

Chapter 8

The views of the few or the voices of many: Methods of exploring leadership roles through alternative approaches within Higher Education.

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Abstract

In the following chapter I begin by discussing the changing landscape in higher education and argue why “leadership” is an important part of every academic’s journey. I discuss why we need to challenge traditional views of leadership and critically how we need to explore individuals’ views and reflections on their own leadership journeys. Furthermore, I will critically reflect on how we need to adopt different research methods to allow leadership journeys to emerge with a focus on the use of Q-methodology and why such approaches allow not only the emergence of understanding but can serve a dual purpose and contribute not only to a global understanding but also an individual’s personal development.

8.1 Introduction

The career pathway for an academic in higher education can be described as both linear and curvilinear. There is an established pathway from junior lecturer through to professor, a predefined and ordered staircase with each tread representing promotion

opportunity, thus providing a linear trajectory. However, in parallel with this ordered, structured, and visible process is the development of leadership and management opportunities. For many these leadership opportunities arise through chance and do not emerge from or through personal development plans. Critically, the leadership journey for each academic can be a winding curvilinear road with differing junctions and routes. Often the nuances of these journeys are neither documented, discussed, nor talked about and the personal subjective experiences of leadership are hidden as we fail to capture the individuality of each person's lived experience. Finding methods that allow these stories to be told including how leadership opportunities arose, developed, and aided career development is crucial if we are to widen opportunities, increase leadership role transparency and help aspiring newly qualified professionals progress within higher education.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the changing landscape in higher education drawing on literature to argue why leadership is an important part of every academic's journey and why the traditional views of leadership need to be challenged. Building on the notion of the need to understand the subjective and lived experiences I discuss how we need to move away from traditional methodological approaches and introduce the reader to Q-methodology. Drawing on one example, I describe how to use Q-methodology to explore the leadership journey and discuss why such an approach may provide insight and detail and importantly help those embarking on their leadership journey reflect on their route.

8.2 Leadership in higher education

Traditionally, educational leaders were most often seen as those in titled positions with power, authority and responsibility often occupying the higher echelons of a hierarchical structure (Yielder & Codling 2004). However, the changing landscape of higher education policy, practice and pedagogy over the last 30 years has brought with it many challenges and changes to these traditional ideas. Universities are no longer merely bastions of learning and thinking segregated from the cities, towns, or regions in which they reside, they are now part of that community with citizenship strategies, knowledge transfer agendas and societal engagement policies (Prelipcean & Bejnaru 2016). For those publicly funded institutions there is closer scrutiny and rightly so of value, for money, to the community and to the student consumer. The combined effect of this contextual shift from a mystified place of learning into a fully integrated institution with societal impact has led to numerous changes in roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for those within academia (Örtenblad 2015).

Gunter (2004) argues educational leadership now transcends titled roles and can be seen in many forms within the structures of higher education establishments. Indeed, it could be argued that the architectural blueprint of leadership is no longer neo classical but now represents a period of structural expressionism, adaptable and malleable to differing concepts and occurring in different and diverse ways to accommodate the changing vision and mission of tertiary education (Prelipcean & Bejnaru 2018). This in turn means that academic leadership roles are no longer reserved or given merely through seniority or as Davies, Hides and Cassey (2001) contest a 'first among equals approach', a phrase used to

denote the giving of leadership roles to those who are senior within the department or faculty as a sign of respect, in essence an honorary position based on seniority rather than skill set or aptitude.

The 'student experience' is now a central tenant of all institutions and this combined with the metric driven governance and scrutiny across higher education means that academics are no longer merely scholars of their chosen discipline and experts within their field. They must embrace new challenges and roles to support the student experience, engage with differing roles away from subjective specialism and work towards becoming an institutional citizen (Astin & Astin 2000). For example, just as students have moved from passive consumers of a curriculum to active participants in the shaping and development of curricula and thus co-creators of their educational journey and learning experience, numerous formal and informal leaders have emerged from within the academic body to support these developments both within the academic and professional services areas (Black 2015). Whilst within these roles staff may not perceive themselves as leaders, they do adopt facets of leadership and as such some informal faculty roles may be the inherent start of their leadership journey.

