

A literature review on effective leadership qualities for the NLC

Executive summary

The review conducted did not produce evidence for a distinct ‘qualities approach’ drawing on the five identified qualities applied consistently across the literature. This is because the review presented a field of research into leadership that is characterised by fragmentation and conflicting nomenclature. These inconsistencies in the findings prevent us from drawing strong conclusions across the literature. Nevertheless, organising the various strands of debate into clusters that capture shared ways of talking about leadership across different theories in the literature can be helpful. The evidence that the five qualities as defined by the National Leadership Centre (NLC) are the most relevant ones is mixed. We summarise the evidence on this and suggestions on how to potentially adapt the descriptions on the five qualities in *Section 2*. In *Section 3*, we turn to a discussion about the challenges of a ‘qualities approach’ to the study of leadership. We describe three main clusters of theories in the literature (explained in more detail in the glossary in *Appendix II*) that challenge the notion that leadership derives exclusively from properties of the individual. These clusters can provide inspiration for an expansion of the NLC understanding of leadership. We then turn to the issue of the outcomes and goals that leadership is measured against in the literature in *Section 4*. Finally, in *Section 5* we report the questions that emerged from this literature review and suggest ways in which the NLC could explore these, including co-productive and qualitative research methods.

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1. Our approach to this literature review

The NLC identified five qualities of leadership based on a preliminary review of the leadership literature: ‘adaptive’, ‘connected’, ‘purposeful’, ‘questioning’, and ‘ethical’. The purpose of the brief was to undertake a wider review of the literature exploring the evidence base on public leadership and examining the support for the NLC five key qualities approach. The brief sought to address the following key questions:

- To what extent does the evidence base support the NLC’s assertion that there are five qualities exhibited by effective public service leaders?
- How could the NLC’s articulation and definition of the key attributes of effective public service leaders be iterated or improved to better reflect the evidence base?

Based on the questions in the brief, we approached the ‘rapid’ literature review through a general search and then separate ones for each of the five qualities. This review involved six searches of abstracts repeated across five academic databases capturing discussions of leadership across academic fields and disciplines. The results of these searches were analysed through an abstract review. The searches included keywords such as synonyms to capture wider discussion of the qualities, and additional phrases to capture discussion of leadership in the context of public services and under conditions of complexity or uncertainty. The searches returned 9318 results. These results were then filtered further to 575 papers based on the preferences expressed by the NLC, including a broad scope review capturing wider research into leadership qualities; a preferred focus on studies based in the UK and similar regional contexts; discussion of public administration at a senior level in the context of collaboration across sectors and organisations; and a focus on complex or ‘wicked problems’ in the public sector. A full breakdown of the search terms, databases, and results can be found in *Appendix I*, while the findings of each of the searches can be found in the separate *Abstract Search documents*.

The search produced results across disciplines (e.g. public administration studies, leadership studies), across theories and methodological approaches (e.g. transformational leadership, distributed leadership), and at different levels of focus (from abstract discussions of the nature

of leadership to discussions specific to particular professions). In our review of the abstracts we summarised key themes and findings emerging from the literature, including findings relevant to specific qualities, additional ways of talking about leadership present in the literature, ideals and outcomes, methodological approaches, and theoretical models of leadership. The results of each search presented in the *Abstract Search documents* include an overall summary, collected themes, referenced papers, and a full list of abstracts. The process revealed a number of trends in the literature, notably a diversity of theoretical perspectives on leadership and a wealth of studies exploring leadership in relation to specific outcomes and goals. The full implications presented by these developments were not apparent through review of the abstracts alone. Therefore, in addition to the abstract review, we conducted deep dives into key papers. We draw out the conclusions from these studies in this paper. In addition, we provide a glossary in *Appendix II* that defines prominent leadership theories and related concepts featured in the literature.

2. The evidence of the five qualities in the literature

The literature review did not produce evidence for a distinct ‘qualities approach’ drawing on the five identified qualities applied consistently across the literature. The review presented a field of research into leadership that is characterised by fragmentation and conflicting nomenclature. While there was evidence of studies using the same terms outlined in the NLCs discussion of qualities, they were not necessarily writing from a self-consciously ‘qualities approach to leadership’, and there was a lack of unified understanding underpinning the debate. Many studies would talk about the attributes of leadership in terms of style, traits, skills, and competencies. Furthermore, while studies might be interpreted as interested in the quality of connectedness, they might talk about it and understand it in different ways, for example, talking instead of empathy or emotional intelligence. Additionally, studies may import broader theoretical frameworks in describing leadership attributes. Influential frameworks include ‘transformational leadership’, ‘charismatic leadership’, ‘collaborative leadership’, ‘authentic leadership’, ‘servant leadership’, ‘network leadership’, ‘place-based leadership’, and ‘complex leadership theory’, all of which are described in detail in *Appendix II*. These approaches frame discussion of qualities, meaning that people may use different words for the same concept, or the same word for different concepts, making it hard to assess

the evidence available on specific qualities.

