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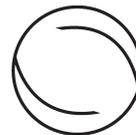
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What is This?

The Grit in the Oyster: Professionalism, Managerialism and Leaderism as Discourses of UK Public Services Modernization

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Abstract

The representation of organizational agency in UK policy discourse on public service modernization is analysed in order to disclose the legitimation of elite organizational centres and the structuring of organizational peripheries and their potential for resistance. Three discourses are identified and explored: the residual, but still potent, discourse of professionalism; the dominant discourse of managerialism; and the emergent discourse of leaderism. The emergent discourse of leaderism is shown to be linked to an imaginary of neo-bureaucratic organizing, which represents an evolution of New Public Management. As such, the analysis of leaderism, a new form of privileged agency, contributes an insight into the dynamics of public service modernization. This is developed through exploring leaderism's tension between its strong affinity with unitarist managerialism and its weaker linkages to quasi-pluralist stakeholder networks which create potentialities for new forms of active resistance.

Keywords

leaderism, legitimation, managerialism, neo-bureaucracy, professionalism, public services, resistance

> *'The grit in the oyster is leadership. We need leadership at all levels.' (Rt Hon Charles Clarke MP,
> cited in National College for School Leadership [NCSL] 2004: 2)*

Introduction

For more than 30 years the institutions and organizational forms of public services across the world have been in flux. They have been the site for highly politicized and evocative arguments and debates as to their purpose, constitution and organization (Marquand 2004). Projects of

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public service modernization, which have been the symbol and site of this contestation, have been complicated in that different formulas for, and practices of, modernization have been projected and implemented by different interests, in different contexts (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004) and been subject to change over time by different governments (Christensen and Laegreid 2007).

In such a milieu human agency – and different forms of legitimated human agency – become extremely important. This is not directly addressed in current academic literature which appears to focus predominantly on institutional (e.g. 6, Bellamy, Raab, Warren and Heeney 2007; Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker 2007) and organizational forms/processes (e.g. McNulty 2003; Morris and Farrell 2007), or views agency primarily in terms of identity (e.g. Ainsworth, Grant and Iedema 2009; Thomas and Davies 2005) or regards organizations as agents (e.g. Heinrich, Lynn and Milward 2010; Skelcher 2010). Agents in organizations, however, are necessarily both the subject and the agent of public service modernization – so the construal of legitimated organizational agency has implications for the privileging of particular subject positions and strategies and, in turn, the imaginaries of organizing.

In order to address this issue we contribute, firstly, an analysis of the different construals of organizational agency in the particular field of UK public service modernization and what this privileging of agency positions implies for organizational practice. Three broad discourses of organizational agency that have shaped ongoing debates and interventions in the modernization of UK public services since the 1980s are identified. Professionalism, managerialism and leaderism are identified as the *residual, dominant* and *emergent* metaphors and discourses, respectively, drawn upon by policy-making and implementing elites to frame and legitimate coherent policy discourses for the modernization of UK public services.

If, as the ex-UK Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Skills [DfES], Charles Clarke suggested, 'the grit in the oyster [of modernization] is leadership', then each of these modernization discourses provides very different conceptions of how such a potentially dynamic force for change, not to say transformation, is to be generated and sustained. Moreover, the emergent discourse of leaderism is seen to be associated with a series of re-imaginings of organizational design and practice – networks, collaborations, autopoietic systems and heterarchies – that have been variously discussed in terms of post-bureaucratic (Grey and Garsten 2001; Hecksher and Applegate 1994; Johnson, Wood, Brewster and Brookes 2009) or neo-bureaucratic (Farrell and Morris 2003) organizations. The analysis of leaderism offers new insights into the imaginary of this 'neo-bureaucratic' organizing.

The second contribution of this article extends this analysis of leaderism and 'neo-bureaucratic' organizing to explore the evolving nature of the legitimation of elites and its attendant consequences for central organizing elites and the nature of the potential resistance of the peripheral subjects of modernization. The deeper problematic raised by the development of leaderism – its development as a new form of privileged agency – is explored through developing the key strands of its contradictory nature: on the one hand, its strong linkage to a unitarist communitarian and managerialist imaginary of control and performance, and on the other its weaker, but still important, linkages to a quasi-pluralist imaginary of networked professional, consumer and public stakeholder co-production and involvement.

We begin by outlining the purpose of the article, followed by a discussion of the ideal-typical methodology and critical discourse analysis methods informing our article before moving on to a fuller specification of the three policy discourses of organizational agency in public service modernization.

Purpose

Across the world there has been an exponential rise in the advocacy of 'public value' or public service leadership as a means for reinvigorating state-run services (Goldfinch and Wallis 2010; Martin, Currie and Finn 2009; O'Reilly and Reed 2010; see OECD 2010 for an example). Prompted by this advocacy of public service leadership as a form of legitimated organizational agency in a variety of international contexts, this article focuses on the UK as an illuminating individual case study. The UK has been variously characterized as a peculiar case over the last 30 years ('leading edge' [Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow and Tinkler 2006], or 'hypermodern' [Pollitt 2007]), but is one with the potential for disclosing some of the driving forces and issues in public services modernization.

In order to inform the analyses and investigation of the construal of organizational agency in UK public service modernization, two complementary traditions are utilized. Firstly, in accord with the linguistic turn in social science, the role of language as a potential cause of, as well as reflection and instance of, social practice is treated as an object of enquiry (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2010; Jessop 2008) through the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Following Fairclough (2003), CDA regards discourses as representations of social life, mainly through 'text and talk', that are *inherently positioned* – that is, they represent social life from a range of positioned social actors differentially located within and advantaged by social structures. He further suggests that 'discourses include representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries – representations of how things might or could or should be' (Fairclough 2003: 207). Such 'imaginaries' or 'possible alternative worlds' also have to contain the potential to be materialized in various kinds of ways through various forms of socio-cultural production and practice. Thus, discourses combine 'software' (imaginaries) and 'hardware' (enactments) into relatively viable and sustainable genres entailing new ways of acting and interacting that can also help to inculcate new 'ways of being' – that is, new occupational, organizational and individual identities.

