Critical Views of Leadership and the Academic Library

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Abstract

Critical leadership studies (CLS) is a recent branch of leadership studies that examines assumptions and issues with mainstream approaches to leadership development and research. This paper reviews three areas of criticism from CLS. First, leadership is a poorly defined and ambiguous concept. Second, mainstream approaches to leadership can be harmful to followers. And third, there is little evidence demonstrating that leadership development is effective. Next, a recent attempt at library leadership development, the Nexus Project, is examined against the three CLS leadership criticisms. And finally, suggestions from the CLS literature are offered on how to pursue organizational improvements outside the context and shadow of leadership.

Introduction

Crises of leadership are the order of the day at the beginning of the twenty-first century: our institutions seem to be in serial meltdown . . . Crises, we have long believed, call forth great leaders.[1]

Elizabeth Samet

We live in the age of leadership. Or is it the age of leadership development? Either way, leadership permeates our culture and society at every level, offering a ready-made solution to just about any problem we may face. How do we meet the challenges of climate change? Leadership![2] How do we meet diversity goals on our college campuses? Leadership![3] And how do we prepare libraries to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing environment? You guessed it, Leadership![4] Common sense dictates that this is as it should be. After all, if something is to be done (pick your backdrop: climate, war, diversity, crime, libraries, immigration, education, terrorism, science, farming, sports, etc.), someone needs to take the lead in making it happen. We call this someone the leader and, through the practice of his or her leadership, the thing gets done. Under this formulation, our only remaining concern has been figuring out how to create more leaders and improve leadership so we can get ever more things done.

In response to what many believe is a self-evident need for more leaders and improved leadership, the last forty years has seen the emergence and dramatic growth of leadership studies and leadership development. Together, these two endeavors make up what Barbara Kellerman calls the leadership industry. She describes the leadership industry as ". . . the now countless leadership centers, institutes, programs, courses, seminars, workshops, experiences, trainers, books, blogs, articles, websites, webinars, videos, conferences, consultants, and coaches claiming to teach people-usually for money-how to lead."[5] The leadership industry, according to Kellerman, is a very big business, with over $50 billion per year being spent worldwide on leadership development and learning.[6] In the United States, an estimated $14 billion is being spent per year.[7] Leadership spending in libraries represents only a sliver of the

leadership industry pie, but even this sliver amounts to an extremely large footprint in our profession. A recent review of library leadership trainings found that there were 39 different leadership programs offered to librarians in 2013.[8] The same study found that between 1998 and 2013, over 8,000 participants had taken part in library leadership programs.[9] Considering the tremendous investment of time, talent, and treasure that has been put towards growing leaders and improving leadership, it would be reasonable to assume that we should now have better leadership, more leaders, and stronger organizations. Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the case.

National surveys have showed a consistent decline in the esteem Americans have for their leaders and the institutions they lead. The 2012 National Leadership Index from the Harvard Kennedy School found that 69% of Americans believe we are in a leadership crisis.[10] A 2014 survey of over 1,500 human resource professionals found that only 25% ranked their organization's leaders as high quality.[11] Such a lack of faith in leaders has not always been the case. In 1979, 60% of Gallup respondents indicated they had confidence in America's banks and 34% had confidence in the American Congress. By 2016, those numbers had declined to 27% for banks and 9% for Congress.[12] The annual Harris Poll, which measures how confident Americans are in their leaders, has found a similar trend. In 1966, those saying they had a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court was 50%, in major companies 55%, and in Congress 42%. In 2012, those number had declined to 27% for the Supreme Court, 15% for major companies, and 6% for Congress.[13] Even for organizations such as libraries that fall outside the scope of the surveys cited, the diminishing standing of leaders and the organizations they lead should give reason for pause. Especially when one considers the declines took place at the same time spending on leadership studies and leadership development saw dramatic increases. How is it possible that massive investments of time and money towards studying and teaching leadership coincides with a reduction in the public's esteem for its leaders and the organizations they lead? And why is the most common response to this situation ever louder calls for more leaders and improved leadership?

