

Whatever happened to educational management? The case for reinstatement

Ian Craig 

UCL Institute of Education, London, UK

Management in Education
2021, Vol. 35(1) 52–57
© 2020 British Educational Leadership,
Management & Administration Society
(BELMAS)



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0892020620962813
journals.sagepub.com/home/mie



Abstract

‘Leadership’ has now become one of the most over-used terms in school organisation, so much so that it is now difficult to find mentions of ‘management’ and ‘administration’ in school organisation literature. Papers published in *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership* and *Management in Education* over the last few years confirm this view. This article argues that although there is a significant overlap between them, leadership, management and administration are different from each other and this should be recognised when talking and writing about school organisation and development, with not all three being subsumed under the banner of ‘leadership’. In particular, the article argues for the re-establishment of management as a major element in the development and training of heads and prospective heads of schools and colleges.

Keywords

administration, headship, leadership, management, school organisation

Introduction

In *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership (EMAL)* in 2008, its editor, Tony Bush (2008: 272) commented that: ‘My review of papers in this journal in 1988 revealed only one mention of leadership, at the end of an overview paper by Tim Brighouse’.

In the years that have followed, ‘leadership’ has become one of the most used terms in school organisation literature, so much so that it is now difficult to find mentions of ‘management’ and ‘administration’ anywhere. In his article, Bush suggested that this focus was given a particular boost by New Labour’s emphasis on schools having more responsibility for their own futures, a new focus on head teacher training, and in particular the establishment in 2000 of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL).

The term leadership is now dominant with, it seems, everybody in education aspiring to be a leader, even in the classroom. Simply being ‘managers’ or even ‘teachers’ is not enough. Principles of rational behaviour suggest that people will usually attempt to maximise their own power and prestige, so it is no wonder that the aspiration to be called a ‘leader’ is so alluring.

Leadership was a well-used term in the business world in the 1960s, although not common in the public sector, where the term ‘administration’ dominated. The 20th century had seen a number of periods when ‘leadership’ was in vogue in business and others when ‘management’ was favoured. In the 1970s, managers again took the place of leaders (Czarniawka-Joerges and Wolff, 1991).

However, a sample over a recent 2-year period – September 2018: 46(5)–July 2020: 47(4) – of the article titles

in *EMAL* – (note that this is a journal theoretically devoted to *Management and Administration and Leadership*), the same journal that Bush commented on in 1988, showed the following:

○ Leadership/leaders	mentioned 61 times
○ Management/managers	mentioned 12 times
○ Administration/Administrators	mentioned 1 time

Of the 61 ‘leadership’ articles, the content of many is at least in part ‘management’ focused and not just about ‘leadership’ in the strict meaning of the term.

In *EMAL*’s sister publication *Management in Education (MiE)* – again note the word ‘management’ in the title), over a similar period (October 2018: 32(4)–July 2020: 34(3)), words in the titles of the articles reflected a similar, if not greater bias:

○ Leadership/leaders	mentioned 16 times
○ Management/managers	mentioned 2 times
○ Administration/Administrators	mentioned 0 times

Leadership has now obviously clearly taken the place of management in organisational literature, certainly within education.

Corresponding author:

Ian Craig, UCL Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL, UK.

E-mail: silverdene@talktalk.net

Administration, management and leadership do not have the same meaning, but they do share many of the same characteristics. However, to paraphrase Gosling and Mintzberg (2003), most educators have become so enamoured of 'leadership' that 'management' and 'administration' have been pushed into the background.

So, apart from the obvious appeal of the term 'leader', how did this change of emphasis come about? First, it reflected a general trend within all public sector organisations, to move decision-making and accountability as close as possible to the 'customer' and certainly to the level of the individual institution, in accordance with in-vogue 'neoliberal' and 'New Public Management' (NPM) philosophies (Ball, 2012; Hill and Kumar, 2009). In education, we perhaps took on the word in a far more substantial way when we began calling head teachers and principals 'school and college leaders' and even their deputies and department heads 'middle leaders'.