Critically, this suggests that roles with an element of leadership now transcend the archaic principle of 'first among equals' noted previously, and early career academics may often find themselves with leadership responsibilities at a much earlier stage in their academic journey (Bolden et al. 2012). Whilst we could argue that this might create tensions it is also important to realise that in the changing higher education landscape the concept of leadership should be a shared responsibility as *"there is a need for multiple individuals to*

share leadership by working collaboratively with a focus on organisation relations and connectedness” (Joyce & O’Boyle 2013, p.71). Furthermore, in this context leadership should be seen not from a hierarchical but horizontal perspective and as a process of social influence (Gigliotti & Ruben 2017) which has as its core the art and skill of communication. For it is the ability to communicate both verbally and non-verbally which influences followers and subsequent outcomes. Importantly however, when we think in these terms, we must remember that communication is much more than a verbal exchange. A good communicator and thus leader can identify and interpret not only the spoken but also the unspoken word. They can align communication to context and culture and draw on reflective skills and knowledge of an individual and or group to identify how previous experiences can shape interactions (Ruben & Gigliotti 2016).

Opportunities for roles with an element of leadership present exciting opportunities for early career academics and importantly can contribute to promotion applications. Critically, leadership opportunities can aid development of their academic identity and sense of self as an academic. In undertaking wider Department, School or Faculty roles, early career researchers are not only developing their ‘identity as a lecturer’ they are at the same time constructing their ‘professional leadership identity’ through these early experiences (Trede, Macklin & Bridges 2012). Whilst one might inadvertently serve the development of the other it could also be argued that there needs to be adequate developmental opportunities to engage with, a supportive Department or Faculty structure that allows not only the attendance at such development events but the time to reflect, action and instigate the learning from this (Efu 2020).

If we are to view leadership in its broadest sense and critically give younger academics the chance to undertake, grow and develop from these “horizontal leadership” opportunities then we must look at how we develop training programmes and support structures to aid leadership development. To do this there is a need for us to explore what we know currently and to critically reflect on the methods we use to understand the leadership journeys of individuals and how we can use the lived experiences to shape supportive environments.

8.3 Exploring leadership journeys and the problems with traditional approaches

Whilst there is little doubt that over the last 10 years, we have seen a growing body of research (Esen, Bellibas & Gumus 2020), literature and policy emerge that focuses on leadership development within higher education there is still much left to uncover (Dopson et al. 2019). To plan effective leadership training there is a need for us to conduct research that underpins the process. Much as we talk about research informed teaching, professional leadership training and development is no different and a compelling evidence base is needed (Dopson et al. 2019). However, here in lies a tension if we continue to adopt what could be considered traditional research approaches such as standard quantitative methods (surveys and questionnaires) or basic qualitative approaches (focus groups or interviews). Critically, using either approach can result in what Bottery et al. (2009) describe as voices being lost when reductionist or positivistic principles are applied to exploring complex social real-world phenomena. For example, a survey would provide merely a score with no understanding of the how and why and adopting a qualitative approach might tell us in

detail the views of a few but would fail to allow us to generalise those results. To understand leadership development there is a need to explore at a granular level the journeys of many looking for similarities, differences, the impact of opportunity and how personal factors have contributed and shaped the journey.

Importantly effective leadership development needs to account for diversity, individuality and consider subjective experiences and social structures and networks of each participant. Furthermore, there is a need to draw this together to understand the lived experiences of those in leadership roles and importantly leader development. By doing this we will be able to identify shared components and unique factors and attributes and thus shape development opportunities so that they are useful to, and for, the individual and consequently impact positively upon the organisation. Furthermore, adopting differing approaches to understanding leadership development will allow continued professional development to become person centred and valued rather than another course to do.

8.4 Q-Method - An Introduction

One method that may allow holistic narratives and viewpoints of leadership development and journeys to emerge is Q-method. First proposed by Stephenson in the 1930's Q-method can be described as a technique that inverts the R-principle of standardised surveys and questionnaires by seeking to explore an individual's subjective point of reference relative to a topic, issue, or situation. In Q-method the analysis focuses on the patterns of responses within individuals thus allowing the researcher to explore a

complex issue from the participant's perspective (Donner 2001; Giles 2002). Unlike the classical factor method (R), which factors variables across people, Q factors people across variables, or suggested another way in the classical approach psychometrics or surveys apply questions to a sample of people, whereas in Q-method people are applied to the sample of statements. It could be argued that Q-method allows us to move from the nomothetic generalisation to a deeper level of understanding and has been described as having benefits not only as a tool within a researcher's tool kit but also as a participatory exercise (Donner 2001).