Secondly, and congruent with CDA's interest in the use of power in discourse, we are informed by an interest in power, its mechanisms and the utilization of these mechanisms by elites. Although discourses are not the exclusive preserve of policy-making and implementing elites, the groups that occupy the commanding and controlling positions within any domination structure – that is, an institutionalized power structure (Scott 2008) – have a clear and definite collective interest in attempting to manage the discourses through which the status quo is protected, reproduced and transformed. By serving a status quo, discourses operate as a means of the 'third face of power' (Lukes 2005). For Lukes, the 'second face of power' denotes the interface where some potential issues or interests are not sufficiently articulated in, or are excluded from, administrative agendas (where they are then subject to open contest at the 'first face of power'). In contrast, the 'third face of power' denotes the means or mechanisms by which potential subaltern issues or interests are not even articulated or are misrecognized and so do not even manifest in a form in which they can be either included or excluded.

Although there are disputes as to whether Lukes' conception of power privileges the role of the observer in determining interests (see Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips 2006), these can be overcome by taking a CDA view of the necessary construal, and potential construction, of interests.

Methodology and Methods

We utilize an ideal-typical methodology to develop our analyses. Ideal typical analysis (Parkin 1982: 28–39) differentiates aspects of empirical phenomena, by abstracting the core conceptual components of the phenomena in order to better understand their nature. In this case the

ideal-typical analysis of the modernization discourses of organizational agency focuses on their core assessment of what is wrong with the established organizational model for delivering and evaluating public services and their programme for correcting these deficiencies. Considered in this way, the ideal typical specification of these reform discourses analytically establishes an interrelation between certain social phenomena and certain ideal cultural values by accentuating the differences between them.

Three specific analyses are developed. First, a conceptual analysis is developed of the three metaphors that provide the three modernization discourses with the cultural, symbolic, and semiotic resources from which they enable the re-articulation of institutional and organizational arrangements. Second, an ideal typical analysis of the key analytical components of the three modernization discourses is developed through a critical discourse analysis of selected texts, outlined below, utilizing a series of corpus linguistic methods. In turn, the third form of analysis is a re-construction of the historical-contextual associations of these discourses via a critical reading of the policy documents and by reference to the academic literature on public services and organizational change. This third form of analysis sets out the contexts in which these discourses of organizational agency were expressed, and in doing so, highlights the alternative imaginaries of organization with which they are associated, and the attendant modes of immanent resistance which ensue.

The empirical material informing these analyses is drawn from texts produced by the UK government addressing either the entirety of the public services in the UK (by central government) or the entirety of a particular public service sector (secondary education and health) for the time period of 1997 to 2008 (owing to their availability in electronic form at the time of analysis). These texts represent the government's agenda and discourse for public service co-ordination and organization both in central government and in its two largest spending departments. Two criteria were used to select these texts – the documents either had to contain a specific formula for modernization (explicit statements of what constituted modernization), or they had to set out a framework for the planning and operations of the service or services. A total of 29 high-level government documents (9 from central government, 9 on secondary education, and 11 on health) served as the corpus of modernization discourse from the government.

These texts were chosen as they represent the stage at which macro-level societal discourses are translated into meso-level administrative discourse – that is, where social and political imaginaries are translated into administrative imaginaries and these imaginaries are constructed into programmatic enactments that stipulate the rationales and mechanisms of administrative practice. The analyses, however, are focused on the construals of organizational agency contained in these texts rather than on modernization discourse itself.

In order to develop the analysis of this corpus two key characteristics of this governmental discourse of modernization were identified. Firstly, a specification of the government's core lexicon of modernization was developed. This was achieved by compiling a list of the key wordparts used in the formulations of modernization. Secondly, we analysed the lexicon of the government's formulaic prescriptions of modernization, and three wordparts associated with organizational agency – profession*, manag* and leader* – were identified (* indicates an open-ended search, that is, all word endings associated with the focal wordpart). In order to test whether these representations of organizational agency had any resonance with other policy actors, we conducted a comparable analysis of documents produced by policy stakeholder bodies (including think tanks and management associations).

The CDA analyses performed on these documents drew upon a number of corpus linguistic techniques. Comparisons were made between the occurrences of key wordparts associated with each policy discourse in the corpus of government documents, the corpus of policy stakeholder documents, and in a national corpus of English (the British National Corpus (BNC), the largest

available corpus of general English). The analysis of the three discourses was thus centred on the three corresponding focal wordparts of profession*, manag* and leader*. Subsequently, collocational analyses were utilized. Collocations are words that occur in the close vicinity of the focal wordpart, showing regularities in co-occurrences. Analysing these collocations shows how the semiotic meanings of the focal wordparts are developed – since 'you shall know a word by the company it keeps' (Firth 1968: 179), and allowed for both the contexts of the collocations and diachronic changes to be taken into account (Baker et al. 2008). The meaningful collocations of each focal wordpart were then grouped together, according to their meanings, in inductive categories, enabling comparison between similar and dissimilar categories between discourses.

Using these forms of corpus analysis allowed for systematic, comprehensive and comparative investigation of the three discourses. There are some limitations, however, firstly, the collocation analyses were limited to the 25 most common collocations, and so the presented analyses of the discourses, though they capture the most dominant meanings, are necessarily abridged. Secondly, within the analysis of the most common collocations we focused on the most common semiotic meanings present. Where there were a series of different regular semiotic meanings, these are indicated in the analyses. The textual analysis of the policy discourses is also restricted to representations of these discourses during the time period for which documents were available.

The next section outlines the root metaphors of organizational agency before detailing the findings from the ideal-typical interpretation of the CDA analyses, and contextual associations of the three discourses.

The Three Policy Discourses of Organizational Agency in Modernization

The three root metaphors of professionalism, managerialism and leaderism can each be distilled into core ideational logics:

- Professionalism: prioritizes professional expertise and client-centred autonomy
- Managerialism: prioritizes managerial control
- Leaderism: prioritizes leaders inspiring others in collaborative endeavours

Of course, in the world of empirical practice these ideal typical representations of the root metaphors of 'professionalism', 'managerialism' and 'leaderism' in their purest, logical/conceptual form are constrained, modified, deviated from and inflected in all sorts of multifarious ways. Nevertheless, they still provide the ideational core from which alternative narratives of public service modernization can be, and have been, constructed and enacted.