It does not necessarily follow from these findings that the five NLC qualities are not a helpful way of understanding leadership. Indeed, the review demonstrates that there is a lack of clarity and coherence in the debate on leadership that might be helpfully navigated by organising the various strands of debate into clusters that capture shared ways of talking about what is valued in leadership that cut across different theories and frameworks in the literature. There is mixed evidence that the five qualities might provide such a useful framework. In the case of **ethical** and **adaptive** leadership, there is direct evidence for discussion of these qualities, although there is variation in how they are understood. In the case of **connected** and **purposeful**, there is more indirect evidence for discussion of these qualities, and perhaps a need to adapt the articulation of these qualities to better reflect the direction of the literature. Discussion of the quality of **questioning** is arguably the weakest, or at least a case where there is a lot of overlap with other qualities. We discuss the findings of each individual quality in the tables below.

Adaptive	
NLC definition	Adaptive leaders are able to change proactively and constantly learn in a complex, uncertain and volatile world.
Number of abstracts reviewed	141
Summary of findings	<p>Adaptive leadership and the need to learn in the face of complex challenges featured prominently in the literature. The review revealed a more formalised understanding of ‘adaptive leadership’ presented in <i>Appendix II</i>. It should be noted that the discussions of this quality often encouraged a less individualistic understanding of adaptation, in some cases talking of adaptive organisations, relationships and cultures, and organisational agility.</p> <p>In order to build on this the NLCs definition, it may be helpful to further explore the more specific understandings of adaptive leadership, as well as the relationship between</p>

	individual adaptiveness and organizational-level adaptiveness.
Trends in the literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of adaptive leaders was common, including a formalised understanding of ‘adaptive leadership’, adaptive behaviours, and an adaptive leadership framework. Further ways of talking about this quality in the context of leadership included ‘learning’, ‘leaders as learners’, and related concepts included ‘self monitoring’. • In addition to talking about adaptiveness as a quality of individual leaders, the literature also included discussion of adaptive organisations, relationships, and organisational agility. • There was also some overlap with other qualities discussed in the brief, suggesting for example that in order to be an adaptive leader one has to exhibit other qualities, such as attributes related to ethical leadership (e.g. trustworthy, authentic, purposeful, forward looking, visionary).

Ethical	
NLC definition	Ethical leaders consistently behave in ways that create trust, and they take a long-term sustainable approach to fulfilling the organisation’s public service mission.
Number of abstracts reviewed	123
Summary of findings	Ethical leadership featured prominently in the literature revealed the complex and multifaceted nature of the relationship between ethics and leadership. It was frequently discussed in the context of more formalised concepts such as ‘servant leadership’ and ‘authentic leadership’. The literature illustrated how the ethical implications of leadership can vary greatly depending on the

	<p>professional context in which it is applied, and how leadership presents ethical dilemmas and potential tensions between the professional and ethical norms of leadership and what might be commonly perceived to be good.</p> <p>Given the multi-faceted nature of ethical leadership, there may be a case for crafting a more specific definition, with thought given to how abstract-level definitions of ethical leadership interact with context-specific understandings of ethics.</p>
Trends in the literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ethical leadership was by far the most discussed quality of leadership, often in relation to frameworks of ‘servant leadership’ and ‘spiritual leadership’. It should be noted that ethics represents a much broader set of concerns than we might reasonably expect from the other qualities. ● Abstract-level discussions of the good leader can be contrasted with more context-specific discussions of leadership, including ethical frameworks, norms, and dilemmas encountered by specific professions such as nursing. ● Within the literature, there is a lot of focus on ‘building trust’ as outlined in the NLC definition with a focus on supporting others. There was some discussion around ‘sustainable’, ‘long-term’, and ‘public service ethos’, which is similar to public service mission. ● Some concepts that were mentioned in the literature that are not in the NLC definition include ‘integrity’, ‘credible leadership’, ‘authentic leadership’, ‘values’, and ‘self-efficacy’. ● Ethical leadership is also contrasted with administrative evil, mistrust, and narcissism.

Connected	
NLC definition	Connected leaders are empathic, collaborative thinkers who consistently work across organisational boundaries to build strategic relationships across the public service.
Number of abstracts reviewed	127
Summary of findings	<p>Connected was not frequently discussed in the literature, however the elements of this quality described in the NLC definition were heavily discussed in relation to leadership. It was more common to talk of this quality in term of empathy, while emotional intelligence can be interpreted as a related concept that features prominently in the research</p> <p>The results of the review present two general questions. The first is whether the NLC definition of connectedness is too rich as it encompasses both notions of empathy and collaboration. The second question is whether the notion of ‘collaborative thinkers’ captures the way in which the literature is talking about collaborative approaches as it potentially challenges the qualities approach (discussed in more depth in <i>Section 3</i> of this paper). This is an area that would be helpful to explore further.</p>
Trends in the literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although connected leaders might be a helpful, more holistic way of talking about this quality of leadership, it was more common for this quality to be discussed in other terms including those listed such as ‘empathetic leadership’, but also through concepts such as ‘emotional intelligence’ (although this term obviously related to a much more specific and contested concept). • The description of ‘collaborative leaders’ who build strategic relationships is potentially relevant to a significant portion of the literature that deals with collaborative approaches and relational understandings of leadership (see