One place to look for an answer is the growing body of leadership criticism that falls under the heading of critical leadership studies (CLS). This relatively new approach to studying leadership breaks with leadership orthodoxy by examining areas that have been left underexplored or have gone missing from mainstream leadership studies.[14] Sinclair believes the critical perspective brought by CLS raises often unasked questions, such as, "What are the purposes to which leadership is being put? Who benefits from those purposes? Who or what may suffer or be adversely affected, perhaps in subtle and not immediately obvious ways?"[15] To CLS scholars, the mainstream assumption that leadership always leads to good things is false. While CLS brings many diverse views and approaches under its umbrella, Alvesson and Spicer have identified four broad themes, including:

> a) Asking whether leadership is always desirable; b) considering the possibility that , in many cases, leadership may be more about creating domination, excess control, and self-enhancing images rather than effective organization and direction of tasks; c) unpacking the blind faith in the powers of leadership; and d) being skeptical about whether leadership is actually needed (or happening) in many situations.[16]

These themes are approached from a variety of critical perspectives that often represent marginalized voices, such as those originating from feminist and queer theory.[17] These voices are essential to CLS because of its attention to the asymmetries of power embedded in mainstream conceptions of leadership.[18]

The concern and analysis CLS puts forward around issues of power, relationships, and identity have arrived at an opportune time, paralleling the growing concern in our society over privilege, diversity, and inclusion. These issues have become a major topic in American higher education.[19] They are also at the center of recent social justice movements like Black Lives Matter. For libraries, CLS arrives at a time when the operating environment continues to be defined by uncertainty and a mandate to transform. Central to library efforts at transformation has been an assumed need for improved leadership and more leaders.[20]

This paper will review three areas of leadership criticism represented in CLS that have relevance for libraries. These areas are: 1) leadership is not always the most effective way to talk and think about organizational life; 2) leadership can be harmful to followers; and 3) there is little evidence that leadership development is effective at growing leaders and improving leadership. Next it will examine a recent effort at library leadership development in light of the three CLS areas of criticism. And finally, it will offer a few suggestions from the CLS literature on how organizational improvements might be pursued outside the context and shadow of leadership. The purpose of this paper is not to undermine good faith efforts by librarians who sincerely wish to see their libraries, communities, users, staff, and profession thrive. Rather, it is a good faith effort to expand the conversation about how best to improve libraries.

Criticisms of Leadership

Leadership: Everything and Nothing

> *What is leadership? Well, despite almost three thousand years of pondering and over a century of 'academic research into leadership, we appear to be no nearer a consensus as to its basic meaning . . .* [21]

Keith Grint

A good place to start any investigation is by defining the terms under consideration. With leadership, this raises an immediate problem, because no consensus definition exists. It is estimated that over fifteen hundred definitions of leadership have been put forward.[22] Alvesson and Spicer have pointed out that the different conceptions of leadership coalesce around it being some type of influence process.[23] But it can also be seen as position or even as a compilation of competencies.[24] Concern over the ambiguity surrounding leadership as a concept was identified early by Pfeffer.[25] But the ensuing years have established little clarity, leading Alvesson and Spire to conclude that leadership has become "an empty signifier – a word that can be stuffed with almost any content one wishes."[26] The result of ambiguity and confusion in defining leadership is that, as a concept, it is not confined and its meaning is contested. This means leadership researchers and those who purport to train others to lead are free to define the concept to fit their own purpose. Someone interested in examining charismatic leadership is free to pull a compatible definition from the many available.[27] Similarly, someone interested in marketing a leadership course or training are free to frame leadership to fit their intended audience. Often this takes the form of 'an offer you can't refuse', relying on exaggerated, romantic, or heroic views that are designed for maximum appeal.[28] The lack of a consensus definition for leadership makes it a challenge to engage with the leadership literature in a productive or meaningful way. And figuring out whether a particular leadership training or approach applies to a particular setting, or would help with a specific problem, too often comes down to guesswork.