Defining leadership, management and administration

What is leadership?

Raelin (2016: 131) suggests that: 'the concept and practice of leadership have been overused and oversold to such an extent that the meaning of leadership is no longer conceptually intact, while its practice has become minimally suspect'.

There are probably as many definitions of leadership in education as there are people who use the term.

Bush and Glover (2003: 10) offer the following definition:

Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. It involves inspiring and supporting others towards the achievement of a vision for the school which is based on clear personal and professional values.

Bush (2008: 276) tells us that leadership is about three things – influence, values and vision, and Cuban (1998: 193) says that leaders must:

- Imagine what the organization can become: define a mission and set goals that embody that vision.
- Motivate and harness followers' energies toward achieving goals.
- Link the mission to organizational routines.
- Promote and protect certain values that give an organization a distinctive character.
- Produce desired outcomes.

Leaders are therefore people who shape goals, motivations and actions of others, and they do this through influence, setting missions, visions and values.

Many writers over the past 20 years, for example, Harris (2005, 2013), have suggested that educational leadership is not the sole province of the head of the school/college. Any member of staff can lead in some circumstances. I agree with that view. However, most school and college heads/

principals work within legislative and structural frameworks and are therefore constrained in their 'leadership' abilities. In order to set direction, a 'leader' needs to be in control of the situation. At what point are these constraints such that 'leadership' cannot take place? Can a school principal within an English Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) or a tight municipal or Board structure be a true leader, or does that role fall to the MAT CEO or a designated senior officer outside the school or college? This issue is addressed helpfully by Gibson (2016) in an article questioning whether Academy school principals are 'autonomous leaders or sponsor conduits?' In terms of leadership, how do we define an 'organisation'? Can heads of departments be expected to 'lead' in, for example, the creation of missions, visions and values, or is that a recipe for organisational chaos?

Even writers, such as Laloux (2014), a clear advocate of distributed decision-making in organisations, suggest that even in organisations that have tried to dispense with traditional pyramid structures, there are times when one person or a small group of people have to make key decisions. As it is the head/principal/CEO who is usually held accountable in most educational jurisdictions, either to a Board or to government for the delivery of targets, it is a very relaxed or foolish one who does not remain in ultimate control of that process. One could say that not to do so shows a lack of leadership.

Without strong structures to support it, leadership can be dangerous. Zaleznic (1977: 201) tells us that many 'leaders' show little interest in delivery and 'sometimes react to mundane work as to an affliction', and Fullan (1992: 19) says that 'vision (a central "function" of leadership) can blind leaders in a number of ways' when they feel they must manipulate teachers and the school culture to conform to it.

In addition, for those in the 'middle' of a school or college who are encouraged in the belief that distributed structures will allow them to exercise their leadership skills, Kotterman (2006: 16) reminds us that:

When the newly trained leaders attempt to lead, they quickly discover that they aren't allowed to do so, they are actually expected to manage'. This only leads to confusion and reduced job-satisfaction . . . and 'In the case of modern organisations, too many leaders will spoil their effectiveness. Multiple leaders with different visions not only can confuse but they can also decrease subordinates' motivation.

Would it be better if we talked less about distributed 'leadership' and more about distributed 'management'?

What is management?

As with leadership, there are many definitions of 'Management'. Bush and Glover (2003: 10) define it as 'the implementation of school policies and the efficient and effective maintenance of the school's current activities'. Connolly et al. (2019: 505) suggest that it:

entails delegation, which involves being assigned, accepting and carrying the responsibility for the proper functioning of a system which others participate in and educational institution and implies an organizational hierarchy.

The many definitions to be found within the literature can perhaps generally be summarised as the following: *management is the oversight, control and direction of processes and resources (especially people) to achieve the desired goals and objectives of an organisation in the most efficient and effective way.*

We do need to differentiate the management environment of the 21st century from the essentially discredited ‘Taylorism’ and ‘managerialism’ of earlier decades, which were according to Pollitt (1993) above all concerned with control, and that control was to be achieved through an essentially administrative approach.