To expand further when anyone is asked to complete a questionnaire, survey, or psychometric the task is approached in what we can describe as a sequential activity, that is items are checked one after the other. However, in Q-method through the Q-sort a different approach is used and elements or chips as you will come to see are ranked more holistically through what might be described as a more Gestalt approach or procedure (Stainton Rogers 1995). Thus Q-method can be described as diverging from the known and this notion becomes more obvious when we think about the output from the two methods. A survey or questionnaire approach gives rise to an output or data created from the sum of parts or items. In contrast, the Q-sort output gives rise to what can be described as creative configurations. For example, imagine that we gave a survey examining leadership skills to 30 new leaders. The output would tell us about the means across categories, what areas were high and low for that group. However, it would not provide detail at the personal or individual level, nor would it show us who within the group had similar or dissimilar views. The notion of being able to understand unique profiles that are both similar and different to others within a group is critical to understand the lived experiences and when we wish to

examine leadership and its development it is this personal uniqueness that we need to explore.

Q-method may serve as a medium for allowing this to happen, by inverting the standard process of psychometrics, q-method allows the researcher to build a picture of the individual or individuals and their construction of meaning with respect to the topic under review. Emergent results are based on the individuals' frame of reference and not the researchers (Oring & Plihal 1993; Barry & Proops 1999). Interestingly, the emergent results from Q-methodology show similarities and differences between people's subjective views and allow us to understand how people in a cohort may be both similar and diverse. Exploration from this perspective as highlighted earlier could help develop continued professional development opportunities that were more tailored and bespoke toward differing groups.

Described as a 'qualiquantilogical' method by Stenner and Stainton Rogers (2004) and an "unusual qualitative method" (Watts & Stenner 2005, p. 69) results of a Q-sort emerge from a combined analysis. The first stage uses quantitative methods to identify factors within the data, subsequently these factors are interpreted to show unique viewpoints. Whilst there has been debate surrounding whether Q-method can be considered a qualitative or quantitative methodological approach and to within which methodological school it resides the fact that it focuses on the lived experience of the individual (Brown 1996) means it offers an alternative to traditional approaches and addresses the short comings inherent within those.

8.4.1 What can Q-method offer when exploring leadership journeys?

Whilst there are limited reports of research into academic leadership using Q-method the fact that it has been used in diverse situations and fields (e.g., health, education, management, counselling, information technology and medicine) suggests it has something to offer when we wish to explore and capture the lived experiences and subjective views of the leadership journey. In the following section I introduce examples of where and how Q-method has been used and draw on the authors reflections of using the technique to show how adopting Q-method may be of benefit to understanding the leadership journey within the higher education context.

Janson (2009) used Q-method to explore how high school counsellors in the United States perceived their own leadership behaviours. In introducing the research question Janson highlights that whilst research within the field might guide practice development and theory there may also be a critical omission in the emerging narrative. That is that the voices of the counsellors have been overlooked and that “... leadership is mostly being told about school counsellors, not by them” (pg. 87) and that models that had previously been developed were conceptual and lacked the subjective viewpoint of those within the field. In discussing the findings Janson argues that the diversity found within the emergent factors suggests that “there is probably not a set of best practice guidelines or a definitive and monolithic school counsellor leadership model” (pg. 95). He further advocates that by using Q-method “additional voices” were heard that had not hitherto been considered and that listening and working to understand the individual would allow what he described as a more authentic approach to professional development.

Militello and Benham (2010) used Q-method as one method of data collection when exploring collective leadership with participants in the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) initiative, this study was a mixed method longitudinal study across numerous sites. They suggest that “Q-methodology provided a rich, robust data set that supplied us with both perceptual and actual vantage points on how collective leadership was (or was not) lived within and across the KLCC communities” (p. 629). When discussing Q-method as a process for exploring leadership evaluation they highlight several advantages of the method including the fact that it enabled the inclusion of participants perceptions and provided a method of triangulation with the other data gathered. Interestingly, this included both photo voice and surveys, two other techniques that can allow lived experiences to emerge. Furthermore, they also highlight what were termed unintended outcomes from the Q-method such as requests from differing sites for copies of the Q-sort cards for their own use. They report that sites intended to use the approach with stakeholders to reflect on the work and look towards the development of new initiatives. Interestingly, they suggest that Q-method is not merely an evaluative technique but can through its participatory approach be a vehicle for discussions, allow for reflection and highlight areas for new development.

In a study examining how doctoral programmes in educational leadership prepare and engage in diverse communities Fitzgerald and Militello (2016) used Q-methodology to identify the views of key stakeholders. These key stakeholders represented all those involved within the course from Deans to the actual students. Critically, Fitzgerald and Militello included two additional steps within the data gathering to enhance the richness of the data. Firstly, after the Deans and Faculty members had completed their sort individually, they took part in focus discussions where they were asked to focus on elements at each end of the forced choice grid and discuss how these elements should influence various aspects

of the educational programme, these views aided the development of the initial analysis. Secondly, they adopted a formalised participant inquiry data analysis process post analysis. This additional stage to Q-method termed InQuiry (Militello, Janson & Tonissen 2016) is a process whereby the exploration of the factors and subsequent naming is done by participants who load onto the factor and not by the researcher, participants are invited in groups to discuss through guided questions what the factor represents and why. Thus, the subjective frame of reference and the participants' view is represented and critically understood throughout the entire process.