The relative frequencies of the policy discourses

As noted above, the government's formulations of modernization were qualitatively analysed to produce a list of key lexical terms of modernization. The list of lexical items produced from this analysis contains 67 core items (O'Reilly and Reed 2010). The lexical item 'leader*' is one of the third most frequent terms, and the lexical terms 'manag*' and 'profession*' are both amongst the fifth most frequent terms in these formulations of modernization.

While leaderism may appear more frequently in the formulations of modernization, it is managerialism that is most frequent as an enacted discourse when the selected documents are fully analysed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Wordparts per 1,000 of leader*, manag* and profession* in key central government, education department and health department documents, May 1997 to May 2008, and comparisons to policy stakeholder documents and a natural language corpus

	Central Govt			Education Dept			Health Dept			All		
	leader*	manag*	profession*	leader*	manag*	profession*	leader*	manag*	profession*	leader*	manag*	profession*
1997	0.05			0.62	0.88	1.27	0.52	3.02	2.31	0.57	1.95	1.79
1998	0.06	1.95	0.12	3.52	3.21	5.73				1.79	2.58	2.93
1998b		2.10	0.11							0.06	2.10	0.11
1999	0.38	2.82	0.29							0.38	2.82	0.29
2000	1.70	10.10	0.08	0.81	1.63	2.47	0.55	1.33	1.45	1.13	5.72	0.77
2001				1.07	1.07	1.43	1.52	6.67	0.84	1.17	4.15	1.66
2002	1.95	1.83	0.46				0.00	0.65	1.24	1.01	1.18	1.04
2002b							0.11	1.35	1.12	0.11	1.35	1.12
2003				5.68	1.60	1.82	0.25	2.88	1.42	5.68	1.60	1.82
2004				1.83	1.17	0.99	3.72	5.33	1.82	1.04	2.03	1.21
2005	0.00	3.24	0.27	1.53	0.65	0.62	0.46	4.52	0.83	1.75	3.07	0.90
2005b										0.46	4.52	0.83
2006	2.17	3.20	0.65	0.63	0.39	0.71	0.92	4.70	0.20	1.24	2.76	0.52
2006b							0.36	3.32	0.14	0.36	3.32	0.14
2007	0.18	1.62	1.18							0.64	1.25	1.30
2008	2.83	2.54	6.22	1.09	0.87	1.41	2.38	1.89	2.74	2.61	2.22	4.48
AVERAGES#	1.04	3.27	1.04	1.86	1.27	1.83	0.98	3.24	1.28	1.25	2.66	1.31
Average in stakeholder documents										3.41	5.18	1.24
Frequency in BNC per 1,000										0.21	0.59	0.18

Note: The frequency of the wordparts in the documents was calculated using Wordsmith corpus linguistic software. The frequency of the wordparts in the British National Corpus (BNC) was calculated using Xaira corpus linguistic software. #: All averages are rounded up.

Table 1 shows that all of the three wordparts are significantly more common in the key government documents and in the policy stakeholder documents than in a comparative corpus of the English language, indicating the significant presence of these three discourses in key administrative documents.

These wordpart analyses inform our argument that managerialism is the dominant and assumed discourse – it is clearly the most common wordpart in both government and stakeholder documents. They also inform our contention that leaderism is the emergent discourse – it is accorded greater significance in the government's formulations of reform than the other two wordparts, and has also been taken up by policy stakeholder organizations, but this significance is not reflected in a comparison of the wordparts across key government documents, and it is not consistently enacted across government sectors – implying that it is a developing discourse. The analysis also partly supports our argument that professionalism is the residual discourse – it is still significantly present in all the policy documents, but is the least common in stakeholder documents. The interpretation of professionalism as the residual discourse is further informed by the collocational analyses, which show that professionalism is subjected to various forms of mitigation in the documents.

The three discourses

Table 2 summarizes the ideal-typical features of the three modernization discourses and the supporting semiotic evidence from the collocational analysis. The features and evidence for each of these discourses will be discussed in turn.

Table 2. The semiotic correlates (imaginaries and enactments) of the policy discourses of modernization in the UK 1997–2008

	Professionalism	Managerialism	Leaderism
Service ideology	Provider-driven – mitigated in documents	'Performance'-driven	Community-driven
Knowledge base	Specialized 'professionalization'	Centralized hierarchy	Distributed – dispersed leadership
Strategic focus	Custodial – 'professional leadership'	Technocratic ('performance', disciplines and domains) and consumerist	Technocratic ('performance') and custodial ('local leadership')
Essential features	Expertise	Management autonomy	Grit of leadership
Service improvement	Professionalization	Better management techniques	'Strategic leadership' by government
Regulative mode	Expert autonomy, light touch regulation and inspection – mitigated in documents by multiple collaborations, measurement and incorporation of elite professionals	Organizational control Collaboration – with government and 'system' management	Dispersed leadership – but strategic leadership by government Involvement – of users and stakeholders

Professionalism. The discourse of professionalism in public services is traditionally structurally aligned with a 'custodial view of public management' in which the autonomy of professional expertise is protected from external modes of rationalization, standardization and commodification in order to maintain standards of service provision deemed essential to the 'management of the

stable state' (Ackroyd, Hughes and Soothill 1989: 611–13). This led to the development of an almost corporatist arrangement between the State and professional groupings after the Second World War, supported by both State and professional bureaucratic organizational forms (Clarke and Newman 1997). The protection of professional autonomy, however, has led to accusations of 'professional recalcitrance' in the face of attempts to improve services (Ackroyd et al. 2007; Dent 2003; Farrell and Morris 2003; MacDonald 2006; McNulty and Ferlie 2004), an argument taken up by those promoting new public management, detailed below.

