Leadership Matters

an exploration of how Ministers understand their role to provide and promote leadership.

by
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A dissertation summitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
the University of Durham for the degree of

Master of Arts in Contemporary Christian Leadership

May 2025

Scottish Episcopal College
Edinburgh

Word count: 15,465

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Abstract

Ministers are responsible for providing leadership and enabling others to lead. In exploring the experience of a group of Ministers in relation to leadership they reported their initial training did not prepare them for the realities of this task. They particularly struggled in their first 5 years of ministry. As they reflect on their experience across the whole of their Ministry they identified the ongoing tension between Managing, Leading and being Entrepreneurial, with competing pressures coming from congregations, the institution and themselves. They recognise and welcome the need for greater accountability, pastoral supervision and continuing professional development, especially around leadership.

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Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to Avril Cutler and to all at St Ninian’s Church, Stonehouse.

Introduction

To say that "Effective organizations need effective leaders" seems obvious, but "the best organizations understand that remaining competitive requires developing leadership capacity as a core business function" (Wallace, Torres, & Zaccaro, 2021, p. 1). The Church might not see itself as a business, nor wish to be competitive, but as an organisation which trains and deploys people in leadership roles, I would argue that understanding leadership and how to develop, support and grow the capacity of leaders is crucial.

The Church of Scotland website states that

> *"Full-time ordained Ministers have a particular role and function in offering leadership and vision to the Church in a changing missional context. Significant to this role is the enabling and discipleship of others to exercise their own ministry as part of the people of God. Conduct of worship, the celebration of the sacraments and preaching are integral, as is the ability to work collaboratively in a wider framework - locally, within Presbytery and as part of the National Church"* (The Church of Scotland, 2025).

It would be safe to conclude that Leadership and Leader Development are central to the role of Ministers.

The study of leadership is nothing new. For millennia we have sought to understand why some people seem to lead more effectively than others and wondered whether leadership is an innate characteristic some are born with or if leadership can be learned, nurtured, and improved. Leadership is multi-faceted. There are an array of types and styles. Exploring these and understanding the contexts and skills required to deploy leadership effectively would seem an expected component of training for ministry and make up a significant part of any continuing development programme.

At the time of this study The Church of Scotland has embarked on what it has named the 'Mission Planning Process', a national reorganisation project. There appear to be several drivers to this process including a lack of members leading to a lack of income, too many buildings, not enough Ministers, and ensuring continued adherence to the 3rd Declaratory Article, committing to providing the ordinances of religion to the whole population of Scotland. This has meant the rationalisation of buildings (around 40% will close), merging of parishes, and effectively the redeployment of Ministers. This prompts significant questions about how the church should operate and what the role of Ministers will be in their new situations.

Similar issues affect the reformed churches in Scotland who share experiences of declining membership over the post-war period, meaning not only a reduction in the number of people involved in church activities but also fewer applicants to serve in Ministry in its various guises. There is a significant reduction in the numbers of serving Ministers due to retirement and ill health. Denominations find themselves trying to work out how to be the Church in this very different reality with serious questions raised around the role of Ministers as their deployment to serve multiple congregations, or much larger parishes on reviewable rather than permanent tenure, becoming the norm.

This research seeks to explore the role of the Minister as leader by uncovering how Ministers understand the concept of leadership, how they have experienced leadership, how they have led and continue to lead, and their role, if any, in encouraging, facilitating, and developing the leadership of others.

This research will provide new contribution to existing and emerging knowledge on the experience of Ministers in leadership.

Literature Review

The aim of this research is to explore the experience of the Minister as leader by uncovering how Ministers understand the concept of leadership, how they have experienced leadership, how they have led and continue to lead, and their role, in encouraging, facilitating, and developing the leadership of others.

To develop a broader understanding of the subject, a search for relevant literature was conducted and appraised then summarised and synthesised (Stake, 2010, pp. 109-111) prior to any conclusions being drawn.

I began with Day's seminal paper "Leadership Development: A Review in Context" (2001) as the most cited paper in this research area before broadening the scope to what Stake (2010, p. 112) describes as 'nearby studies', those also frequently cited papers which themselves cite Day's work. This provided a sense of the development of research around Leadership and Leader Development, including discussion about what defines leadership, how it operates, the important difference between Leadership Development and Leader Development, and the development of human and social capital. I also looked, mostly unsuccessfully, for literature exploring Leadership Development in these terms in a Christian context.

We begin by exploring how leadership is defined, and some key ideas about what it is and how it operates before moving to Day's discussion about the difference between Leadership Development and Leader Development.

What is Leadership?

Northouse (2016, pp. 6-9) offers a helpful definition of leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". This definition recognises the complexity of the task as we seek to further clarify wide terms like 'process', 'influence' and 'groups'. From this we know that leadership takes time and effort, it involves conversation, persuasion, and vision, and it happens in and with groups of individuals who may all have competing values and goals but who can choose to work together to reach a shared destination. Northouse also highlights the continuing discussion about how and why people come to be leaders. Is leadership a gift of character, the idea of a 'born leader', or is it a set of skills and competencies which can be learned, practiced and improved? Is leadership given, bestowed or assigned? Can leaders emerge through positive interactions, self-confidence and intelligence?