Purswell, Willis and Lara (2019) examined qualified and in-training counsellors' views of their professional development using Q-method. In this example, the Q-sort was developed to represent phases of the Lifespan Development Model (LDM) (Rønnestad & Skovholt 2003; 2012), 40 statements were generated to represent each phase. Results showed that two of the three emergent factors aligned to stages of the LDM although interestingly, whilst the components aligned participants sitting within these factors differed in terms of personal characteristics. This finding and the fact that one factor did not align indicated that when thinking about personal development standardised models and theories may not suit all people. In terms of leadership and leadership journeys findings such as this suggest that there is a need to employ methods that whilst robust allow for flexibility to capture the experiences and nuances of the individual's development pathway.

A further example of the diverse application of Q-method can be seen in the work of Gómez, Ali and Casillas (2014). They utilised Q-method as a tool for exploring ex-students' views on mentorship within a specific graduate education programme. Interestingly, and of relevance when we think about leadership journeys is the fact that in this study participants

were asked to think retrospectively about the characteristics a mentor should have and to Q-sort from this retrospective stance. This suggests that adopting a Q-method approach could provide us not only with an “at this moment” method for assessing leadership journeys and development but also a more robust method of allowing someone to reflect upon their journey.

Whilst not intending to be a review of all Q-method research, the studies mentioned to date have highlighted the diverse ways in which Q-method may allow narratives of the leadership journey to emerge. Whilst the reviewed studies are drawn from different areas, they have one thing in common in that they all used groups of participants. One of the benefits of Q-method is that it can also be used as a single case approach with one individual completing the Q-sort several times. For example, Goldstein and Goldstein (2005) report on using Q-method to explore the self-image of a client in a therapeutic setting. They discuss how the Q-sort emerged from within the therapeutic sessions and how the client was asked to complete the ‘sort’ several times related to differing conditions e.g., “Sort the cards to show the way you are as the lead editor” (pg. 47). In total thirteen separate sorts were completed and subsequently analysed to reveal three factors. These were then discussed as part of the therapeutic process. This example highlights how Q-method may be useful when we wish to explore with individual academics how they view leadership and their development through the multiple lenses that comprise the role of the modern academic.

Given its flexibility as shown in the work of Militello and Benham (2010), Q-method could serve as a method that not only allows for the exploration of leadership journeys within one context be that a Faculty, Department, or Institution but could allow for

exploration across institutions both within, and or between countries. Through this approach we would be able to capture diverse experiences and develop a deeper understanding of the impact of context and culture. Exploring the impact of culture is a critical aspect that has often been negated in leadership development to-date and there is the need to explore in more depth and detail cultural influences at the individual, institutional and environmental level. By employing alternative approaches such as Q-method with its focus on the subjective view of participants we will as Janson (2009) argues be better placed to support the career development of lecturers and educators and through mentorship aid personal development so that individuals can be empowered to develop the necessary skills, attributes, personal philosophy, vision relative to their own leadership trajectory (Montgomery 2020). Importantly, adopting an InQuiry approach as in the work of Fitzgerald and Militello (2016) will further develop our understanding of individual journeys and will allow participant voices to be heard and recorded in a robust manner. Whilst the example of Goldstein and Goldstein (2005) suggests that Q-method may provide us with a means of exploring critical factors at the individual level.

8.5 Stages in a Q-Method Approach

From the presented overview it can be argued that Q-method may offer an interesting and exciting way of exploring leadership development in the context of higher education. In the following section I will discuss the core stages in developing and administering the Q-method approach, so the reader has a basic understanding. There are numerous texts available that document all aspects of Q-method in detail and for those wishing to further develop their knowledge there are numerous resources at the Q-Method

website <https://qmethod.org/> and the work of Donner offers an excellent practical guide (Donner 2001).

8.5.1 The concourse and Q-set development

The starting point of any Q-method study is the identification of the area of discourse, the topic under review and a definition of the concourse. Brown (1993) describes the concourse as “the flow of communicability surrounding any topic” that occurs in “the ordinary conversation, commentary and discourse of everyday life”. The concourse should represent and contain all relevant views, and these can be represented in several ways. For example, a concourse may as Van Exel and Graaf (2005) describe be composed of pictures, objects, self-referent statements or as is more common be restricted to a verbal concourse that can include a myriad of sources, for example newspapers, observations, interviews, social media, focus groups. When generating the concourse, it is important that the information is representative of a range of views and encompassing. Critically, the development of the concourse in reported Q studies shows divergence in approach. Some researchers have focused on using reviews of literature to allow the concourse to emerge whilst others have conducted interviews or focus groups, there are further examples of a combined approach of literature searches with focus groups.