The confusing, ambiguous, contested state of leadership means that nearly anything can be considered leadership. Unbounded, leadership is free to spill across the vocabulary landscape subsuming other ways of talking about concepts such as work, management, strategy, teamwork, collaboration, productivity, motivation, personal growth, and organizational performance. Sharing a good idea with your boss can now be considered upward leadership. Working productively with a co-worker is peer-leadership. And working independently fits in the category of self-leadership.[29] New spaces for leadership to colonize continue to appear. In education it is now possible to talk about teacher leadership and student leadership. Once familiar terms such as middle management have also been refashioned. Where once stood middle managers, now stand middle level leaders.[30] But a situation where everything is leadership is equivalent to one where nothing is leadership. What is lost in such a formulation is the opportunity for clarity, precision, and understanding.

It should seem obvious that contested, undefined ideas would not lend themselves very well to improving practice. And yet the ambiguous and confusing idea of leadership continues to reign in organizational discourse. It does so despite the availability of other ways of talking and conceptualizing organizational life. For example, Spicker has argued that competing paradigms- such as economic, humanist, social, and cultural- offer alternative ways of understanding what happens in organizations.[31] Depending upon the context, these paradigms could very well offer better angles of approach to organizational and interpersonal phenomena than leadership. Blom and Alvesson have similarly pointed out that traditional ways of talking about management may be more effective than utilizing vague notions of leadership.[32] A rich and relatively uncontested organizational and workplace language already exists, and these alternative ways of describing and understanding organizational life may offer advantages over viewing every situation through the lens of leadership.

But narrowing the focus of leadership to where it has demonstrated benefit and application will not be easy. Learmonth and Morrell have pointed out that the language of leadership has become institutionalized, which makes it very difficult to think or speak outside its contested, ambiguous, and confusing framework.[33]

Followers: Alone and Forsaken

Since the word follower is considered something of an insult . . . it has been shunned by those in the leadership field.[34]

Barbara Kellerman

As with many concepts in mainstream leadership studies and development, the standing, meaning, and even the existence of followers is open to debate. Part of the problem with recognizing the existence and importance of followers is that it underscores what many consider the unhealthy dynamic of leadership. Recognizing followers and emphasizing their role in respect to leaders highlights the false dichotomy that exists between how the two are perceived. Leadership is largely assumed to be good, while followership is bad.[35] This has led to much consternation and disagreement in mainstream leadership studies. Bligh traces the followership problem back to the Industrial Revolution when followers were linked to such unsavory qualities as subordination, submission, passivity, and lack of control.[36] Attempts to redefine the associations that come with followership have largely been unsuccessful, leading to suggestions that follower be replaced with a less loaded term.[37] But here again, agreement is not forthcoming in mainstream leadership studies and development.

CLS scholars, for the most part, recognize that the existence of leadership means the existence of followership. Alvesson and Blom write, "Arguably, leadership relations without followers does not make sense, and absence of the latter undermines or even precludes leadership."[38] This recognition provides many opportunities for exploring the impact leadership has on followers. The two types of impact that will be examined more closely here have been described by Alvesson and Blom. They are the creation of a negative identity for followers and a loss of follower autonomy.[39]

The negative associations that come along with followership (subordination, submission, passivity, and lack of control) play a part in the construction of a negative identity for followers, which reflects the asymmetrical relationship they have with their leaders. The result is an elevated social status for leaders at the expense of followers. This serves not only to define the lowly status of followers but it also highlights the exceptional nature of the leader. Examining this dynamic from the perspective of queer theory, Ford, Harding, and Learmonth have stated,

"[followers] have to be second-rate, inferior, and subordinate, so that leaders may know themselves as the superior beings theory assumes them to be. It is followers who provide the yardstick against which leaders can measure their superiority. Against the shining brightness of the leader, the follower has a dull uniformity, so dull s/he remains hidden from view behind the leader who dominates the discussion of organizations.[40]

According to this perspective, the superiority of the leader can only become fully visible when viewed against the follower's inferiority. Followers are needed both in a functional sense, to provide a vessel upon which the leader can enact leadership, but also in an evaluative sense, to provide the full measure of the leader.