Nonetheless, recent research evidence suggests that the ideological and normative attachment of public service workers to professional occupational cultures and identities is still deeply entrenched (Dent 2003; Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker 2005; Kitchener 1999; MacDonald 2006). This doesn't mean to say that contemporary professional discourse and its cultural power to generate and sustain overarching conceptions of 'professional authority' remains undiminished by over two decades of managerialist ideology and practice. Indeed, all sorts of professional adaptations to and compromises with new managerialism/new public management (NPM) have been necessary over this period and these 're-negotiations of negotiated order' have undoubtedly weakened the power, authority and status of professionals working within UK public services (Farrell and Morris 2003; Reed 2007a). One documented example of this is the development of 'clinical governance' within health in the UK, which is argued to be "a peculiar *hybrid*, combining in different institutional forms a mixture of rationalities and strategies designed to establish and codify explicit clinical standards and to achieve a rigorous method of performance evaluation through the co-optation of medical professionals in ways which give some semblance of delegated autonomy" (Flynn 2004: 25). Flynn, however, primarily considers clinical governance at an organizational level, whereas, as will be noted later, recent systems of clinical co-ordination in the UK are multi- and inter-organizational – which implies that the issue of the co-optation and coordination of professionals requires the consideration of the role of professionals in networks, which is highlighted in the discourse of leaderism.

Despite these encroachments on, and incorporations of, professional authority, however, 'professional qua professional autonomy continues to influence actively the new organizational arrangements' (Dent 2003: 123) and to play a powerful strategic role in how macro-level institutional change and micro-level workplace change are discursively constructed/legitimated and structurally generated/reproduced. Despite all the best discursive, ideological and organizational efforts of NPM-generated and supported modernization reforms to enrol public service professionals within 'the managerial state' (Clarke and Newman 1997), the latter remain committed to occupational cultures and identities that reject most of the normative and institutional innovations associated with modernizing managerialism.

Within the empirical CDA material of the policy discourse of professionalism the provider-driven ideology of professionalism was subjected to a number of mitigations. It was made subject to 'regulation' (in the Health documents), for example:

> Our new approach to accountability will be through openness on the quality of outcomes achieved for patients. Professional regulation has ensured that practitioners are accountable to their individual patients during their episode of care. By focusing on the overall outcome, it means that the new accountability is for the whole patient pathway – so clinicians must be partners as well as practitioners. (Department of Health [DoH] 2008: 63)

Professional work was also measured in terms of 'performance' in central government documents, and via the discussion of 'standards' in three of the sets of documents – where standards variously referred both to professionals producing services to the standard stipulated by government, but also

adhering to and contributing to the standards of their own profession. Professionals were also allotted a role in exerting self-control in central government documents ('The Government will now expect professionals themselves to take the lead in addressing underperformance and to ensure they have the skills necessary to meet people's needs and aspirations' [Cabinet Office 2008: 34]), including the active consideration, by central government, of an expansion of the numbers and types of budget-holding professionals.

Professional 'bodies' and 'groups' were regularly embroiled in 'partnership' (for example: 'The Taskforce [for involving frontline staff in healthcare planning] will involve NHS staff, unions, professional bodies, employers and others' [DoH 1997: 72]). Professionals in general were also represented as being involved in collaborative 'work', or collaboratively 'working' with others – including 'government', other professionals and 'users' – all signaling a process of mutual regulation. These various forms of collaboration and measurement all indicate an encroachment into the light touch regulation and inspection of the bureau-professional state.

The work of professionals was also represented as requiring improvement – it was adjectivized with a series of improvement qualifiers – 'new', 'greater', 'high', 'higher', 'more' ('clinical uncertainty requires … greater professional judgement as to what is the right course of action for an individual patient' [DoH 2008: 29]) – and was thus seen as one means of improving public services. Elite 'lead' professionals and the 'best' professionals, however, were allotted special roles: 'providing space for the best professionals to manage and run their own services' (Cabinet Office 2008: 33). There was, therefore, an attempt to co-opt elite professionals to the government's project of modernization. There was also, on other occasions, an acceptance of the need for specialized professional expertise, for example, in terms of mandatory qualifications, indicating an acknowledgement and accommodation of the specialized knowledge base of professionals.

Managerialism.   Since the early to mid 1980s, debate over public services modernization in the UK has been dominated by a managerialist policy discourse that has indelibly shaped the ideological terrain on which various reform programmes and practices have been enacted and inculcated. As such, managerialism has been subjected to intensive analytical scrutiny and extensive historical research (Barley and Kunda 1992; Bendix 1974; Parker 2002; Reed and Anthony 1992), which has revealed the highly protean and adaptable nature of managerialism as it has evolved and mutated through a series of complex discursive iterations and combinations geared to changing material conditions and cultural contexts from the late 19th/early 20th century onwards.

In the context of ongoing debate over UK public services reform over the last three decades, the core analytical elements and ideological encrustations associated with what has come to be called 'new managerialism' have been most clearly enunciated and enacted through 'NPM' (Clarke and Newman 1997; Du Gay 2005; Hood 1991; Kirkpatrick and Martinez-Lucio 1995; Pollitt 1993; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; Reed 2007b; Reed and Anthony 2003) which took some considerable time and effort to establish itself as the dominant discursive framework (Ferlie and Fitzgerald 2002; Massey and Pyper 2005). NPM emerged out of a critique of pre-existing corporatist-style mechanisms, and, analytically, has a number of core conceptual components around which a more elaborate reform agenda and extensive reform strategy have been incrementally and pragmatically developed. These core analytical elements refer, primarily, to the mechanisms through which public services are to be provided, the resources which such forms of provision require, and the metrics through which they are to be audited and assessed. Such matters are regarded, pre-eminently, as issues of practical concern and operational significance.

Indeed, the eclectic mix of 'administrative argument' and 'administrative philosophy' (Flynn 2001; Hood 1991; Massey and Pyper 2005) that characterized the embryonic stages of NPM's

initial development as an emergent policy discourse and narrative storyline in the UK, Australia and New Zealand in the early-to-mid 1980s was largely focused on 'nuts and bolts' issues relating, primarily, to organizational design and managerial control – particularly over public expenditure on public services. However, this initial 'technical' focus soon escalated into a much more elaborate and inclusive set of doctrines such as neo-liberalist political theory, public choice theory, and transactions-cost economics (Miller and Rose 2008). By the early 1990s these diverse intellectual, administrative and managerial critiques of established policy doctrines and organizational practices, such as Osborne and Gaebler's *Re-inventing Government* (1992), began to penetrate and reshape policy thinking within the 'commanding heights' of central government, such as the UK's Treasury. Consequently, the complex interrelations between 'markets, managers and metrics' were seen to play an increasingly influential role in the formulation and promulgation of NPM doctrine (Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin 2000; Dawson and Dargie 2002).