Once the concourse is assembled the next stage is to generate a list of elements that form what is termed the Q set. These elements can be described as statements (or in some reported research chips) related to the topic under review and sitting within the umbrella question. In many ways, this is one of the most critical and crucial stages as the researcher must condense the concourse into a subset that is still representative of what may be

divergent points. Dependent upon the research question these elements may emerge as the concourse is reviewed or be drawn to represent elements of a theory. The most critical point is that the Q-set should retain diversity to capture the varying subjective opinions in and of the area (Van Exel & Graff 2005).

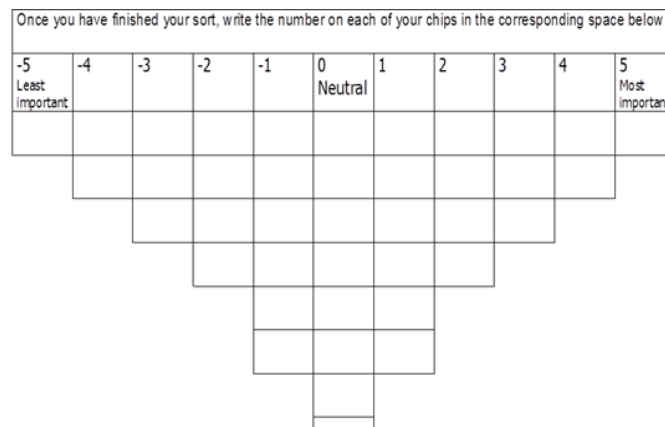
When developing the set of elements there are several rules or guiding principles that should be followed. Donner (2001) suggests that each element /statement should mean different things. Furthermore, repetition and exact statement inverses should be avoided. For example, if we think about leadership capabilities as outlined by Black, Groombridge and Jones (2011) we might in a Q-method study wish to include an element such as *“Flexibility is important in all levels of planning”*, the direct invert of this would be a statement such as *“Flexibility is not important in all levels of planning”*. The first statement would fit easily into the sort whilst the latter could give rise to confusion. Donner also suggests that statements containing either positive or negative extremes should be avoided as these will usually be perceived as strongly divergent within the sort. In describing element development Donner (2001) introduces the notion that they should be plausible competitors with each other and thus for some participants elements may be highly attractive or resonate strongly with the whilst others may be disinterested. The last point noted relates more to the stylistic approach of the elements and includes using either all sentences or phrases and avoiding a mix thus keeping a parallel style throughout and avoiding the use of double negatives. Once the statements are selected, they are numbered and transferred onto cards to form the Q-set or uploaded into one of the available Q-method software packages. The number of elements / statements included in a Q-sort within reported research has ranged from 20 to 60. When deciding on the number

researchers must remember that participants are asked to rank the statement and compare to others therefore the larger the number of statements in the Q-sort the higher the number of comparisons, which can impact on time and participant fatigue.

8.5.2 Q-sorting

Central to most Q-sorts is the notion of a forced choice quasi-normal distribution, for example in a Q-sort with 40 statements a forced choice distribution might look similar to figure 3. The guide scale runs from -5 to 5 with anchors of least and most important respectively, only one statement can be sorted and placed at each extreme whilst at -3 or +3 three statements can be placed.

Fig 8.1 Q-sort guide bar and distribution



To complete the Q-sort each participant is provided with a guide bar, the Q-set, and a sheet to record their responses. They are then instructed to read the statements and create three piles, in the example above they would be asked to sort the statements into most important for them, least important for them and neutral. Critically these piles do not

need to include equal numbers of statements. Participants are then asked to focus if we use the example above, the pile representing statements most important for them and to reread the statements and select for them, the one that is most important. This statement would in our example be placed under 5 and the process is repeated to then select the next two most important statements which would go under 4. This process is repeated until all the statements in the most important pile have been sorted onto the distribution. This is then repeated with the least important pile, and finally the neutral set of statements. Participants are then asked to reflect on the distribution and the placement of the statements making any alterations. The statement numbers are then copied onto the recording grid ready for analysis.