A negative identity that results from a leader/follower relationship can spill beyond its immediate context and lead to the creation of a negative self-conception.[41] This would represent a deeper internalization of the negative associations that come with being a follower. Ford, Harding, and Learmonth describe it this way: "just as the leader is someone who looks inside and finds a paragon of virtue, the follower who looks inside must find someone deviant, in need of being led, unintelligent, passive, and second-rate."[42] This may be an extreme description of what goes through the head of a follower, but there is little reason to doubt that the negative associations that come with being a follower are real and to some extent felt.

If negative identity has to do with how leadership makes followers feel, reduced autonomy has to do with the way leadership limits and controls follower actions. Similar to the creation of a negative identity for followers, the reduction in follower autonomy is rooted in the asymmetry of power in the leader and follower relationship. Agency resides with the leader, who is seen as the source of values, goals, directions, and meaning.[43] Operating from a position of privilege and purpose, the leader is empowered to go forth and change the behaviors, actions, and beliefs of followers.[44] Alvesson and Blom state, "There is an element of reduced room for maneuver involved, and leadership is to a significant degree about constraining actions space, cognition, values, emotions, identity constructions, and so forth."[45] The extent to which this is feasible or whether it is morally defensible has been questioned by Sinclair.[46] To do so risks reducing followers (people) to the role of instruments. It also places an unrealistic and unhealthy expectation that leaders are beneficent and have followers' best interests in mind. There is no reason to assume this will always or ever be the case. Tourish warns that a transformational view of leadership is especially worrisome, because it can move quite easily towards a model that grants the leader the power to punish, reward, and fire followers based on how well they adhere to the mission and goals put forward by the leader. "It is a model," according to Tourish, "that can easily see a kindly uncle morph into an angry god."[47] There is clearly some risk of

reduced autonomy and agency for followers baked into mainstream formulations of leadership, which may help explain the reluctance most people have for identifying themselves as followers.

A negative self-identity and reduced autonomy are only two areas of interest CLS scholars have explored with followers and followership, but they are important because they suggest leadership may actually have harmful effects on followers. At a minimum, mainstream approaches to leadership study and development that fixate on leaders should raise questions regarding the impact they have on followers. Too often, these questions are left unasked.

Improving Effectiveness: Or Not

A dirty secret about the leadership industry is that its offering are rarely evaluated.[48]

Robert Kaiser and Gordy Curphy

Based on its ubiquity and stature, it would be easy to assume that leadership development has a consistent and demonstrated track record improving organizational outcomes. The reality is that very little evidence is available to support this assumption.

When evaluation takes place, it is generally at the simplistic level of individual reaction. Questions focus more on how the participant felt about the program rather than if they actually learned anything or improved their leadership skills.[49] This type of smile sheet assessment is widely viewed as being ineffective. But the view of Bill George, a business professor who teaches a course on Authentic Leadership Development (ALD) at Harvard, represents a common and conveniently held belief that student or participant opinion is what really matters. "The best assessment of ALD's value comes from the students themselves. Across a variety of instructors, students have consistently rated the course highly, and demand for gaining entrance continues to be exceptionally strong."[50] The problem with such subjective evaluation is that it says nothing about whether a program actually achieved its learning outcomes. And it says nothing about the organizational outcomes and issues that justified the investment in developing individual leadership skills in the first place. Were they impacted, were they improved? The answer, in most cases, is that we don't know.

Often, leadership development programs are not evaluated at all. Howard and Wellins found that only about one-fourth of leadership development efforts are monitored or formally measured.[51] In another study done with thirty UK based organizations, it was found that 60% of the participants from leadership development programs reported no formal evaluation of what had been covered.[52] If evaluation is deemed unnecessary, it would seem to suggest that the leadership program, rather than serving as a means to an end, has become the end itself. The line of reasoning seems to be that since leadership is recognized as an unalloyed good, then any program or effort that seeks to improve or grow it must also be good. So why assess?