	for example the description of ‘network leadership’ and ‘collaborative leaderships’ in <i>Appendix II</i>).
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Purposeful	
NLC definition	Purposeful leaders display absolute clarity about their mission and purpose, and they are able to see beyond the problems and pressures of the present
Number of abstracts reviewed	36
Summary of findings	<p>Compared to the other searches, such as ‘adaptive’, and ‘ethical’, ‘purposeful’ leadership did not return many results. This could be due to the fact that ‘adaptive’ and particularly ‘ethical’ are terms with much wider applications that are likely to be used in research. It may also be that the notion of purposeful leadership is not widely recognised or applied in the literature, even if related concepts feature more frequently.</p> <p>The NLC could consider linking the idea of purposefulness with the ideas discussed in the literature of ‘boldness’ and ‘motivation’ on top of those of ‘mission’ and ‘clarity’ that are already present in the definition.</p>
Trends in the literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful leadership is often discussed in terms of boldness, clarity, clear communication, clear goals, and planning. Related terms include ‘being bold’, ‘having vision’, and ‘thinking outside the box’. Studies also consider the relationship between these qualities and narcissism as a personality trait and charismatic leadership as a leadership type. • One might argue though, that the notion of ‘purposeful leaderships’ is implicit in the way people frame talk of

	‘transformational leadership’ and ‘public service motivation’ (See <i>Appendix II</i> for more details)
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Questioning	
NLC definition	Questioning leaders are open minded and seek to understand the views and experiences of others.
Number of abstracts reviewed	42
Summary of findings	There was little evidence to support ‘questioning’ as a distinct quality of leadership within the literature. It may be helpful to consider the purpose of distinguishing this quality from the ideas of ‘adaptive’ and ‘connected’ and what might be lost by merging it to these other attributes.
Trends in the literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compared to the other searches, such as ‘adaptive’ and ‘ethical’, ‘questioning’ leadership did not return many results. Those that it produced, emphasised the importance of ‘curiosity’ and the use of questions (rather than the quality per se) as a means of building trust, respect, constructing authority, and developing and building relationships. ‘Vigilance’ also appeared as a related concept. • The concept description shares similarities to the description of ‘connected’ and ‘adapted’. For example, a person who is open minded and seeks to understand the views and experiences of others might be described as ‘empathetic’ in some contexts or perhaps receptive to change and capable of learning and adapting in other contexts. In this sense it may be that the literature tends to discuss these features in ways more aligned with that language.

3. Critiques of a 'qualities approach' to leadership

Stepping beyond the discussion of the evidence of individual qualities, the literature reviewed presented a number of challenges to taking a 'qualities approach' to the study of leadership altogether. Recent trends in the literature tend to depart from an understanding of leadership as deriving exclusively from properties of the individual. Based on deeper exploration of the key papers in this area, we explain the evolution of leadership studies towards less individualistic theories and the implications of these developments for a 'qualities approach' in the section below.

3.1 The evolution of leadership studies

Over the past fifty years, the understanding of public administration and governance in the literature has become increasingly nuanced and complex (Bussu and Galanti 2018, Horwath and Morrison 2007, Heifetz et al 2009). Many recent studies observe a shift from hierarchical, command and control mechanisms to coproduction and/or collaborative action across sectors, organisations and disciplines (Silvia 2011, Avolio et al 2009). In parallel to this, the study of leadership also evolved and branched out in this direction. Heroic, great-man theories that focused on traits and qualities unique to the leader used to be predominant, while now the literature presents more expansive understandings of leadership and its challenges that attend to the relational, situational, and context-specific elements (Bass and Bass 2008).

The shift to this more nuanced understanding of leadership is also a response to criticism of exclusively leader-centred approaches. Accounts of 'charismatic', and later 'transformational leadership', which emphasise the capacity of leaders to inspire and motivate followers to excel in their work and enhance performance (see *Appendix II* for more details), have been criticised for being too individualistic in their understanding of leadership. Stogdill (1948 in Bass and Bass 2008) argues that the qualities, characteristics, and skills required of a leader are determined to a large extent by the demands of the situation. Therefore, analysis of leadership cannot be abstracted from the context in which it occurs.

3.2 Three challenges to the qualities approach

As a result of these criticisms, there have been efforts to move beyond an individualistic

account of leadership, resulting in a rich diversity of theories and models. These can broadly be grouped into three clusters of literature.

The first cluster (Bussu and Galanti 2018, Horwath and Morrison 2007, Tong et al 2018) responds to the increasingly horizontal and collaborative nature of public administration by **rejecting heroic leadership approaches** and encouraging us to reframe the leader's role in terms of those around them. The unit of analysis remains individuals but rather than talking of leaders inspiring followers, these discussions will talk of leaders empowering others, fostering communication, building trust, and enhancing accountability. 'Authentic' and 'servant' theories of leadership belong to this strand of the literature (see *Appendix II* for more details).

