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<h1 style="text-align:center">Leadership in the Third Space</h1>

Introduction

I am writing this chapter during the first lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK. The last few weeks have been a rollercoaster of rapidly made decisions and immediate actions that would have been inconceivable a few months ago. Our entire university, like many others, moved online in the space of a week. My time has been filled with proposing, writing, rewriting, persuading and negotiating to agree a way forward for how we will deliver education and a student experience in the Autumn, not to mention attempting to balance this with "home schooling" and other personal circumstances.

Why is this relevant to the leadership of the *Third Space*? This crisis placed my Directorate at front and centre of attempting to move the University online as there was suddenly a need for rapid pragmatic adaption of existing pedagogic practice into technological delivery. As a Professor of Learning and Teaching Development and Director of Learning Enhancement and Development, my role includes overseeing educational development and technology, academic skills and leading on various aspects of educational strategy, including student attainment and learning analytics. My professional role has always straddled boundaries between academic and professional services, seeing this as just part of my job to enhance the educational experience for our staff and students. However, the advent of the pandemic brought this to fore as I was suddenly involved in strategic decision making on a daily basis, collaborating with the Deputy President and senior colleagues to negotiate our way through the challenges we were facing and ensure my directorate could meet the demand. The services of my team were suddenly hugely in demand. There were queues out of our office for those days whilst we remained open and groaning inboxes for all our educational technologists. "This is our moment" we suddenly realized with an inward sigh that if only it had not happened like this for so many reasons. Although the University had agreed to go online, no one had really defined what that meant. How could we ensure quality and good pedagogic practice with such rapid change? What did it mean for academic staff suddenly catapulted into the VLE which they might have avoided for years? One could argue, that this gave renewed agency for the *Third* Space, as traditional parameters and ways of working were unraveled overnight; in the moment it seemed natural to step up and undertake new ways of collaborative working, was this easier for those more used to working in undefined ways across institutional boundaries?

In this chapter, I will explore those leadership skills that I believe are required for effective leadership in the *Third Space*, using the Covid-19 pandemic to illustrate the opportunities for a *Third Space* leader, as well as considering how focused leadership development can support future development. Although grounded in my experience as an educational development leader, there are implications beyond this area for any leaders working in new, and often undefined ways, in higher education organisations.

Third Space leadership skills

The ways I and other *Third Space* leaders have operated during the pandemic, exhibit many of the hallmarks that characterize the working of *Third Space* professionals as envisaged by Whitchurch (2008) and later Veles and Carter (2016) . Working in an agile way, across

institutional boundaries accords with Whitchurch's (Whitchurch, 2007, 2009) notion of the "unbounded and blended professional", which is explored in the introduction. The cross-institutional and collaborative approach required to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic shone a light on the skills *Third Space* professionals who were used to working in this way due to the speed of response required. Using existing networks and collaborating across the university to achieve shared goals around programme delivery in an emergency situation has required a deep knowledge of the university's academic culture "its core values, beliefs and strategic intent" (Veles and Carter, 2016) as well as the ability to be comfortable with messiness and ambiguity (Whitchurch, 2008). In an environment where suddenly all boundaries have become permeable, feeling comfortable with operating in undefined professional spaces, as well as being comfortable with a fluid professional identity, have been significant advantages and ones that *Third Space* leaders are used to navigating. The pandemic moved technology enhanced learning from a "nice to have" to fundamental to the continuation of learning and this also contributed to the importance of *Third Space* leaders who understand and can operate confidently in that arena.. Graham (2013) observed how technology changes the professional identity of staff and requires new skillsets, resulting in a "capacity to work across and beyond boundaries". Staff working with technology were often "moving towards the *Third Space* between traditional academic and professional staff roles" (Graham, 2013). This is also reminiscent of Jameson's call for "e-leadership" in higher education which recognizes a different kind of leadership that crosses institutional boundaries and requires alternative levels of communication and co-operation (Jameson, 2013). The fact that universities were able to rapidly shift into fully online learning is a testimony to the work of educational technologists up until this point in supporting the development of blended learning.