8.5.3 Analysing the Q-sort

As previously described the first stage in the analysis of Q-sorts can be considered both objective and quantitative and involves the use of a statistical package such as PQ-method. The first stage of statistical analysis is the production of a correlation matrix of all sorts. This allows similarity and dissimilarity between each participant's sort to emerge. This correlation matrix is subsequently subjected to factor analysis. At this stage, factors emerge, these factors contain people who have shared views. For a comprehensive review of the statistical elements of Q-sort and interpretation of the statistical output see Donner (2001). Once all statistical analysis has been completed and statement factor scores calculated interpretation can begin. Factor scores are critical as they highlight distinguishing between factor statements whilst consensus statements show where similar views are held across factors. When interpreting the results, the focus moves from the quantitative to the

qualitative as the researcher explores the uniqueness of the people in each factor through examining previously gathered information about each participant and or conducting interviews with each person where their lived experiences or views can be understood.

8.6 An example of using Q-Method to explore leadership journeys

In the following example I draw upon the work of Goldstein and Goldstein (2005) to show how Q-method can be used to chart an individual's journey within academia and academic leadership. An introduction to the method and approach is followed by a discussion of what the Q-analysis identified. Reflections by the participant are used to exemplify the emergent story and I conclude by discussing how this approach may help us understand the lived leadership experience and how stories may help us develop appropriate structures and strategies for individualised professional development.

8.6.1 Development of the Q-set and the Q-sort process

The Q-sort statements for this example emerged from literature relating to academic roles and were framed around the work of Janson (2009). The final Q-set contained thirty statements including elements related to working within the Department and at a wider University level. The forced choice grid for this Q-sort was a 9-point scale with anchors of -4 and +4 and is shown in figure 2.

Fig. 8.2 The Forced Choice Grid

| -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
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The sort was completed by a female academic who held numerous senior management positions within a mid-sized University in the United Kingdom. They were asked to complete the Q-sort several times with differing instructions relating to timescale and role characteristics (e.g., when you started teaching, as you moved into your first full time academic position, as you became a senior lecturer, academic / module lead through to identified management positions for example subject lead). For each condition they were given a new recording grid and the previous grid was placed in a folder to avoid previous sorting influencing current perception. An example of a completed sort for the condition “when I first started lecturing” is shown in figure 3. After the sorts had been analysed, we had a discussion to identify how the sorts might exemplify stages in the academic journey, extracts of that discussion are included to highlight critical points.

Fig. 8.3 Sort example for “When I first started lecturing”

| -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| Recognition for all that I do is important to me | I establish clear goals and keep those goals in the forefront of the Departments attention | I am given opportunities to develop myself as a leader | I actively challenge the status quo when necessary | I have a research profile | I feel supported in my professional development | I have a clear career plan | I use data to monitor the effectiveness of my pedagogic practice | I operate from strong ideals and beliefs about University Education |
| I have a recognised leadership role | I perform many roles that make me highly visible to others in the University | I volunteer for roles outside of my Department | I adapt my leadership behaviours to the needs of the current situation | I lead by example | I take initiative to do things in the Department | I seek out, maintain, and develop relationships with people who can aid my development | I engage other Department staff in conversation around academic issues | I demonstrate my knowledge about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices |
| | I have a visible professional profile outside of the University | I work collaboratively with others to inform policy and strategy | I develop interdependent relationships that promote the University's guiding vision | I belong to professional organizations | I establish strong communication networks within the Department | I demonstrate empathy with colleagues | I feel valued as an academic | |
| | | | I learn and grow as a leader through experience and reflection" | I foster shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation | I am given CPD opportunities to develop professionally | | | |
| | | | | I develop my leadership from within based on my values and life principles | | | | |
| | | | | I challenge others to set high expectations for themselves | | | | |

The completed sorts were entered into PQ-Method software and analysed following the stages of Donner (2001). Four factors emerged with eigenvalues exceeding 1 that explained 89% of the variance. Rather than exploring the factor arrays in detail we will focus on the emerging distinguishing and the consensus statements as in many ways this exemplifies the uniqueness of the approach. Critically, three consensus statements emerged. Consensus statements as previously mentioned are those that do not distinguish between the factors (Van Exel & Graaf 2005) and in the present example may be thought of as views on statements that remained similar or stable for the participant regardless of the sorting condition. Of the three consensus statements one was rated as consistently low across all sorts and that was “*recognition for all that I do is important to me*”, whilst

consistently highly placed statements were *“I lead by example”* and *“I challenge others to set high expectations for themselves and meet them”*. Post analysis when reflecting with the participant on these consensus statements they stated that:

“...it’s interesting but in a way, this actually reflects who I am, it’s not about reward or accolade as in many ways that’s not sustainable however, being seen to be doing, setting standards but also living those values yourself is I think a critical part of professional pride and leadership, I guess I have always inherently done it, you know set the bar high for myself...”