The NPM imaginary envisaged a paradigm shift – if effective competition between service providers, for continued central government funding and support, was to become the guiding principle of public service modernization, then a whole series of interrelated reforms would be required. These related not only to funding allocation systems, the generation and utilization of performance data and the extended use of 'consumers' as appraisers of service performance but also, even more crucially, the removal of structural obstacles and the eradication of cultural and ideological barriers that stood in the way of progressive modernization. Thus, the containment and dilution of established professional power and authority in public service specification and delivery emerged as the major priority for a fully-fledged NPM discourse insofar as professionalism was identified as a fundamental drag on the technical and organizational changes – market-based competition, metrics-based performance measurement, and managerial-based control systems – on which service modernization depended (Ackroyd et al. 1989; Farrell and Morris 2003; Flynn 1999). As Clarke and Newman suggest (1997: 50–55), by the early 1990s the 'core discourse' of NPM, increasingly influenced by neo-liberal radicalism and 'transformational managerialism', had become strategically directed to remaking the organizational forms through which UK public services were provided around the managerial prerogative of 'the right to manage'. This was to be achieved through a combination of symbolic and linguistic innovations whereby the professional 'vested interests' that opposed such an 'organizational remaking' were either to be co-opted within the new discursive imaginaries that NPM promulgated or, if they still resisted, were to be subject to a new control regime in which expert autonomy and power would be severely curtailed. A new policy narrative of 'managerial modernization' was in the process of being enacted that would combine the effective streamlining and concentration of strategic control with the decentralization of operational control within organizational hybrids that placed professionals 'on tap' rather than 'on top'.

Fergusson (2000) insists that managerialism is far from monolithic in ideological and cultural terms – it comes in a range of discursive forms – and it is open to resistance and challenge in terms of its narrow instrumental rationality and even its actual operational efficiency and utility. But he maintains that the 'technical' aspects of NPM – that is, the 'organizational re-tooling' that it promoted in areas such as performance measurement and evaluation – necessarily brought new forms of control into the previously professionally-dominated cultures of welfare institutions. By the late 1990s modernizing managerialism had 'achieved discursive supremacy within a hybridized system where market processes continue alongside the new and extended control processes of government' (Fergusson 2000: 213).

The use of management as a mechanism of control is evident within the empirical CDA material of the government's discourse of managerialism where the most common collocation of manag* in nearly all of the sets of government documents is 'performance':

> Performance management – The essential building blocks. Effective performance management is essential for a successful organization. Without the rigour that performance management provides, public services can (and do) lose sight of their objectives, accept mediocrity and fail to serve the customer. (The Treasury 2000: 6)

Over time there was a self-conscious representation of performance management being mitigated to avoid undesirable consequences, but it remained as a baseline mechanism for coordinating the public services:

> Although the key elements of top down performance management have evolved considerably in recent years, they will not disappear. … Smarter targets and more refined inspection strategies promise the benefits of top down systems with less distortion of the systems they regulate and a lower overall cost. Top down measures will remain an integral part of the UK Government's approach to performance management. They have a continuing role alongside horizontal pressures (of good commissioning, competition and contestability), bottom up pressures (of choice and voice) and measures to build the capacity and capability of public services and public service workers. However, where these other pressures increase, there will be much more scope to reduce the role of top down performance management. (Strategy Unit 2006: 46)

A further aspect of the desire for control via management is the preponderance of collocations that denote a hierarchy – 'senior' ('expert support for senior managers and other school staff' [DfES 2003]), 'heads', 'top', and 'down' (as above), which also reflects the centralization of authority and knowledge by managers.

Hierarchy is also an issue in the complex central government collocation of 'government' with managerialism. Government is assigned a role in the management of public services, but occasionally this is alleviated by the representation that government should not micro-manage. Government is also represented as a partner to managers ('government and top managers'), indicating a degree of regulation of managerialism. Furthermore, government itself is represented as the subject for managerial improvement ('This strategy will require coordinated management across Government' [The Treasury 1998]).

The importance of managerialism is also evident via the number and variety of disciplines of management that commonly occur - 'strategic', 'information', 'annually' 'expenditure' ('annually managed expenditure'), 'risk', 'costs', and 'change' ('managing change'). These generic practices of management are joined by sector-specific domains of management – 'civil' in central government documents ('civil service management board'); 'clinical', 'case', 'conditions'; 'health', 'care', and 'healthcare' in the health documents; and of 'behaviour' in the education documents ('behaviour management'). These are strong indicators of the technocratic and control-focused character of managerialism. Furthermore, they also indicate that service improvement, from the point of view of managerialism, entails the application and evolution of these techniques and controls.

The collocation of 'system' (all documents) also has especial relevance. It occurs partly in terms of discussions of the 'performance management system' but also in terms of an expanded conceptualization of public services as a 'system' that can be managed ('setting out roles and levers for system management and regulation' [DoH 2006: 3]). The concept of a system marks a disjuncture with the NPM imaginary of the market – yet the self-defeating idea of managing or regulating a complex system points to a limitation of the imaginary of controlling managerialism.

Leaderism. Leaderism (O'Reilly and Reed 2010) is an emergent modernizing discourse that hybridizes selected discursive elements drawn from both managerialism and professionalism to form a distinctive change narrative that focuses on aspects of public services reframing and

restructuring that remain somewhat muted and underdeveloped within the change narratives articulated by the dominant and residual modernization discourses. While modernizing discourses focused around various conceptions of leadership are well-established within the policy frameworks and change narratives that have characterized debates about UK public services reform since the early/mid-1980s (Blackler 2006; Deem, Hillyard and Reed 2007; Miller and Rose 2008; Newman 2001, 2005a), they have failed to crystallize into a penetrating critique of the status quo and a coherent vision of how the latter may be radically reformed. Thus, as an emergent modernizing discourse, leaderism lacks the discursive coherence and continuity associated with managerialism and professionalism. But it makes up for these relative weaknesses by articulating a strategic re-imagining and re-enacting of UK public services that seems visionary and innovative in comparison to the established discursive regimes.