A second cluster of the literature (Cullen-Lester and Yammarino 2016, Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009, Fairhurst 2007) **rejects the individual as a focus of leadership, departing from talk of properties of individuals to properties of relationships, organisations, networks, and systems**. Therefore we might talk of adaptive organisations rather than adaptive leaders, or we might think of qualities emerging through an intersubjective process of collaboration or relationship building. For example, the 'leader member exchange' theory (Dionne et al 2010) focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers where the quality of the relationship, not the qualities of leaders, determines effectiveness. Other examples of this strand are 'distributed' models of leadership (see *Appendix II* for more details), which consider the potential for leadership to emerge amongst different members of an organisation or network, regardless of their managerial role or seniority. The more extreme examples of this body of literature seek to transcend person-centred approach by focusing on sources of leadership outside of individual people (Ospina 2017). These approaches see leadership as an emergent process and practice intended to cultivate group members' capacity to navigate to complexity, where leadership can emerge through relationships, system properties, networks as well as individual action. Theories that follow this approach include 'network leadership theory', 'complexity leadership theory', and 'collective leadership' (Ospina 2017, Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2015, Mandell and Keast 2009, Morse 2010) (see *Appendix II* for more details). These theories offer valuable insights and highlight the limitations of individualistic approaches, however they raise challenges of their own. Some of these more radical

approaches are criticised in the literature for stretching the concept of leadership beyond any natural sense of the word, undermining the explanatory value of the term, and inviting one to consider whether such theories are meaningfully talking about leadership at all (Morrison 2010).

Finally, the third cluster of the literature **departs entirely from grand theory of leadership altogether, focusing instead on specific types of challenges and barriers leaders face**, as well as more specific goals and outcomes (Heifetz et al 2009, Ekstrom and Idvall 2015, Corazzini et al 2014). A prominent approach that belongs to this strand is ‘adaptive leadership theory’ (see *Appendix II* for more details). This is described not as a theory of leadership per se, but as a practice that mobilises people to tackle tough challenges and thrive (Heifetz et al 2009). The theory is oriented around specific types of challenges that have no ready answers and cannot be addressed with existing procedures and expertise. The activities recommended in the adaptive leadership theory literature may not be necessary or even desirable in other contexts. This approach draws our attention to the possibility that general theories of leadership may be too abstract to be helpful in understanding what is required in response to challenges that leaders face. A general leadership theory narrows our focus to a particular set of challenges anticipated by the theory, and this may neglect other barriers that might be experienced in practice.

An example of where this literature identifies challenges that might not be captured by general leadership theories is highlighted by Ekstrom and Idvall (2015). They discuss leadership challenges experienced by nursing staff, and the implications this has for retention of staff. A challenge the study highlights is the issue of nurses disassociating from their leadership role, concerned that they may appear lazy or bossy, and feeling uncomfortable in their role and therefore job. The discussion presents a specific challenge (the experience of disassociation) and its consequences for a specific outcome (staff retention). While this could be reinterpreted using the language of ‘transformational leadership’ or ‘leader member exchange’, it is not clear this would give us a better understanding of the problem or its potential solutions, rather it might obscure and over-complicate the issue. Intuitively this level of analysis is more helpful to understanding leadership in the context of nursing than the broader understanding introduced by general leadership theories. Further literature highlights

the particular ethical dilemmas and frameworks for understanding ethics of leadership within particular professions, as these might present context-specific features (Storch et al 2013, Broussine and Miller 2005, Curtis and Hodge 1995). These discussions suggest a need to pay further attention to what is usefully gained, and also what is lost, by moving from the specific context to much more general understandings of leadership and leadership qualities.

3.3 Implications for the NLC's qualities approach

To conclude, there is certainly a push from the literature to look beyond individual qualities of leaders and acknowledge the importance of the context and systems within which they operate. This doesn't reject the validity of a 'qualities approach' but it calls for an expansive understanding of the qualities, which acknowledges that these may manifest in various ways and emerge from different sources other than the traditional leader. In this sense, in addition to thinking of adaptive qualities of individuals, the NLC could also consider how cultures or organisations demonstrate these qualities. Additionally, the literature would also suggest that attention needs to be paid to the situation in which leaders operate, including the specific challenges and barriers experienced by members of a system, and the specific goals or outcomes that would be desirable in a given professional context.

4. Measuring leadership impact

The discussion in the previous section considered sources of variety in how leadership is conceptualised and different approaches to understanding the challenges that leaders encounter. It is important to also reflect on variety in how good leadership is measured, and more specifically, the intended purpose of leadership — the goals and outcomes that leadership is judged against. The literature talks about leadership in the context of various outcomes, from the abstract to the context-specific, from outcomes relating to work output to satisfaction amongst employees or the wider public. The findings suggest a need to consider the compatibility and potential tensions between different goals and outcomes and therefore the need to understand the priorities of leadership in a given context, and the nature of the relationship between leadership style and particular outcomes.

4.1 Approaches to leadership outcomes

The impact of leadership is approached from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives and in many cases different theories are accompanied by specific methods of empirical measurement. For example, ‘authentic leadership’ has been approached through a leader authenticity scale and authentic leadership questionnaires (Avolio et al 2009). Nevertheless, it is helpful to note the presence of goals or outcomes that are applied across these different theoretical approaches as a measure of the impact of good leadership. We have captured numerous examples of these at the top of the *Abstract Search documents*, however the main ones identified in the literature reviewed are summarised in the table below.