It seems odd, considering the organizational investments being made, that more systematic and widespread approaches to assessing leadership program effectiveness would not be common. In the library community, this situation prompted Irene Herold, in her 2015 edited volume *Creating Leaders*, to make the honest but startling admission that, "there was no systematically created body of evidence-based results leading to the conclusion that leadership development programs develop leadership in participants."[53] Kaiser and Curphy suggest the lack of assessment may be because available funds are expended on the actual trainings, leaving little for evaluation and accountability beyond showing that action has been taken.[54] Another possible explanation is that those earning a living in leadership development have little

to gain by rigorous evaluation but potentially much to lose. The prevailing assumption, after all, is that leadership development works. This would seem to offer little incentive to produce evidence to the contrary. The incentive to evaluate leadership development is also undermined by the fact that so many organizations are satisfied simply by having people attend a training or program, whether leadership is actually improved or not. Whatever the reason, the final result is a lack of evidence supporting the effectiveness of leadership development. Considering the money being spent and the hope being placed on achieving organizational improvements through developing more leaders and improved leadership, this continues to present a significant problem.

Libraries and Leadership

> *Although both academic and public libraries face growing threats and competition, there are increased opportunities to help their institutions meet their missions more effectively. Change, which is central to success, requires leadership.[55]*

> *Peter Hernon*

Academic libraries have been in the throes of technology driven change for over forty years. Beyond technology, many other issues contribute to a sense of perpetual crisis and need to transform. Examples include the price of serials, declining budgets, changes in higher education, and changes in community expectations. The uncertainty and urgency these issues engender has helped forge a consensus in the library community that we need more leaders and improved leadership. Maureen Sullivan, a former American Library Association president and library leadership consultant, captures the stakes and scope of this effort. "Investment in the development of our leaders, both current and future, is critical to our success and the success of the students, faculty, and scholars we serve. As we continue to make the transition to a digital future, we need leaders with the knowledge, abilities, and drive to transform our organizations."[56] The library community is not unique in identifying leaders and leadership as being central to its future success. As previously mentioned, leadership has largely become institutionalized and is deeply woven into the fabric of organizational life and discourse. This makes leadership the assumed solution to the challenges facing any number of organizations and industries, including libraries.

The library community has made and continues to make significant investments towards growing leaders and improving leadership. The Institute of Museum and Library Service (IMLS) identified the development of library leadership as a funding priority in its most recent strategic plan.[57] As part of this priority, IMLS has granted nearly $500,000 to the Educopia Institute to develop library leaders and improve library leadership.[58] Efforts at improving library leadership go back to the 1980's and are fairly well described in recent publications.[59] Programs can be found at the national, regional, state, and organizational levels. Some of the better known programs include the Association of College and Research Libraries/Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians, the University of California, Los Angeles Senior Fellows Program, and the Association of Research Libraries Leadership Fellows Program. To see how the perspectives of CLS might apply to library leadership development, one program will be examined against the CLS criticisms previously discussed. Since many library leadership programs and institutes predate the emergence of CLS, the more recent and far reaching attempt at improving and reshaping library leadership development by the Educopia Institute was selected. The intent in doing so was not to single out this particular program. After all, the

criticisms put forward by CLS could just as easily have been applied to other mainstream approaches to library leadership development.

In 2013, the Educopia Institute embarked on its ambitious, IMLS funded project to strengthen library leadership development. The Nexus Project: Spanning Boundaries to Transform Library Leadership plans to accomplish this goal through the creation of a National Leadership Lab, the identification of essential library leadership skills, development of common core curriculum offerings and evaluation components, and by the creation of a program to train leadership development trainers. The project has moved forward quickly with its work.