Viewed in ideal typical terms – that is, as a pure heuristic analytical model – the policy discourse of leaderism has a number of conceptual elements that are logically interrelated to form an identifiable discursive formation articulating and advocating a distinctive change narrative for UK public services. First and foremost, it critiques and rejects the implicit 'theory of leadership' promoted by NPM – that is, a conception of leadership restricted to the formalized technical expertise necessarily embedded in the managerial function and the administrative technocrats who perform that function. In stark contrast to this, largely technocratic, re-active and pragmatic conception of leadership, as embodied in the 'body corporate' of management, leaderism identifies and advocates a much more charismatic, pro-active and visionary conception of leadership as a generic cultural resource and process to be mobilized by and diffused through a multiplicity of stakeholder agents. This is closely associated with culturally-based theories of 'transformational leadership' that became incrementally aligned with NPM in its later manifestations as it began to wean itself off its earlier dependency on bureaucratic models of governance and to experiment with post-bureaucratic, network (Newman 2005b) or system forms. But leaderism gives these conceptions of transformational leadership and network or system governance a new and dramatic discursive twist insofar as it reworks them within a change narrative that empowers service users or consumers in much more radical and fundamental ways than ever envisaged under more mainstream conceptions of managerialism or professionalism.

This suggests a second crucial discursive component of leaderism – its advocacy of a form of 'democratic or militant consumerism' in which the service user becomes, at a minimum, an equal partner in the co-production of service provision alongside service managers and professionals or, more fundamentally, the major interest and reference point that should drive the process of service reform and the terms on which that process should be evaluated and made accountable (Bovaird 2007; Clarke, Newman, Smith, Vidler and Westmarland 2007; Kirkpatrick and Martinez-Lucio 1995; Miller 2005; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). If, at the ideological heart and discursive core of new managerialism/NPM 'lies a faith in *generic* management skills, applicable across a range of public and private sector organizations' (Exworthy and Halford 1999: 133, emphasis in original), at the ideological heart/discursive core of leaderism lies a faith in *generic* leadership resources, processes and skills geared to the satisfaction of citizen-consumer values and needs as the ultimate arbiter of service performance. Of course, in the real world of service practice and delivery the articulation and promotion of service consumers' values and interests are likely to be much more complicated and difficult to achieve; as a result, all sorts of 'proxy consumers and users' have had to be constructed from 'internal markets' (Walsh 1995) to various audit and inspection regimes or other 'rituals of verification' (Power 1997) or 'performing performances' (Clarke 2005) to an ever-growing range of 'virtual consumers' such as 'best value inspectors' in local government (Miller 2005). Nevertheless, the inevitable 'messy compromises' entailed in real world organizational

practice does not detract from the force of the argument that, at its discursive core, leaderism projects and protects the values and interests of an idealized 'service user/consumer' that it has inherited from the neo-liberal ideological elements accompanying new managerialism/NPM. This contextual change from a concern with simple performance, targets or consumer wishes is further indicated in the evolution of policy evaluation from a managerial concern with inputs and outputs to broader concerns with the co-ordination of multiple services (Davies 2009; Pollitt 2003) and the social outcomes of policy (Strategy Unit 2006).

Thirdly, however, the policy discourse of leaderism – in its ideal typical form – does something more ideologically and politically innovative to 'militant consumerism' in its orthodox neo-liberal/ new managerialist form – it gives it a grass roots, active participatory twist in which consumerist interests are re-aligned with strongly expressed citizenship values such as involvement, accountability, self-governance and deliberative democracy (Clarke et al. 2007; Fischer 2003; Newman 2001; Pestoff 2009), which are emblematic of a communitarian turn in UK public services (Bevir and O'Brien 2001; Brooks 2000; Foley and Martin 2000). In this respect, leaderism provides one of the contemporary discursive forms through which welfare subjects might be remade through a new imaginary that defines them as a widely differentiated social, economic, racial, gender and ethnic mix worthy of inclusion in key decision-making arenas at both strategic and local levels (Newman 2001: 143–60). Dispersed leadership thereby becomes the major organizational agency – potentially including an extremely wide range of actors from elite policy-makers to grassroots service users associations – through which public services reform programmes are to be designed, implemented and renewed.

Within the empirical CDA material, 'performance' is not nearly as strongly collocated with leader* as it is to manag* – only occurring frequently in central government documents ('There is evidence of a strong correlation between effective leadership and organizational performance' [Strategy Unit 2006: 82]). This more subdued desire for performance in the context of leaderism is joined by an innovative form of custodial stewardship. While professionalism is traditionally associated with a custodial relationship with individual 'clients' (starkly absent from the policy discourse of professionalism), leadership has a custodial relationship with the 'local' – a communitarian collective. In the context of leaderism, 'local' is most commonly collocated as 'local leadership' or 'local leaders' – signifying the leadership of a locality – an instance of the communitarian turn in UK public services. Furthermore, the related theme of democratic participation in public services comes through in the health documents through the collocation of 'involvement' signifying either the leadership of, or leadership and the, 'involvement' of – staff, professionals, or the public in the health service.

The dispersal of leadership was indicated in a number of ways – 'teams' in the secondary education documents almost exclusively referred to senior leadership teams, indicating a degree of collective leadership, but also indicating an exclusivity to leadership. Similarly, the collocation of 'role' in the health documents assigned leadership roles to a variety of actors –expert nurses, local health organizations, commissioners; as well as there being discussions of the need for an expanded role for clinical leadership. References to the 'national leadership network' in the health documents were an example where dispersed leadership was institutionalized in a network.

There were also a number of collocations along the theme of service improvement that were significantly more common to leaderism than the other discourses – 'improve', 'excellent', and 'strong', the latter two in particular were very forceful adjectival collocations – 'strong leaders' and 'excellent leadership' – indicating that leadership was afforded especial importance – its role as the 'grit' in the oyster of service modernization.