Outcome	General	Adaptive	Connected	Questioning	Purposeful	Ethical
Trust	[22][60][85]	[44][93]	[3][37][40][77]			[2][20][26][83][87][90][91][96][6][2][79][54][97][23][44][85]
Effectiveness	[18][14][85]	[71]	[1][39][79][88][98][99][64]	[25][6]	[8]	[54]
Public Value	[2][5][32][72]					[4][21]
Retention of staff	[75]	[27][48][49][100]	[58][113]			[38]
Innovation/Creativity	[101]	[64]	[13][61]	[19][33]	[18]	[79]
Follower satisfaction	[108]	[27][56][100]	[108][58][61]	[6]		

Performance	[14][97][37]	[48!][49!]	[32][39][79]	[37]	[29]	[75]
Efficiency	[17]	[103]	[88]			

This overview shows that the literature has explored leadership in relation to various outcomes. The measures of outcomes can vary; for example, Kotze and Venter (2011) measure an individual’s effectiveness by asking the individual and four colleagues to rate them, while Uster et al (2018) link effectiveness to external measures of performance. Some of the measures are easily verifiable (such as staff retention rates) to other outcomes such as trust or creativity that are more intangible and thus rely on more contested measures and indicators. Outcomes such as trust can be treated as a dependent variable by some studies (Agote et al 2016) and an independent variable by others (Lee et al 2010).

Finally, outcomes are measured within different theoretical perspectives. For example, retention of staff has been explored from different theoretical frameworks, notably ‘leader member exchange’ and ‘transformational leadership’ (See *Appendix II* for more details). Joo (2010) and Joo (2012) both find a correlation between high-quality relationships between leaders and followers and staff retention in studies that utilise leader member exchange theory. Additionally, Wang et al (2018) explore the impact of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on the retention of nursing staff, finding that transformational leadership and emotional intelligence were significant predictors of nurse intent to stay, with emotional intelligence found to partially mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and intent to stay.

In order to judge the significance of these findings, we would need to be able to establish the validity of the individual studies and the comparability of measures applied across studies to allow for meaningful comparisons, which is beyond the scope of this paper. An important consideration for the purpose of strengthening our understanding of leadership qualities is the extent to which the findings support a causal relationship between a given attribute of leadership and a given outcome, or whether they only establish correlation.

4.2 Implications for the NLC's qualities approach

These examples from the literature illustrate multiple layers of variety in the research, from how leadership is understood and measured, to the variety of outcomes that are understood to be the desired goals of good leadership. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the strength and validity of individual methodological approaches, the extent to which these studies establish a causal link between a given quality of leadership and a given outcome, or the most effective route to developing these qualities in leaders. Nevertheless, these questions are of importance to our understanding of a 'qualities approach' to leadership. For example, is the key to understanding how connected leaders are able to retain staff or enhance creativity emotional intelligence? If so, discussion on leadership development that focus specifically on enhancing emotional intelligence would be an important direction for further exploration. The developments in the literature suggest a need to think about the desired outcomes for leadership and the extent to which these are shared by different leaders, for example, whether particular outcomes are more relevant for particular fields, or specific challenges. Once there is a clearer sense of the desired outcomes and goals of leadership, it is possible to explore leadership attributes relevant to those outcomes and the strength of that research and potential for leader development.

5. Conclusions and recommendations for future research

The review undertaken here provides a wide ranging overview of leadership (with elements similar to a scoping review approach to the literature) through the lens of the NLC five qualities using the academic literature as its basis. Its strength is the breadth of the review and the broad grounding of the five qualities in relation to academic knowledge. The obvious weakness is the depth to which this review has been able to go into the details of the theoretical linkage of the literature with each quality. Another weakness is the limit of the academic literature generally — the context and contemporaneity — which are comparative strengths of the 'grey' literature. Literature reviews by their nature are prone to degrees of imprecision, particularly in an area as ambiguous as leadership and a context as complex as the public sector. Different approaches to reviews will always be prone to exaggerating aspects of a phenomenon and occluding others. Given these inevitable constraints, the key

question is what to do with the knowledge base that this literature review provides.

Based on the findings and conversations with the NLC team, the following questions emerged as potential areas for future exploration that can advance both the NLC understanding of leadership and its goals as an organisation:

- What is the most useful balance of considerations between the individual qualities of leaders and the wider relational and contextual elements of leadership in public service contexts?
- How can the NLC make use of the plethora of theories of leadership that exist within the literature and judge the ways in which these may be helpfully applied in practice?
- How should the NLC understand the desired outcomes of leadership, how these might change depending on the context and how to navigate tensions between them?
- To what extent do findings and recommendations on leadership support leaders in interpreting challenges and providing effective leadership in practice?
- How can leadership qualities be usefully identified, learned, and practised through training?
- How can the NLC evolve their understanding of leadership overtime to ensure it accounts for the challenges and experiences of today's leaders and supports their practice?

These are difficult questions and the first step in addressing them is identifying where the relevant knowledge can be found. The review provides a helpful resource to direct further exploration of the existing evidence base relevant to the issues raised by these questions. Further in-depth academic research could yield useful results, potentially in conjunction with 'grey' literature. However, the people best placed to provide the answers to these questions are the leaders themselves. Academic research helps to frame the debate but understanding the value of these theoretical insights, where and how they can be improved, requires closer collaboration and co-production with leaders and those who will translate these lessons into practice.

The NLC is uniquely positioned to tap into the knowledge of its network of public service

leaders and gain primary insights into the challenges and attributes of leadership. It has the opportunity to genuinely co-produce with leaders the generation of insights into the way they operate in public service contexts and bring about better outcomes. This could be achieved through introducing co-production into the delivery of its programme or through using qualitative/participatory research methods. Using these methods would build the findings of this and other reviews and connect what is a rich but fragmented literature with the practice of leadership in a complex and ambiguous reality.