In April 2014, the project published a dataset and white paper that provided information on library trainings from 1998-2013.[60] In May 2014, Educopia's collaborator on the project, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), published the "Nexus Project Library Leaders (LDIA) Discovery Report," outlining core library leadership competencies.[61] In August 2014, "Recommendations for Action" was published, reporting the results of a meeting of the Nexus Project Team that was facilitated by CCL consultants.[62] Since 2014, the Nexus Project has published its model of leadership, "Layers of Leadership: Key Roles and Challenges", and worked with two additional consultants, TrueBearing Consulting and Toolkit Consulting, to produce an online Leadership Evaluation Suite and the first curriculum modules targeting its newly defined layers of library leadership.[63] This content is currently being piloted and the project is soliciting feedback.

The Nexus Project has enlisted the support and participation of an array of library professionals and organizations, including representatives from the American Library Association, Association of Research Libraries, Society of American Archivists, Ithaka S&R, Public Library Association, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, Council on Library and Information Resources, and OCLC.[64] This national scale, multi-sector project is on track to be the library community's largest and most far-reaching attempt at leadership development. In light of this, it seems appropriate to use the Nexus Project as an example in which to examine CLS criticisms.

The first area of CLS criticism reviewed makes the case that, because it is a contested and ambiguous concept, leadership is not always the most effective way to talk and think about organizational life. The Nexus Project does not appear to recognize leadership as a contested and ambiguous concept that means different things to different people. The original IMLS grant proposal[65] framed the project around a very narrow conception of leadership. The lens of leadership used is so tightly focused, in fact, that the grant proposal cited only one leadership source, a 2011 book, *Boundary Spanning Leadership*, written by researchers from the CCL.[66] Why this particular leadership book was chosen from the hundreds that were published in 2011 is never fully explained. The Nexus Project's white paper, "Training the 21st Century Library Leader," does acknowledge that there are many definitions of leadership. But it goes on to assert that the most prevalent, and apparently important, aspect of the many different definitions is the distinction made between the work of leaders and that of managers.[67] The documentation that is cited does not provide evidence that this is true. That there are others who might contest this view of leadership is left unmentioned.

Overall, the Nexus Project's approach to the ambiguous and contested nature of leadership fits the CLS contention that leadership is an empty signifier that can be fashioned to fit the need at hand. Whether the Nexus Project's conception of leadership will prove to be an effective way to improve libraries remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that a narrowly conceived but confidently asserted conception of leadership can generate significant support, enthusiasm, and funding from the library community.

The second area of CLS criticism examined in this paper concerns the detrimental impact mainstream approaches to leadership can have on followers. The Nexus Project's most detailed statement of its approach to leadership is found in the draft document "Nexus LAB: Layers of Leadership across Libraries, Archives and Museums."[68] The layers of leadership and corresponding competencies were identified in cooperation with the CCL. It turned out, the layers of leadership CCL identified in the library, museum, and archives sectors closely parallel the five leader levels CCL uses in its own leadership programs. Layer two of the Nexus LAB document, Leading Others, shares its name with the second level of CCL's leadership programs.[69] Followers, in both models, are referred to as others. As this euphemism would suggest, the focus of the Nexus Project's layers is entirely fixated on the leader. Followers, or others, are there to be motivated and to complete work that the leader would like done. Agency in the leader and follower (other) relationship resides with the leader, who is the sole beneficiary of the Nexus Project's attention. This approach to leadership and followership, which is also evident in other leadership programs, does little to acknowledge or address CLS concerns over negative self-identity and reduced autonomy in followers.