The government itself was a key collocation of leader*, partly related to the representation of leadership being displayed by government: 'Providing strong *strategic leadership* from central

government to ensure that direct intervention is more sharply concentrated on underperforming organizations' (Cabinet Office 2008: 11, emphasis in original). Furthermore, the collocation of 'strategic leadership' almost exclusively allots the role of setting strategy to government and government departments, and only occasionally to sub-national actors – the government, therefore, was allotted a particular superordinate form of leadership. In this way, although the discourse of leaderism includes instances signifying the dispersal of leadership, the insertion of the future-oriented (strategic) direction of elite (government) leadership legitimates the unitarist superordinate prerogative of the government elite. Here, Lukes' third face of power is manifest – leaderism mystifies the superordinate prerogative afforded to elites, while incorporating other agents through quasi-pluralist networks, and provides an imaginary that identifies the interests of other agents with those of the elite.

Table 3. The contextual correlates of the policy discourses of modernization in the UK 1997–2008

	Professionalism	Managerialism	Leaderism
Government documents	–	*Leadership in context of managerialism:* 'Leadership and management' (all documents)	*Management in context of leaderism:* 'Leadership and management' (all documents)
	Leadership in context of professionalism: Professional leadership (secondary education documents, all documents)	–	*Professional in context of leaderism:* Professional development for leaders, occasionally professional leadership (secondary education documents). Leadership of professional practice – 'clinical' leadership/ leadership of 'teaching' in respective service documents.
Stakeholder documents	*Management in context of professionalism:* Management of professionals Collaboration between 'managers' and professionals	–	*Management in context of leaderism:* 'management and leadership'
	Leadership in context of professionalism: Professional leadership	–	–

While the above presentation discusses the discourses separately, as Table 3 indicates, the three discourses were inter-related in the documents. The wordpart leader* occurred in the context of the discourse of professionalism in the government documents – relating to discussions of professional leadership. There were also representations of the leadership of professional practice within the discourse of leaderism – for example, 'clinical leadership' or the 'leadership of teaching' in the departmental documents. These mutual inter-connections indicate a re-working of the custodial role of professionals.

There was a much stronger relationship, however, between managerialism and leaderism. The coupling of leadership and management occurs in all sets of government documents, both in the context of managerialism and in the context of leaderism, indicating that they are a standardized relational pair in government documents, that is, a set of two categories that are tied together so that

the activation of one member of the pair also invokes the other (Collet 2009: 459). In government documents, therefore, the meanings of leadership and management are mutually informing.

Ramifications for Practice and Resistance

By pointing to the conflicts and tensions between these discourses of organizational agency these analyses raise the larger issue of the legitimation of the modernization of the public services by the UK policy elite. These differences in logics of legitimation and their associated organizational imaginaries are not without importance:

> every such system [of domination] attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy. But according to the kind of legitimacy which is claimed, the type of obedience, the kind of administrative staff developed to guarantee it, and the mode of exercising authority, will all differ fundamentally. Equally fundamental is the variation in effect. (Weber 1978: 213)

The differential effects of these discourses for the organizational mobilization of bias (Schattschneider 1960) can be inferred along Weber's outline. Due to space considerations we will focus on the ramifications of the emergent discourse of leaderism in contrast to professionalism and managerialism. We will also extend Weber's issue of the variation of effect, in terms of the modes of potential immanent resistance that these differing modes of legitimation entail.

Ideal-typical leaderism presupposes communal sacrifice and obedience (Grint 2010; Wallis and Dollery 1997) – as the future-oriented direction of the community is valourized as having normative importance in and of itself. This is a more thoroughgoing expectation of obedience than the deference expected by the professional, or the contractual authority of the manager. The development of leaders, and leadership, therefore, requires a more integral focus on the character of leaders – on their intellectual, affective and moral selves as well as on their behavioural competencies (Carroll and Levy 2010; Day and Harrison 2007; Richards 2008), which has been reflected in the content of growing leadership development provision in the public services in the UK, as well as many other countries (Luckcock 2007; Wallace, O'Reilly, Morris and Deem 2011).

The practice of expressing leadership authority, however, is not straightforward – it has been observed that those performing leadership negotiate a tension between pragmatic methods of instrumental influence and their ideological aims (Vangen and Huxham 2003). The authority of leaders is also more tenuous than that of credentialized professionalism or the positional leverage of managerialism – in that leaders require to be 'authorized' by the systems in which they operate if they are to be effective (James, Connolly, Dunning and Elliott 2007) and if initiative is to 'circulate' (Buchanan, Addicott, Fitzgerald, Ferlie and Baeza 2007). For example, Martin et al. (2009) found that the leadership fora of networks overlapped and conflicted with hierarchies and markets, so that while they created potential spaces for change, these constraints needed to be negotiated. These negotiations of network practice also involve what Huxham and Vangen (2000) call 'leadership media' – the structures, processes and participants that enable authority to be expressed. This has included the development of what can be termed 'leadership technologies' – means of negotiating and displaying consensus such as a shared vision or ethos or the visual display of joint sense-making (Conklin 2006).

As a corollary to the different modes of the expression of authority, the potential forms of active immanent resistance to the ideal-type of leaderism also differ from those that are inherent in professionalism and managerialism. Immanent resistance to professional bureaucracy is possible through the use of alternative expertise or procedures which have a basis within the legitimated rationality of bureaucratic organization, while immanent resistance to managerialism is possible

through the application of superior technique, disputations over utility, or disputations over managerial authority. In contrast, immanent resistance to leaderism is possible via the expression of alternative communal goals, via the disruption of communal bonds, or the withholding of authorization of those seeking to perform leadership. Davies (2009), for example, provides an account of how the ethos of consensual network practice served to displace value conflicts, which suggests that the communal tendencies of leaderism may create surface consensus, but that differences in values and interests continue to be evident at other levels, which, however, fail to gain access to high-level administrative agendas: Lukes' third face of power in practice.