Appendix I: Search terms and key results

General search	SEARCH TERMS: leadership AND (“public administration” OR government OR “public service”) AND (complexity OR “systems leadership” OR collaborative OR wicked problems OR effective)	
Database	Results	Added
SAGE	51	13
Social Science Citation Index	266	43
Social Service Abstracts	16	6
Wiley Online	78	23
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts	99	21
Total results	510	106

‘Adaptive’ search	SEARCH TERMS: (leadership AND qualit* AND (adaptive OR learning))	
Database	Results	Added
SAGE	727	43
Social Science Citation Index	945	50
Social Service Abstracts	50	11
Wiley Online	1608	31
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts	28	6
Total results	3358	141

‘Connected’ search	SEARCH CRITERIA: leadership AND (Connected OR empathetic OR emotional intelligence)	
Database	Results	Added
SAGE	134	32
Social Science Citation Index	467	52
Social Service Abstracts	31	3
Wiley Online	258	33
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts	120	7
Total results	1010	127

‘Questioning’ search	SEARCH CRITERIA: leadership AND (Questioning OR curious)	
Database	Results	Added

SAGE	1987	17
Social Science Citation Index	87	11
Social Service Abstracts	3	1
Wiley Online	180	11
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts	63	2
Total results	2320	42

'Purposeful' search	Search criteria: leadership AND (Purposeful OR bold)	
Database	Results	Added
SAGE	77	9
Social Science Citation Index	131	8
Social Service Abstracts	5	2
Wiley Online	215	13
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts	88	4
Total results	516	36

	SEARCH CRITERIA: Leadership AND (Ethical OR trust OR sincerity OR sustainable)	
Database	Results	Added
SAGE	157	40
Social Science Citation Index	84	21
Social Service Abstracts	141	11
Wiley Online	567	37
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts	655	14
Total results	1604	123

Appendix II: Glossary

The literature review revealed how the study of leadership has been approached from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives appealing to specialised concepts and understandings of leadership and governance. The glossary below provides an introductory summary of the most prominent theoretical perspectives and concepts that were identified in the review. In each case, the definition is accompanied by a table providing references to papers discussing the theory, where the columns indicate where the theory has been applied in general leadership literature and in discussion of the five NLC qualities. The specific papers referenced in the columns can be found in the six *Abstract search documents*. As for notation, papers are referenced by a number (e.g. [17]), where this refers to where the abstract appears in the search documents. An ‘!’ indicates a particularly important or relevant paper (e.g. [17!]), an ‘n’ indicates where no abstract was present (e.g. [17n]), a ‘-’ indicates limited information available (e.g. [17-]).

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Charismatic leadership

Until the 1940s study of leadership primarily focused on individual traits. ‘Great-man’ theories and the ‘warrior model of leadership’ (see Machiavelli, SunTzu) understood leadership, as well as much historical and social progress, as attributable to the qualities of extraordinary individuals. Max Weber introduced the religious concept of ‘charisma’ into social sciences to describe leaders with extraordinary abilities and this notion of charismatic leadership has proven an influential modern continuation of the individual traits approach to leadership. Charismatic leaders are expressive, articulate and emotionally appealing. They are self-confident, determined, active and energetic. They have a positive effect on their followers who identify with them and have complete faith in them. House (1997) presented a theory of charismatic leadership resulting in renewed interest and empirical study of the concept.

Although theories that focus purely on traits have fallen out of favour and have been modified and adapted in recent literature. Charismatic leadership can be understood as a significant modern example of this approach to leadership. It has been influential on further developments such as ‘transformational’ and ‘authentic leadership’ (see p.23 and p.25 respectively), and remains part of the language of the study of leadership.

General	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
	[97]	[88][27!][31]	[20][12]	[12][19]	

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a theory of leadership that highlights a leader’s capacity to inspire their followers and thus enhance motivation, morale and performance. This is commonly understood to involve acting as a role model for followers, encouraging followers to act beyond their own self-interest and work for the good of the group, organisation or

cause, take greater ownership for their work, to excel and self-actualise. It is commonly contrasted with ‘transactional leadership (see p.24) in which leaders rely on extrinsic rewards and punishments to produce more short term change in behaviour.

Transformational leadership was first mentioned by Downton (1973 in Bass and Bass 2008) and formalised in Burns (1978 in Bass and Bass 2008). Most articulations of transformational leadership treat charismatic leadership as an important dimension of transformational leadership, while including other elements such as inspirational leadership, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Transformational leadership has also been understood to co-exist and indeed augment the results of transactional leadership. Scholars have noted limitations to transformational leadership, principally that the focus on leaders and followers is individualistic and represents only one way to understand and perform leadership (Ospina 2017). Furthermore, the framework may be limited in its application to more collaborative and horizontal forms of leadership. Further theoretical developments in the study of leadership have moved away from the individual highlighting the importance of relationships and networks (for example see ‘network leadership’ and ‘collaborative leadership’).