In rapidly moving times like those experienced during the pandemic, it can be hard to remember the guiding principles and theoretical approaches that drive one's leadership practice. In my planning for this article, I was reflecting on that leadership literature that for me has been a touchstone for my own practice. The work that has influenced me the most is that of Kouzes and Posner (2002), *The Leadership Challenge*, whose identification of the five areas of exemplary leadership practice (Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart) map well onto the areas of leadership for *Third Space* professionals. Their model of personal and exemplary leadership that is at its heart collaborative and recognizes that leadership is intrinsically connected with empowering those that you are leading connects well with Whitchurch's (2009) observation that "*blended professionals* described leadership […] in terms of facilitation and development, in the sense of "bringing others on"" (p.415). Kouzes and Posner present a conceptualization of leadership that fits with the notion of integrated practice, as outlined in the introductory chapter.

For *Third Space* professionals, the notion of leading without formal power is often intrinsic to the role (Whitchurch, 2009). This could mean having operational responsibility without the authority to input into strategic decisions or in other words, the resources but not the mandate to mobilise them for strategic benefit. For example, *Third Space* professionals may be placed in charge of large teams or budgets, usually in professional services, with requirements to deliver on University key performance indicators for academic success, meaning that much of the leadership required is based on negotiation and persuasion, rather than direct lines of

authority. Such a situation requires responding differently in terms of leadership, where traditional lines of authority are absent, by presenting compelling visions of the future that inspire others to follow. This is particularly true in terms of responding to the external regulatory environment that universities have found themselves in, in the UK, where the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Office for Students (OfS) play a key role in determining how a university can operate. In other international situations, it may be responding to local or state regulations on student performance or meeting new markets. The challenge for all here though is the same; that improving performance in these areas is often located in staff non accountable to those *Third Space* professional leads. Thus leadership here requires motivating and persuading staff towards a shared vision and working collaboratively. The following section will explore how Kouzes and Posner's model can be useful framework for illuminating the role of *Third Space* leaders in navigating this complex and challenging environment. It will conclude by considering what is needed for the future in terms of leadership development to support *Third Space* leaders

Leading during a pandemic

The unprecedented, and at times almost surreal, events of the pandemic have demonstrated how vital that "fuzziness" or "permeability" (Stuart and Shutt, 2019) is of the *Third Space* professional. *Third Space* professionals, and particularly leaders, have been brought to the fore of their institutions' response because of their agility to work across boundaries and adeptness to utilize and apply technological solutions.

Rapidly implementing fully online learning, initially within an emergency situation and then planning for a longer, uncertain partial operation of campus, with much online learning has stretched leadership capacities, but the ability to work across traditional institutional divides and bring diverse staff together has been vital to ensure the university can adapt and change, and that students are supported.

Kouzes and Posner's first principle to "Model the Way" outlines how as a leader one should be clear in clarifying your personal values and being able to express these in the way that you act, as well as setting the example through your practice. Translating this into my practice, when planning for educational delivery in the Autumn 2020, collaborative working across the university has been vital to ensure that the needs of academic schools have been listened to so that appropriate responses can be offered. One way of achieving this has been to establish shared planning structures between Schools and Professional Services around a common set of principles. This approach led to the second principle identified by Kouzes and Posner, that of "inspiring a shared vision". The identification of good practice principles for how Schools could tackle the challenge of delivering entirely new modes of learning and teaching in three short months were built on a shared vision and collaborative way of working. It is interesting to note that the principles enabled a sense of consensus, whereas earlier in the pandemic an attempt to implement a policy around assessment had caused huge resistance. The notion of a principles approach enabled more freedom and buy-in.

The third principle, "challenge the process" is where Kouzes and Posner encourage leaders to look for opportunities to innovate and take risks, to take the initiative and explore new ways to grow. In the case of the pandemic, there are certainly many of these! A particular example has been designing models for dual on campus and online delivery and how to schedule these, building on the work of educational technologists already. Key to this has been

drawing on Kouzes and Posner's fourth principle "enabling others to act". Creative scheduling and planning in a time of uncertainty requires collaborative working. It requires trust and collaboration, setting principles that can be agreed to but not dictated. Supporting this process has reminded me of the sometimes "invisible" role of educational development which is about facilitating and guiding, steering and supporting; enabling others to reach a shared goal. As Brene Brown (2018) identifies, demonstrating vulnerability builds trust and the facilitative role here of *Third Space* professionals can enable boundaries to be broken down and for vulnerability to be shown as all identities are blurred. Establishing a shared theme, such as these principles, can work to leverage this building of trust as it is a new ground for everyone, there are no knowns or experts.