Management requires achievement of results and taking personal responsibility for doing so. Management objectives are defined predominantly by the language of economics, in particular relating to ‘output’ and ‘value for money’ (Pollitt, 1993). This has been the direction taken in UK and other Western governments’ policies since the 1980s, as a result of NPM and reflected, for example, in the demise of the middle tier of local government in education and the rise of Academy Trusts in England and their like in other parts of the world. Now more than ever before, heads and senior staff in schools and colleges are expected to be managers and strategic planners. They are no longer just expected to be educationists.

Educational management therefore entails carrying the responsibility for the proper, day-to-day functioning of an institution. In practice, it entails delegation, which involves being assigned, accepting and carrying responsibility. ‘The manager’s role is to introduce and keep order in an organisation’ (Czarniawka-Joerges and Wolff, 1991: 538), and ‘the management process reduces uncertainly and stabilises the organisation’ (Lunenburg, 2011: 1)

A ‘manager’ needs a good grasp of budgetary and human resources issues as well as the specific issues relating to the organisation, which makes it different to others. These are key requirements for a good head of an educational institution.

In summary, a manager is accountable for putting processes and structures in place to achieve results and management requires acceptance of personal responsibility for their achievement. Across most of the public sector (but maybe not in education), management is seen as a distinct function requiring its own skills and training.

What is administration?

It is surprisingly difficult to find a widely accepted and meaningful definition of administration. Sergioivanni et al. (1980) define it as the process of working with and through others in order to accomplish organisational goals efficiently. This, like many other attempts at the definition is fairly bland, but it is worth noting that it does not mention ‘accountability’, nor putting the processes and goals in

place initially. Hughes (2012) tells us that administration is about following the rules to the letter, carrying out instructions given by someone else. An administrator ‘is responsible only indirectly for the delivery of results’. Essentially then, administration is based on following instructions. Unlike management, administration has an inward focus and a short-term perspective.

Administration has traditionally been found widely in the public sector. Its history goes back thousands of years, but in the form that we now know it stemming from the works of Weber and Wilson in the early 20th century (Hughes, 2012).

In Weber’s ‘pure’ form of administration, he suggests that ‘public servants’ cannot, and should not, exercise leadership – they should be subject to the direction of leaders, usually political. Perhaps at this point, we should consider whether heads and senior staff in schools and colleges regard themselves as public servants, as this will have a bearing on the framework within which they operate.

The term ‘administration’ has traditionally been used widely within the education sector in preference to leadership and management in many parts of the world (e.g. in North America). It more accurately serves hierarchical education systems within a system of strong government, often working through regional and municipal decision-making structures.

Since the introduction of neoliberal and NPM philosophies into the education system in the 1980s, throughout the world more and more decision-making has been delegated to schools and colleges, and perhaps other than in few instances, the need for administrative training for senior positions in educational organisations is now in the past.

The traditional model of administration has now more or less been replaced by (public) management as the culmination of the reform process that began in the 1980s, and managers, rather than administrators, are now accountable for their actions as they never were in the past. Perhaps the time has now come for us working in education to abandon the term ‘administration’ and focus more directly on the concepts of leadership and management.

How leadership and management fit together?

Kotter (1990) argues that leadership and management are two distinctive and complimentary systems, each having its own functions and its own characteristic activities, but both necessary for complex organisations and for optimal effectiveness.

There is some confusion in the literature as to whether it was Warren Bennis or Peter Drucker who originally said ‘Management is doing things right, but leadership is doing the right things’, but it is a useful distinction.

Cuban (1988: xx) tells us that:

Managing is maintaining efficiency and effectively current organisational arrangements. While managing well often exhibits leadership skills, the overall direction is towards

maintenance rather than change . . . different settings and times call for varied responses.