The distinguishing statements for each of the four factors are shown in table 1. What is interesting is when we look at which stage of the academic journey sort loads on to each of the factors and how each of these is distinguished from the others. Reflecting on table 1 it is easy to see how this participant’s view on what was important at each stage in their academic journey changed and this was something we discussed post analysis as we explored how we might label and define the factors.

Table 8.1 Factors and distinguishing characteristics

| Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 | Factor 4 |
|---|---|--|--|
| “I demonstrate my knowledge about current curriculum” | “I establish clear goals and keep those goals in the forefront of the | “I develop interdependent relationships that promote the | “I belong to professional organizations” |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p>“I communicate and operate from strong ideals and beliefs”</p> <p>“I use data to monitor the effectiveness of my pedagogical practice”</p> <p>“I engage other Faculty staff in conversation around academic issues” “I establish strong communication networks within the Department”</p> <p>“I take initiative to do things in the Department”</p> | <p>Departments attention”</p> <p>“I adapt my leadership behaviors to the needs of the current situation”</p> | <p>University’s guiding vision”</p> <p>“I foster shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation”</p> <p>“I operate from strong ideals and beliefs about University Education”</p> | <p>“I volunteer for roles outside of my Department”</p> <p>“I demonstrate my knowledge about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices”</p> |
| <p>“I have a recognised leadership role”</p> | <p>“I have a visible professional profile</p> | | <p>“I establish strong communication</p> |

| | outside of the University” | | networks within the Department” |
|---|---|--|---|
| <p>“I utilize systems thinking and develop interdependent relationships that promote the University’s guiding vision”</p> <p>“I have a visible professional profile outside of the University”</p> <p>“I perform many roles that make me highly visible to others in the University”</p> <p>“I work collaboratively with other leaders in the</p> | <p>“I engage other Department staff in conversation around academic issues”</p> <p>“I actively challenge the status quo when necessary”</p> | <p>“I demonstrate empathy with colleagues”</p> | <p>“I am given CPD opportunities to develop professionally”</p> |

| | | | |
|--|----------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| University to inform policy and strategy” | | | |
| Start Lecturing, Full Time position, Module leader, Senior Lecturer. | Subject Leader | Deputy Head Professor (Early stage) | Professor (Established) & Management Role |

Key: Black statements Most important / occurring, Blue neutral, Red least occurring / important.

Factor 1 – Starting out

The first factor for the participant represented the start of their journey within academia, and interestingly their sorts from the commencement of teaching life through to the position of senior lecturer all share the same distinguishing features which can be summarised as; developing as an academic, establishing relationships and working on initiatives within their home department. When discussing why these statements were important there was the feeling that at this stage it was about showing you could live in the academic world and at the same time developing that professional identity and establishing personal values.

“I suppose at the start I had to prove I had the knowledge both in terms of the subject and in terms of being able and equipped to teach and that is why thinking back to those early roles where the focus was on doing the teaching job the pedagogical factors were important, I

think also during those first few years you're establishing your professional academic identity, your core professional values but also you're trying to move forward. I remember someone telling me that you need to put yourself forward, get involved in things and be part of the bigger picture – otherwise you will just be a teacher...”

When we discussed how this translated to leadership it was clear that leadership began through opportunities such as module leadership where there was a teaching team to organise and manage. Critically at this stage management was discussed and framed more in terms of managing the content rather than managing people. An interesting reflection at this point was the fact that *“no one actually told me what to do, how to manage a module or team – and that is something that we need to think about”*.

Furthermore, from the distinguishing characteristics it is obvious that during this time there were limited opportunities to develop a profile at a university level. This suggests that to help people develop there needs to be more opportunities for early career academics that allow them to not only develop their identity as a professional within their discipline but also within their university.

Factor 2 – Learning to lead

The second factor in table 1 represents the stage of the leadership journey where the participant had more responsibilities and had taken on the role of subject leader. In many academic careers this role or position represents a midway point. When reflecting on the defining characteristics it was obvious that flexibility and developing strategic direction within their subject were critical. As we discussed this they reflected on how:

“...it’s strange that these emerged as defining characteristics.... I mean in one way it is obvious but as I reflect on them, and we are discussing the whole leadership journey I am thinking how did I learn to do that. What made me do that and you know, how comfortable was I really, in being flexible, how much did I at that point actually explore what it meant to lead... and the characteristics or was I following what had gone before...”