Discussion

The discourse of managerialism has clearly been both the dominant and the assumed policy discourse of public service modernization. The managerialist concern with performance is, at the current moment, beyond question for policy elites, reinforcing the argument that NPM is in many ways a taken-for-granted imaginary for organizational practice (Ferlie and Fitzgerald 2002). The rise of leaderism, however, is in some way a reflection of some dystopian imaginaries of public service organization that have challenged the idea that NPM provides a comprehensive account of how public services should be understood, including a growing dissatisfaction with the impact of NPM on effectiveness and efficiency – 'bureaucratic remoteness', 'audit culture', 'market complexities', 'accountability crises', 'performance game-playing' and 'consumer fetishism' (Miller 2005), and the sense that 'the cult of the omnipotent manager' (Carroll and Levy 2008) may be looking increasingly threadbare and hollow.

As noted, the developing stresses on user participation, social outcomes, networks, systems and service co-production all point to a post-NPM era, where managerialism may still be assumed, but is not sufficient. At the moment, the needed 'grit' has been supplied by the development of management's relational partner of leadership – covering over the tensions in the attempted rational management of multiple inter-related stakeholder interests with an assumed unitarist communitarianism. Leaderism, thus, displays some contradictory tensions – on the one hand its strong linkage to unitarist managerialism, on the other to quasi-pluralist stakeholder networks.

As a unitarist discourse, leaderism plays a strategic ideological role in redefining the problem of UK public services as one of 'missing agency'; that is, as a condition of organizational stasis generated by the paucity of appropriate modes of collective agency that will radically transform the cultural norms and institutional means through which such services are justified and delivered. It is an evolving discourse that legitimates, interprets and mediates new organizational forms in public services that reject conventional corporate-based mechanisms in favour of network-based configurations that will revivify and revive 'citizens/consumers' engagement with the services that they, however indirectly, legislate and pay for. Yet, it is promoted by a complex bloc of political, administrative and professional elites that are striving to fabricate a new 'welfare settlement' which gives political primacy to 'post-bureaucratic' organizational forms and mechanisms thought necessary to drive forward a long-term programme of public services reform empowering users and consumers rather than providers and producers. As such, it is another illustration of the complex interpenetration of Lukes' (2005) 'second and third face of power' insofar as leaderism provides dominant elites with a discursive imaginary that frames the contemporary ideological context through which certain public service reforms can be legitimated both as being functionally necessary and as advantageous to the 'public good'.

On the other hand, although leaderism is clearly used as an evolution of managerialism, there is the potential, at least, that it may not be wedded to managerialism in the future. As an emergent

modernizing discourse, leaderism has the potential to reconstitute legitimacy and accountability in ways that align it with emerging, network-based, forms of neo-bureaucratic service organization and governance that seem to resonate with increasing ideological force in professional circles – that is, forms that reject the NPM-based 'markets, managers and metrics' mantra in favour of heterarchical co-produced services in which philosophies and practices of self-organization and management are much more pronounced. Public service professionals may be much more receptive to discourses of 'democratic or citizen consumerism' than many suppose (Clarke et al. 2007; McDonald, Harrison and Checkland 2008). This may be less surprising when we remember that they have always been quite adept at adapting to, in some cases even embracing, market-led reforms in which the 'citizen consumer' plays an increasingly important role in demanding 'personalized services' that cannot be simply 'bought off the shelf' according to a bureaucratically predetermined checklist (Kitchener 1999; McNulty, Whittington, Whipp and Kitchener 1994).

The degree to which the nascent modernizing discourse of leaderism can flourish under the incessant unitarist 'top down' political and economic pressure on service professionals and managers exerted by policy-making elites (Blackler 2006), on the one hand, and the plural 'bottom-up' social pressures exerted by an increasingly vociferous and disaffected set of stakeholder user and employee representative groups, on the other, is a moot point. This tension points to why the problematic of the rise of leaderism is of interest. Leaderism is a strategic discourse and practice that aids in the outflanking of recalcitrant or resistant forces through its focus on community and the future. Nonetheless, by incorporating non-elites and external social dynamics such as informal networks into its unitarist logic, it internalizes the tensions and conflicts between these interests, but does so by at least part-authorizing these interests. With this internalizing of disparate interests, there is an increased potential for future fractures between central organizational and political elites and incorporated peripheral agents who, by virtue of their past incorporation, are potentially more powerful both in terms of their relative positioning and in terms of the shadow of their past authorization. If such fracturing were to occur, it may be that the grit of modernization may serve to be an altogether more schismatic catalyst than a transformational one.

In conclusion, the focus on discourses of organizational agency, and in particular on the emergent policy discourse of leaderism, indicates three important aspects in the evolution of public sector organization during the period of analysis. Firstly, the euphemistic use of the language of leadership to bolster and extend managerialist trends in public service co-ordination. Secondly, the movement beyond some of the paradigmatic elements of NPM to embrace new imaginaries of organizational practice and co-ordination – networks, systems, co-production, participation and social outcomes. Thirdly, it points to the re-negotiations of legitimacy, and the exercise of leadership authority – through the development of leadership affectivity, processes and technologies; and the attendant spaces for potential resistance – the disruption or withholding of communal assent.

These findings raise interesting issues for future theory and research – such as the relationships between meso-level institutional discourses, macro-level societal discourses and micro-level organizational discursive practice – both in the UK and in other national and international contexts, as well as the iterative forms of resistance to these modifications in organizational legitimation. They also raise the question of the durability of the discourse of leaderism and the imaginary of neo-bureaucracy in a situation constructed as fiscal crisis and apparent moves back, in the UK at least, both to market and professional forces.

Indeed, our analyses lend support to the view that contemporary organizational resistance is becoming more innovative and 'creative' insofar as the emergent forms that it is taking demonstrate more subtle and flexible ways of subverting dominant reform ideologies and the organizational agencies through which they are mobilized (Courpasson and Dany 2009). Our research on

leaderism illustrates the complex interpenetration of processes of organizational transformation and localized modes of resistance that creatively respond to the institutionalized power relations within which organizational agency is necessarily embedded. By combining surface level compliance with 'ideological arguments from above' (Courpasson and Dany 2009: 337) with new forms of engagement on the part of key stakeholder groups – such as public service professionals – our analysis of the political dynamics of leaderism exemplifies the emerging research focus on the creative and innovative modes of action that will shape the long-term prospects for public service modernization.

Acknowledgements

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