenges of change, locally and globally. They can be roughly defined as 'time', 'focus' and further opening of locus in terms of 'space / place'.

'Time' speaks to a persistent concern for context in our understanding of leadership and how it leads to collective good. This concern is also reflected in another article in this journal issue – that of Jan Erik Karlsen in his Reflection on Time and Temporality.

As we see from this work, the contributions in the special issue and wider research and scholarship, leadership behaviours, practices and most importantly decisions, are built on the legacy of the past. As such leadership practice is necessarily Janus faced – looking forwards but also backwards and tasked with marrying up decisions of yesterday with the vision of today and tomorrow. An understanding of the impact of the past is rarely a key concern in leadership scholarship and yet to achieve change for collective good, the past and how we frame it must be managed as carefully as the vision to be enacted. This goes beyond a concern for context and also speaks to the reality that to achieve collective good strategies must often be enacted over long periods of time and a processual understanding of those processes is vital (Pettigrew, 1990). This of course, presents huge challenges, not least in relation to researcher time, focus and funding but we contend that in order to fully understand how to achieve change effectively we must adhere to the maxim that human beings often overestimate what can be achieved in the short term, but underestimate what can be achieved over longer periods. A better understanding of long-term leadership engagement seems important if we are to take account of time and achieve measures of collective good.

As we have discussed above, the 'focus' of leadership – its goals and purposes, internally and externally to organizations, have been an ongoing interest of leadership thinking and practice. However, a concern for 'focus' to take account of the broader, system-wide challenges we face as a society is in the ascendent (By, 2021; Tourish, 2019). Despite this renewed interest, there is a need for a much more nuanced understanding of how leadership 'focus' operates in practice in relation to the generation of system-wide change and achievement of objectives related to 'common goods'. In particular, we require a better understanding of the interrelationship of leadership theory and practice to individual agency and sustained collective action. Understanding better the mechanisms that facilitate individuals, organizations and institutions to develop and sustain a focus on common goods, above and beyond narrow, strategic advantage is still not sufficiently understood. In that respect, we may include a more normative stance or even idealism into our understanding and study of leadership, to develop better knowledge and evidence of how leadership contributes to what we truly are aiming for (e.g. van Knippenberg, 2020; By & Kuipers, 2023).

This brings us to our third concern – that of the significance of locus of leadership in terms of space and place, in a changing world. When we talk of space and place, we are thinking of the reality that recent events – not least Covid 19 and the changing patterns of work have changed enormously how leadership is enacted. The ubiquitous nature of Zoom and other video conferencing tools mean that many interactions which were previously in person are now virtual. Leadership now operates in cyberspace as much as in organizations and institutions. Understanding how this impacts leadership behaviours and practices seems critical not least if we are to engage seriously in the collective action required to create meaningful and lasting change in relation to the challenges that face us. Of course, there has also been a great deal of activity and concern over the past period for scholarship on place-based leadership (Kempster & Jackson, 2021; Jackson, 2019; Hambleton & Howard, 2013) and the significance of the local and regional to wider debates about change, development and participative engagement. This too, provides another dimension to our concern for space and place.

Conclusion

This article has sought to draw together recent critiques of leadership theory and practice, with a focus on multi-level leadership, purpose and the creation of collective goods, as central concerns. It frames multi-level leadership for collective good as a spectrum and identifies four angles: Intra-Organizational; Macro-Meso; Distributed and Shared; and System Wide Change. In doing so it provides connections and commentary on articles within this Special Issue *Multi-level Leadership for Collective Good* as a whole and its wider contribution to this area of leadership studies. Most importantly, the authors of this issue have sought to provide an opportunity to reflect upon the enormous leadership challenges that face us globally, the ways in which we may seek to discern paths through those challenges, and where our future scholarly focus may lie.

Notes

1. https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc
2. https://sdgs.un.org/goals
3. https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/certification/
4. https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/about-us/about-the-met/bcr/baroness-casey-review/

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