General	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[75][108] [103]	[17][112][59][69][74] [78][97][25]	[1][6][12][14] [20][45][47] [75][79][107] [113]	[29][19]	[6]	[3][40][107][10]

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership understands leadership in terms of an exchange or transaction between leader and follower, for example the exchange of reward for work. Transactional is often contrasted with transformational (see p.23). The main criticism of transactional approaches is that the rewards provide only basic motivation, may increase work rather than quality and may produce poorer results relative to transformational leadership.

General	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
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[75][108]	[17][112]	[1][6][12][14][20][45][47][75][79][107][113]	[29][19] Critique [28]		[10]
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Servant Leadership

Servant leadership was formulated by Greenleaf (1977) who argues that leaders are required to curb their egos, convert their followers into leaders, and become the first among equals. The needs of others are the leaders' highest priority, they are expected to build relationships that help their followers grow, while power has to be shared by empowering followers. According to Bass and Bass (2008) servant leadership shares much in common with transformational leadership such as vision, influence, credibility and trust. It is also linked with other models of leadership including self-sacrificial leaders.

General	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[106]	[100][23]	[8][27!][43][56][65][67][77!]		[12][19]	[82][107!]

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership is a nascent but popular concept in the leadership literature that emphasises self-awareness, openness, fair-mindedness and the ethical foundations of leadership. The concept is related to 'charismatic' and 'transformational leadership (see p.22 and p.23 respectively); the suggestion that there are pseudo (i.e inspirational but self serving) versus authentic transformational leaders led to research into authentic leadership (Avolio et al 2009:423). The moral or ethical component of authentic leadership has been questioned. Some have speculated on whether people can remain true or authentic to a value system or organisation that is itself damaging, harmful or corrupt. Similarly, one might be able to inspire or build trust in people through superficial means without being trustworthy or honest in your interaction with them. These considerations highlight a distinction and potential tension between the norms or ideals of good leadership and broader considerations of the good. The philosophical foundations and methods of empirical study have also been challenged in the literature.

General	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[17]	[111]	[27][37][63][86] [5][90]		[18]	[2][22][107!]

Adaptive Leadership

Heifetz et al (2009) argue that adaptive leadership is a practice not a position. They define it as the practice of mobilising people to tackle tough challenges and thrive. It is an example of a ‘distributed leadership’ model (see p. 31), meaning leadership can be displayed by people across an organisation regardless of managerial role or seniority of position. Adaptive challenges have no ready answers and cannot be met by existing procedures or expertise. Adaptive change is uncomfortable, challenging our assumptions, beliefs and habits. Adaptive leadership requires non-traditional leadership behaviour, whereby leaders do not provide answers and accept a degree of conflict and discomfort to sustain adaptive change.

Three activities said to be core to adaptive leadership are

- Observing events and patterns without forming judgements about the data’s meaning.
- Tentatively interpreting observations by developing multiple hypotheses about what is going on.
- Designing interventions based on observations and interpretations in the service of making progress on the adaptive challenge.

Adaptive leadership has been criticised for failing to conform to traditional views of the leader, stretching the concept of leader to the point where it might be better described as a theory of facilitation. McCrimmon (n.d) develops an argument against the concept that suggests not all leadership occurs in the context of a problem, and not all change entails a response to an adaptive challenge. It is not clear that adaptive leadership makes such assumptions, though it may be better understood as a recommended response to a specific type of challenge rather than a general theory of leadership.

General	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
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[17][99][33]	[1][109][75][83!][101][103]	[10]			[79]
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Complexity leadership theory

According to Uhl-Bien et al (2007), complexity leadership theory is a leadership paradigm that focuses on enabling learning, creative and adaptive capacity of complex adaptive systems within the context of knowledge-producing organisations. The conceptual framework includes three entangled leadership roles (adaptive leadership, administrative leadership, and enabling leadership) that reflect a dynamic relationship between the bureaucratic, administrative functions of the organisation and the emergent, informal dynamics of complex adaptive systems.

Morrison (2010) provides a critique of complexity theory. While acknowledging its rise in popularity and the valuable insights it offers, Morrison presents a range of concerns with the approach. These include the claim that it can be regarded as disguised ideology conflating description and prescription and that it risks exonerating leaders from expectations of accountability and responsibility.

Overview	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[40][70][61!]	[103!]	[10]		Critique[28!]	

Related theories:

Complex Adaptive Systems general [75]

Collaborative leadership

Collaborative leadership entails working across boundaries and in multisector and multi actor relationships (O’Leary et al 2010). In discussion of collaborative governance, Getha-Taylor and Morse (2013), observe that the traditional model of leadership development focused on

leading within bounded hierarchy and via command and control mechanisms. This approach, they argue, fails to accurately reflect the nature and challenges of leadership encountered in contemporary joint public service delivery, which involves multiple government and for profit and nonprofit agencies. Such an approach must therefore be moderated with a focus on collaborative problem solving, working in flattened structures and incentivising behaviour in new ways. Collaborative governance, collaborative leadership and collaborative management are prominently discussed in leadership literature to highlight these considerations.