The final CLS criticism covered in this paper is the lack of evidence that leadership development is effective. To its credit, the Nexus Project appears to take evaluation of its new leadership curriculum seriously. However, the current information available on the *Nexus LAB Leadership Evaluation Suite* indicates the assessment focus will be on measuring individual leadership competencies.[70] While the Nexus Project should be applauded for addressing assessment of their leadership curriculum at the outset, focusing on individual competencies raises several questions. Since a need for change at the organization level is behind the call for more library leaders and improved library leadership, it would be helpful to know the extent to which the Nexus Project's curriculum will impact organizational level variables. Is it not possible that the project could move the needle on individual leadership competencies while leaving that of the organization unchanged? Another question is whether or not the leadership competencies identified by the CCL for libraries, archives, and museums are valid. Considering the scope and aspirations of the Nexus Project, very little actually went into the selection and validation of its leadership competencies. If the purpose of developing library leaders is to improve libraries, then the real measure of the Nexus Project's effectiveness should come at the level of the library. As it is, the project may produce evidence that does little to demonstrate library level change.

The leadership criticisms put forward by CLS scholars raise questions about many mainstream approaches to leadership, including, but certainly not limited to, the Nexus Project. This program was reviewed in light of CLS criticisms to serve as an example of how these views might or might not apply in a library context.

Discussion

To summarize, CLS scholars advance the argument that leadership lacks definition, leaving it an ambiguous and contested concept. Leadership lacks boundaries, resulting in an organizational world where leadership is everything and nothing. It is also argued that leadership has harmful effects on followers, especially in the areas of negative identity formation and reduced autonomy. The impact of mainstream conceptions of leadership on followers is largely ignored because of a single minded focus on the leader and his or her qualities and goodness. And finally, proof that mainstream approaches to leadership development are effective is largely lacking.

Like many other professions and organizations, the library community, by and large, subscribes to the assumptions and promise of leadership. The need for more leaders and improved leadership continues to dominate the discussion over how best to improve libraries. As a recent example of library leadership development, the Nexus Project was examined in light of the CLS criticisms discussed in this paper. It was found that the Nexus Project adheres to a narrow conception of leadership that does not recognize, what CLS authors argue, is leadership's fundamentally ambiguous and contested nature. The Nexus Project's approach is leader-centric with little or no consideration given to followers, who are referred to as "others." And finally, it is questionable whether the project's efforts at assessment will move beyond measuring changes in individuals to demonstrating organizational level effects.

If mainstream approaches to leadership and leadership development are not up to the task of improving our organizations, then what are the alternatives? Critical leadership studies is not silent on this question, but there is no simple answer. CLS authors suggest one place to start is to change the way we talk about organizational life, the way we talk about work, by limiting the use of the empty signifier leadership. Blom and Alvesson state, "A good exercise is to generally consider and often use other terms instead, perhaps not so grandiose, but less filled with and less inclined to reinforce hegemonic ambiguity and therefore more helpful in aiding thinking and practice."[71] Managers, workers, teamwork, organizing, coordination, power, cooperation, persuasion, collaboration, creativity, influence, supervision, autonomy, and networking are all terms that can be subsumed or confused under the messy sprawl of leadership. Enriching and reclaiming our workplace vocabulary could help us achieve not only clarity and greater understanding, but it might also rescue leadership from its own loss of meaning, from being both everything and nothing. If more narrowly conceived and applied, perhaps agreement could be found on what leadership actually means and what role it has in organizational improvement.

Another suggestion from CLS is to move on from our obsession with developing single individuals to a focus on developing systems.[72] Libraries are complicated organizations with entrenched obstacles and opportunities that may limit the ability of a single person to effect change. The list of variables that might influence an organization's context, relationships, productivity, effectiveness and ability to change is long. It would include whether an organization is high or low performing, resource availability, demographics, governance or decision making processes, centralization, whether the organization is stable or in crisis, and the state of technology. In any given organization, individual leadership is just one piece of a much larger and complex system. This would suggest that efforts towards organizational improvement that rest primarily on individual leadership development will likely meet with limited success. Which actually explains a lot.

Critical leadership studies has emerged at a time when the call for more leaders and improved leadership continues to grow and to take on greater urgency. The call echoes from the board rooms of profit driven corporations to the book stacks of community minded libraries. The questions about leadership that CLS raises regarding power, language, identity, and effectiveness, it is hoped, will broaden the discussion about how best to improve libraries.

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