He provides a clear distinction between leadership and management, linking leadership with change while he sees management as a maintenance activity and says: 'I prize both managing and leading and attach no special value to either one'. Distinguishing between leadership and management perhaps allows the importance of educational management to be acknowledged and its status raised. Connolly et al. (2019: 542) say 'school failure is frequently blamed on a failure of leadership. We do not discount that but suggest that it could be a failure of management'. They argue that leaders are often needed to refocus an organisation, but their need is often short term and it is managers who usually get the organisation onto a stable footing.

This view is supported by the work of Hill et al. (2016) who examined different styles of headship and clearly concluded that heads of schools who focused largely on managerial processes, although not often being seen as charismatic leaders, were the most effective in the long run. My own work (Craig, 2017) identifies that 'leadership' at the expense of 'management' can often result in a toxic work environment that has a detrimental impact on an organisation.

According to Fullan (1992: 19), the high-powered, charismatic principal who:

radically transforms the school in four or five years can also be blinding and misleading as a role model. A principal's strategy is often fragile because so much depends on his or her personal strength and presence, which is relatively short-lived.

Edelman (1988: 65) is of the view that 'except as minor elements of a complex transaction, leaders cannot provide security or bring about change', whereas Zaleznic (1977) concluded that while leaders are needed in times of crisis and change, 'managers represent the everyday rationality of welfare and affluence'. Southworth (2004: 83) says 'too much management and a school may run smoothly on the spot. Too much leadership and it may be running all over the place and never smoothly'.

My favourite distinction is however made by Wildavsky (1984) who tells us that although Moses was a great prophet and a great leader, he took 40 years to lead the Jews to the promised land. A good manager would have only taken 40 days.

Czarniawka-Joerges and Wolff (1991) add that a good manager would also have found the most direct route and the cheapest means of transport.

What's in a name? What do we need?

Words are important, and as we have seen, the meaning of the term 'leadership' has become confused over recent decades, during which time educational leadership has been favoured with educational management becoming neglected and downplayed.

Connolly et al (2019: 2) tell us that 'the "fall" of educational management underplays its importance in organising in schools and colleges'. Important questions for all education systems across the world are: Can we afford just to develop leadership at the expense of management? Can we improve our education institutions with a re-emphasis of management? Have we lost our understanding of what is important?

As we have read earlier in this article, many academics tell us that leadership and management are both needed in any organisation, but can they always be provided by the same person? Perhaps you can have a good leader who is not a skilled manager if (s)he has a strong management team working with her/him. It may be more difficult, probably impossible, the other way around.

Is there such a thing as 'middle leadership' and is it important? All 'leaders' want senior staff working with them who are 'aspiring' and 'inspiring' and can get the best from their teams, but they also want good middle *managers* in their organisations, not competing 'leaders'.

My own experiences suggest that in many countries, the concept of individual school or college 'leadership' does not fit well within the culture – for example, where there is strong central policy direction. In much of the world, the recognition of the training and development of 'leaders' is not a priority – the training and development of 'administrators' is, and 'managers' are slowly being recognised as necessary to develop, rather than just to maintain systems. Bush (2008), commenting on schools in parts of the developing world, says that there is evidence that many schools are dysfunctional, suggesting that a focus on management would be more appropriate. This would surely be the case worldwide!

So why are we, particularly in the United Kingdom, emphasising 'leadership' to aspiring heads and others rather than, or as well as, 'management'. Although 'leadership' within the profession is important, are we losing sight of what most heads and senior staff in schools and colleges are expected to do every day, and for most of their time – administer, and manage? Headship, even good headship, is perhaps 80% management and only 20% leadership. Perhaps we should bear this balance in mind.

This view is certainly not an attack on the importance and necessity for 'leadership' in education – it is questioning its prominence at the expense of other, equally, if not more important functions.