Overview	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[20][21][22][36!][42][74][76][77][78][79][80][85][86!][47][56][63][64][9][38!]	[34!][37][79]	[62][98]			[32][43][64][17][83][103]

Related theories:

Collaborative management: General [1][17]

Collaborative governance: General:[24][27][29][51] [67][71][87] [107] Adaptive: [34]

Network leadership

According to Ospina (2017), network leadership theory views leader or follower attributions as properties of the system, in which influence relationships define relational structures, whether they be within a single organisation or across inter-organisational and cross sector networks. Silvia (2011) describes understandings of governance moving from hierarchical or command and control mechanisms to public services jointly produced by networks including government and private and third sector organisations. Network leadership can be understood as the study of leadership and management within these collaborations. For example, Silvia and McGuire (2010 in Silvia 2011) find differences in leadership between these two contexts, with an increased emphasis on people oriented behaviours such as motivating personnel, creating trust, maintaining a close-knit group and treating others as equals. The concept is also discussed in terms of collaborative leadership (see p.27). While the discussion of collaborative leadership is often framed as a response to a change in the nature of public

administration, requiring consideration of factors including networks, discussion of network leadership appears to centre discussion on those networks and understand further features of the system through this lens.

Overview	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[5][71!][107!][101]	[109][75]				[83]

Leader Member Exchange

Leader member exchange (LMX) refers to the exchange relationship between a leader and member (follower). LMX theory claims that the quality of the relationship between leader and member determines the effectiveness of leadership. High quality LMX relationships yield high levels of mutual trust, support and obligation, while low quality relationships are more instrumental and less effective (Ospina 2017). Associated with Graen (1976 in Bass and Bass 2008), LMX theory assumes that the leader behaves differently toward each follower and that these differences must be analysed separately. This theory is contrasted with most earlier theories that assume leaders behave in much the same way to all group members. Graen (1976) categorises followers as belonging to an in-group and an out-group with different behaviour expected of leaders in relation to these groups. Although it is less leader-centred it remains person-centred, and therefore has received some criticism from those seeking to broaden the object of study to factors external to the individual (such as ‘collective leadership’ on p.31 for example).

Overview	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[66!]	[48][49]	[28]		[36] Critique [34] Ethics [37]	

Related theories:

See also Relational leadership [13]

Distributive Leadership

Distributive models of leadership decouple leadership roles from formal positions of authority and propose that leadership may emerge in different locations, drawing on the collective intelligence of an organisational system in which interdependence and connectedness are critical. According to Ospina (2017), shared/distributed theories focus more directly on the relational nature of leadership and its collective dimensions by attending to new demands associated with horizontal relationships of accountability in contemporary organisations. The terms ‘distributive’, ‘distributed’ and occasionally ‘distributary’ leadership appear to be used interchangeably in the literature to capture the same issue.

Overview	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[17][99][66!] [99][108!]	[6][36][68]			[22]	[103]

Collective Leadership

Collective leadership theories locate the source of leadership one level up from the individual or the relationship at the system of relationships — the collective (Ospina 2017). The primary source of leadership is not exclusively the leader (see transformational), the dyadic relationship (see leader member exchange), or the shifting roles (see shared/distributed), leadership can also emerge from other system properties such as the networks of interdependent relationships influencing what its members can and ought to do or other processes associated with the new demands of organising to achieve joint results (Ospina 2017:281).

Discussion of collaborative leadership focuses on shifts in the nature of public administration and the changing requirements of leaders, there is more flexibility in how leadership is discussed relative to these changes. In contrast, discussion of collective leadership reflects a more deliberate effort to reimagine the nature of leadership. Relative to some of the more traditional approaches to leadership, collective leadership can be understood as seeking to incorporate these approaches yet also broaden the scope of the object of study. It shares similar theoretical strands with network leadership and complexity leadership theory (p. 28 and p.27 respectively). Ospina et al (2017) argues that collective leadership lenses are

particularly helpful in the study of leadership in networked governing arrangements.

The risks presented by expansive projects such as collective leadership is that they are vulnerable to concept stretching, distorting talk of leadership to the point that it loses explanatory value. When the focus moves beyond individual catalysts and persons, it is reasonable to question whether we are meaningfully talking about leadership at all.

General	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[66!]	[87!]				

Public Service Motivation

Public Service Motivation (PSM) is not a theory of leadership in itself but it is a widely referenced concept in discussions of public leadership. It is defined as an attribute of government and NGO employment that explains why individuals have a desire to serve the public and link their personal actions with the overall public interest. This concept features prominently in literature on leadership, notably in relation to transformational leadership (p.23) and discussions of roles, identity and motivation relating to both leaders and followers.

General	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[63][100][103][106]			[19]		[3][10][75][76!][82][90][91][105]

Leadership of place

Leadership of place is described as an inclusive model of leadership based on systems thinking in a spatial context. It is discussed within the context of New Civic Leadership (NCL), an approach which is understood as an alternative to New Public Management, and a response to the challenges of the complex multi-level, multi-disciplinary environment of a knowledge based economy (Gibney et al 2009). NCL, and by extension leadership of place, draws attention to the power of place in policy making. It is argued that the strong feelings of commitment people have to their locality have been neglected by other approaches to public

management theory and practice. NCL highlights the role of place based leadership in spurring the co-creation of enhancing life in a locality. It has been associated with a number of aims, including drawing on the commitment of leaders to their locality in delivering long term benefits for the local community, using and building on local knowledge and building relationships and capacity within a community and local context. It has been observed that the concept of leadership of place is in its infancy and is used by different organisations to mean subtly different things.

Overview	Adaptive	Connected	Purposeful	Questioning	Ethical
[30][31]	[38][39]				[5]

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