Kouzes and Posner's last principle is "encouraging the heart" where effective leaders have high standards, create a sense of community and recognize the contributions of others. Never has this leadership practice been more important during the pandemic when people are isolated, scared, struggling with huge change and often feeling alone. Denney (2020) has argued for the importance of compassionate leadership, particularly during the pandemic. Compassion can also inspire trust as well as vulnerability (Brown, 2018). Reinforcing positive behaviour, recognizing that everyone is doing their best and just simply saying "thank you" are crucial leadership skills that become even more significant and valued in times of crisis.

These five principles have had a particular resonance for me as a leader in the *Third Space* during a time of uncertainty and change, which is reshaping our educational systems. This spirit of co-operation and values-based leadership, goes to the heart of the work of *Third Space* professionals. Such an approach will be vital for building on the experiences of the pandemic to engender sustainable change for the future.

Leadership development

Kouzes and Posner's framework has certainly provided guidance and structure to validate and inform my approach to the various leadership situations I have faced in the *Third Space*. However, this role is not without challenges and identity insecurity. Building collaboration and consensus during a time of crisis has been challenging and required considerable resilience. The rapid pace of change and pressure of the enormity of the issues being dealt with means that there has been resistance and disquiet at times. This can play into feelings of being an imposter or outsider, "what is my role here?" "what gives me the legitimacy to occupy this position?" "why should others listen to me?" "How can I grow as a leader?" "How can I align my actions and my words?" The notion of being an "imposter", often articulated in literature around the imposter phenomenon (Langford and Clance, 1993) is one that resonates with staff working in *Third Space* roles where their presence in particular situations may be questioned or misunderstood.

Leadership development can assist with recognizing the value of the *Third Space* leader and addressing some of the characteristics around the imposter syndrome. Although general leadership development can be extremely helpful in building confidence around identification of leadership values and recognition of leadership approaches and techniques, staff working in the *Third Space* may require more specific approaches to address some of the opportunities and challenges of their specific circumstances. Tailored leadership development can benefit staff moving towards or already in senior educational management roles, particularly

exploring the challenges of leading in an environment where hierarchies and structures are very different to corporate organisations. Coaching and mentoring can be important parts of this leadership development, alongside spaces where *Third Space* leaders can learn together to explore issues of vulnerability, trust and collaboration. Research on educational leaders found that most had had very little specific leadership development, if they had had any leadership development at all (Stefani, 2015).

Structured leadership development that focuses on core skills of reflection and being clear about your guiding values, as well as your leadership approach and philosophy can significantly help to support aspiring leaders in the *Third Space*. Values-based leadership, centred on collaboration and communication, was core to my work on building consensus around the principles I described above. *Third Space* leaders can adapt frameworks such as Kouzes and Posner for academic environments to articulate a clarity of purpose that defines and shapes their work with others. Such leadership development for leaders builds confidence, enabling a greater sense of purpose and clarity, as well as appreciation, all of which the a *Third Space* professional may lack.

Conclusion

Could the Covid-19 pandemic be the "moment" for *Third Space* leaders to be accepted as crucial players in helping shape universities continuing educational sustainability in the future? Absolutely, but only if we continue to reinforce the benefits of the flexibility and permeability of our approach and roles to enact change and work with others to achieve it. We need to heed the warning from Julie's chapter that the *Third Space* needs to be understood and embraced so that it does not become "no space". Although a time of crisis may benefit the *Third Space* professional, the key challenge is for *Third Space* leaders to reinforce those skills that came to the fore during the crisis and demonstrate again whilst these are needed for the longer term and day-to-day operations. This could be even more of a challenge than has been faced before, particularly as we will be judged on the success or otherwise of our responses during the crisis. The fluidity of perspective that *Third Space* professionals have combined with agility of their professional role are vital for embracing change and demonstrating flexibility in the future, so that we can continue to meet the changing needs of our staff and students. We need to challenge the narrative of leadership in academia as the preserve of only the academic and join with others to imagine a more diverse future, both cognitively and experientially, where leadership is open to all and the *Third Space* operates as an arena for enacting this change. From the dark days of the pandemic can come the light and space for a future of the *Third Space*.

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