Do we any longer expect *every* school and college head to set their own missions, visions, values and so on? In many instances of course we do, particularly in terms of reflecting the particular communities they serve, but how do these relate to their government's expectations, or to the mission, visions and values of their 'middle-tier' (whether it be MAT, Board or local government) CEOs and politicians? Is it appropriate, for example, for departmental heads in secondary schools be given a free hand to set their own directions, which may be completely different to other departments? If not, then the whole concept of 'middle leadership' may be unviable, or at least very limited. If we expect this, then we must also expect system failures.

Kotterman (2006: 16) points out that the need for leadership above anything else is a view embedded in our consciousness – ‘corporations will continue to ask for leaders but need managers’. Systems cannot afford to ignore training and development opportunities for managers.

Let’s not confuse both ourselves and others by using wrong descriptors. For training providers that rely on overseas work, particularly in developing countries, they should not confuse potential students or funding agencies by describing the qualifications on offer incorrectly. Apart from anything else, a focus on leadership may dissuade them from supporting the programmes. When we mean ‘leadership’ we should by all means use that term, but at other times we should always refer to ‘leadership *and* management’. It is not appropriate to use one very term to encompass both.

Ideally, what we need to create is what Gardner (1990) refers to as ‘leader-managers’ who are able to undertake both functions well, concerned with developing organisational visions and values, thinking and planning longer term and motivating and supporting others to achieve goals both efficiently and effectively. Some may get the opportunity to lead more than others, but they also need to be equipped with the skills of management to enable them to undertake what Belbin (2010) describes as completer/finisher tasks when necessary. More importantly, for the great majority of school and college senior staff, they need to be able to exercise high-level management skills but also be able to take on leadership functions when and where appropriate.

Undoubtedly, all staff in schools and colleges can and should lead in certain circumstances, as not to be promoting this would be wasting talents, but we should not pretend that all can be ‘organisational and system leaders’. Let’s not totally abandon our current leadership focus but let us once more also focus on management of the service. It is essential that we promote good leadership as a desired goal, but this should not be at the expense of effective management.

Conclusion

Although good leaders and managers share many attributes, leadership and management are essentially different, but both are necessary for an effective organisation. We must recognise and support both appropriately and not focus on leadership at the expense of management. Let us no longer be cavalier with our use of the words ‘leadership’ and ‘leaders’. Let’s not diminish the need for better ‘management’ and ‘managers’ in our systems.

Kotter (1990) says that ‘management is about providing the order and procedures necessary to cope with the everyday complexity . . . Leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change’. A good organisation needs both. ‘If an organisation is run effectively, leadership and management will exist in tandem’ (Gosling, 2013).

We could of course debate more how much ability there is to practise ‘leadership’ within most schools, where direction is now more and more ‘led’ by politicians and

government, and where they exist, municipal and other ‘authorities’ (e.g. MATs) outside individual schools.

As the meanings of the terms management and leadership are often so misunderstood, organisations seem to believe that they need many leaders when in fact what they probably need is a small number of exceptional leaders and many more first-rate managers.

Everybody in education should be clear about the differences between leadership, management and administration. Organisations and systems should be very clear about what they require of head teachers/principals and senior staff within them. Providers should ensure that relevant and clearly described and focused development opportunities can be accessed. We need to focus on both leadership and management for the future of the system. Good leaders should be encouraged to lead – others should support them by managing the organisation around them.

Simple administration is now a relic of the past. A refocus on management within schools and colleges is necessary.

Finally, Czarniawski-Joerge and Wolff (1991) point out that crises are usually followed by a refocus on the need for management and managers. The 2020 Covid-19 crisis has clearly illustrated that governments and public services throughout the world have needed to adapt quickly and that good ideas are worthless without clear management of them. Educational institutions have been required to adapt their teaching methods, the management of staff and resources to deal with the pandemic, and it is clear that this will change the way in which education will be delivered in the future. In particular, we will undoubtedly see far more use of distance and e-learning across the world. These and other changes must however be ‘managed’ to ensure that those who are currently disadvantaged are not disadvantaged still further, and others do not join their ranks. As never before, high-quality managers are necessary in all our educational organisations to ensure that new processes are clearly evaluated, managed into and during practice, and then constantly re-evaluated to ensure this.