When we think about leadership development and the lived experiences of those within academia the above quote captures critical points. Are we developing leadership skills through professional development opportunities or do academics develop a leadership style based inherently on what they know and have personally experienced?

Factor 3 – Being a leader

The third factor represented their time as a Department Deputy Head. At this point statements that were deemed most important or critical related to working towards the wider University vision, the development of community and interestingly, their professional philosophy. Reflecting on the defining characteristics they stated that:

“...When you get a role that obviously has higher recognition suddenly, there is a bigger picture to think about you know in terms not just of Department goals but how that fits into the university direction, you have a chance to be heard and to begin to shape things, but at this time as well you begin to work with others. I think, this was the point that I realised that it wasn’t just about what I was doing at a personal level but, also people from other Departments and subjects were asking my advice, I was involved much more, and people valued my opinion...”

When asked about the defining characteristic of “operating from ideals and beliefs about University Education” they discussed how this became more important and how they had at this stage spent time reflecting on and exploring their personal and professional values.

“...I think at this time, especially when I started in the role, I looked at myself possibly more critically what did a University Education mean, what should it look like, how do we facilitate that and importantly if I am leading others what do I need to do, how do I do it and what should I look like as a leader...”

During discussions around this stage of the journey the fact that “I demonstrate empathy with colleagues” emerged as a least occurring / important statement was explored.

“It’s not that I don’t empathise, I do but I think, when I was thinking about the time when I was a Deputy your focused on the challenges and moving forward.... I was and am empathetic to personal situations, but I guess as I was thinking about that statement in terms of management and working towards goals and targets...”

This shows how the statements, and a person subjective view can differ relative to the sort condition, the time point and their personal interpretation.

Factor 4 – Moving beyond the home base

When we discussed the fourth factor and the fact that this related to being a professor and having a management role the participant described how at this point leadership and the academic journey was more about what might be considered externality and a wider contribution to academia beyond the home base through engagement with subject networks, professional bodies, and other institutions. Interestingly, there was still a

focus on demonstrating knowledge but as she described this was now much more outward facing rather than internal. Subject specific and pedagogical knowledge was still important; however, it was not necessarily informing their actual teaching but was being shared with colleagues. This is exemplified through the following quote:

“...when I look at those positive distinguishing characteristics the position and point, I am at now, it's about sharing the knowledge, working beyond my home Department, taking that responsibility that leadership away from being the lecturer, I miss the actual teaching and now it's more about mentoring and helping others at both a personal level but also at a pedagogical curriculum level...”

Interestingly, during our discussions we reflected on the negative distinguishing characteristic that at this point in their journey they were not “given CPD opportunities to develop professionally”. An interesting debate ensued relative to the notion that as you progressed along the academic leadership highway it became more difficult to identify exactly what CPD was needed and when and importantly be able to prioritise your own needs.

8.7 Reflections and conclusions

In the present example Q-method allowed the participant through discussion of the emergent factors to reflect on their journey and to discuss what they felt was important to them as they moved from being the teacher or lecturer through to a position of senior management. It was obvious that moving to a position of strategic management involved several stages as we would expect but importantly as well the defining characteristics at each point show that leadership in academia brings with it challenges for the individual.

These include challenging oneself about what it means to lead, developing a leadership identity and importantly, reflecting on how leadership influences personal and professional relationships. In the present example we also see how progression in leadership and management involved a process of moving from building a reputation within their institution to building an external profile. For those with responsibility for performance reviews and development planning how often are conversations focused around “externality” and helping early career academics to foster external relationships? As an approach, Q-method could also be used in several other ways to explore leadership. For example, it would be interesting to give the present sort to a diverse group of academics to examine commonalities and differences between institutions, disciplines, genders, and career points. For those who have a mentoring role even completing the Q-sort with a mentee may give rise to opportunities for discussion and identification of ‘individualised CPD’ needs through analysis of the completed sort.

Importantly, in this chapter I have introduced and opened discussion on how we need to embrace alternative methods to build a picture of leadership journeys. Through describing Q-method, the process and output I have shown how this approach can help uncover the story behind the journey. Critically, how the process can allow exploration of individual stories at a deeper level beyond merely the reflective account. How the approach can be used for individuals to critically reflect, questioning themselves about how defining characteristics emerge and what this means and meant to and for them. Importantly, this approach may allow us to use these lived experiences in a more structured manner. For example, through helping early career colleagues structure a personal and professional development programme that is centred on their personal needs. Adopting alternative approaches, such as Q-method will allow us to build a research and evidence base of

leadership journeys and from this, frameworks and models may emerge that retain the uniqueness of experiences and open up further avenues for dialogue.

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