The ‘crisis’ has undoubtedly highlighted the need for both high-quality management and clear leadership across all public services. A clear mission and clear goals are of little use without the efficient management of the processes and resources to achieve them.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared the following potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article:

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Ian Craig  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8316-3881>

References

- Belbin RM (2010) *Management Teams: Why They Succeed or Fail*. 3rd edn. London: Heinemann.
- Ball SJ (2012) *Global Education Inc: New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary*. London: Routledge.
- Bush T (2008) From management to leadership: Semantic or meaningful change? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 36(2): 271–288.
- Bush T and Glover D (2003) *School Leadership: Concepts and Evidence (Full report)*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
- Connolly M, James C and Fertig M (2019) The difference between educational management and educational leadership and the importance of educational responsibility. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership* 47(4): 504–519.
- Craig I (2017) Toxic leadership. In: Earley P and Greany T (eds) *School Leadership and Education System Reform*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Cuban L (1988) *The Managerial Imperative and the Practice of Leadership in Schools*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Czarniawka-Joerges B and Wolff R (1991) Leaders, managers, entrepreneurs on and off the organisational stage. *Organisational Studies* 12(4), 529–546.
- Edelman M (1988) *The Construction of the Political Spectacle*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fullan MJ (1992) Visions that blind. *Educational Leadership* 49(5): 19–22.
- Gardner JW (1990) *On Leadership*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Gibson MT (2016) Sponsored academy school principals in England: Autonomous leaders or sponsor conduits? *International Studies in Educational Administration* 44(2): 39–54.
- Gosling J and Mintzberg H (2003) The five minds of a manager. *Harvard Business Review*. 81(11): 54–63.
- Gosling J (2013) What is the difference between leadership and management. *The Guardian*, 29 June 2013.
- Harris A (2005) Teacher leadership: More than a feel-good factor? *Journal of Leadership and Policy in Schools* 4(3): 201–209.
- Harris A (2013) Distributed leadership: Friend or foe? *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership* 41(5): 545–554.
- Hill A, Mellon L, Laker B, et al. (2016) The one type of leader who can turn around a failing school. *Harvard Business Review*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2016/10/the-one-type-of-leader-who-can-turn-around-a-failing-school>
- Hill D and Kumar R (2009) *Global Neoliberalism and Education and Its Consequences*. London: Routledge.
- Hughes OE (2012) *Public Management and Administration*, 4th edn. London: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Kotter JP (1990) What leaders really do. *Harvard Business Review* 68(3): 103–111.
- Kotterman J (2006) Leadership versus management: What's the difference? *Journal for Quality and Participation* 29(2): 13–17.
- Laloux F (2014) *Reinventing Organisations*. Brussels: Nelson Parker.
- Lunenburg FC (2011) Leadership versus management: a key distinction – at least in theory. *International Journal of Management, Business & Administration* 14(1): 1–3.
- Pollitt C (1993) *Managerialism and the Public Services: Cuts or Cultural Change in the 1990s*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Raelin JA (2016) Imagine there are no leaders: reframing leadership as collaborative agency. *Leadership* 12(2): 131–158.
- Sergiovanni TJ, Burlingame M, Coombs FD, et al. (1980) *Educational Governance and Administration*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Southworth G (2004) Learning centred leadership. In: Davies B (ed.) *The Essentials of School Leadership*. London: SAGE.
- Wildavsky AB (1984) *The Nursing Father: Moses as a political leader*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.
- Zaleznic A (1977) Managers and leaders: Are they different? In: Gibson JL, Ivancevich JM and Donnelly JH (eds) *Readings in Organisations*. Plano, TX: Business Publications.

Author biography

Ian Craig has been a teacher, headteacher, LEA and Ofsted inspector, local and central government official. He is currently a visiting professor at UCL, where he mainly tutors and supervises post-graduate students. His main interests are in education systems policy, strategy, organisation and management.