Northouse's definition is founded on the widely accepted 'tripod' ontology where, in its simplest form, leadership occurs where 'leader, followers, and shared goals' are all present. Drath, McCauley, Palus, Van Velsor, O'Connor and McGuire (2008, p. 638) suggest that if this is indeed the accepted view of the nature of leadership then leadership theory and research will always seek to explain the interaction of these three essential components. While this has been productive, they assert that context is seen as external to the tripod. This means leaders must have individual characteristics and qualities which exist separately to the context they find themselves in. They provide a helpful alternative ontology: 'Direction, Alignment, and Commitment' (DAC). Here they suggest the "practice of leadership would

no longer necessarily involve leaders, followers, and their shared goals but would necessarily involve the production of direction, alignment, and commitment (which may or may not involve leaders and followers)" (2008, p. 636).

While Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff welcome much of the DAC ontology, in particular recognition of "co-construction of a sense of common direction in social interaction" **No source specified.** their main concern that this remains 'outcome focussed' and that its construction as an opposite to the tripod ontology means it is seen only in contrast to its opposite rather than as being helpful in and of itself.

Leadership is Contextual

When leadership is viewed as "processes, interactions and practices - i.e. as socially constructed, emergent organizing embedded in sociocultural contexts" (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010, p. 80) it means that whether the observed leadership is viewed as effective or not effective depends greatly on the cultural norms of both the observer and the context being observed. This has been particularly true in challenging the highly masculinised and individualised properties associated with 'heroic leadership' which have until recently dominated perceptions of how effective leadership should be performed (McCauley & Palus, 2021, p. 2).

Cunliffe and Eriksen question "the egocentric and heroic approaches to leadership" (2011, p. 1427) as problematically encouraging individual action without much consideration of the moral consequences. Instead, they suggest leadership as a process founded in relationship. The "post-heroic theme positions leadership as non-hierarchical, distributed throughout the organization as a relational practice of collaboration, empathy, trust, empowerment, etc.: something that collaborating actors 'do' within social interactions and networks of influence to construct realities" (2011, p. 1430).

Relational Leadership

Uhl-Bien's (2006, p. 668) defines relational leadership as a "social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (i.e., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviours, and ideologies) are constructed and produced".

Uhl-Bein describes entity, or individual reality, perspectives as assuming individuals who have agency and that they exercise that agency through creating or bringing order by relating to others to achieve a shared outcome. This assumes a realist ontology. Studies from this perspective are concerned with how parties as autonomous individuals relate to other individuals.

In Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory leaders and followers develop good relationships over time enabling the leader to influence the followers to accept and pursue a goal.

Hollander's relational theory sees leadership as a process of influence where the leader is one of the participants relating to others, and that transactions take place between the leader and followers on the understanding that there is benefit or reward. Hollander suggests that a significant element of how leaders are viewed is in their self-perception in

relation to those who follow them and how the leader understands that relationship (1995, p. 55).

'Collective Self' suggests that collective social identities can be formed by identifying with a group, belief or organisation where people see themselves as like others in that category (e.g. social class, fans of football teams, faith groups). People then assimilate into groups and take on shared outlooks and behaviours, meaning to be effective the leader must also display those same characteristics to be accepted as part of the group.

Uhl-Bien then describes relational perspectives.

'Relational Constructivism', is seeing knowledge as "socially constructed and socially distributed" and not the preserve of the individual meaning understanding and meaning are created differently depending on the social, historical or cultural context. This approach sees leadership as process where the way we relate and organise are negotiated and accepted then implemented and subject to ongoing renegotiation. The 'Relational Leadership' approach views leadership as emerging from influence between people seen in activities where members relate to each other to create knowledge systems together. "Leadership is generated by bringing in increasing numbers of increasingly responsible people to produce an unfolding of ever more involving and complex knowledge principles" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 663).

Cunliffe and Erkisen (2011, p. 1429) suggest in Social Network Theories leaders are central to organising and maintaining relationships between "environmental, social and organizational network elements". If we view leadership as a way of being-in-relation-to-others, then leaders should make sure leaders are aware of how people relate and how these networks of relationships are used to construct our understanding of our context and experience (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1430).

These relational perspectives see a move away from the management language of 'boss - subordinate' towards views of leadership as non-hierarchical relationships where co-construction of meaning occurs.

Iles and Preece (2006) chart the move from the language of management to that of leadership, sharing the view that leadership development and leader development have been confused and conflated. They suggest leadership development is "extending the collective ability of people to effectively undertake leadership roles and build social networks, develop commitments, and access resources" (2006, p. 321). Leadership training must therefore not be an accidental by-product of leader development training but should instead be a deliberate process that recognises the need for leaders to be able to both manage the task in hand but also be aware of the emotional and social factors always in play. Effective leadership must involve people from all aspects of the organisation who have the capacity to understand both their own contexts and that of the wider organisation. This means leadership is a social process. They suggest any strategy to improve management must include those doing the managing, not only in training to be more competent in the skills of management but also to help promote a better and more effective culture across throughout.

Followership

Following Northouse's Tripod Ontology definition of leadership (Northhouse, 2016) much less attention has been given to the nature and contribution of Followers.

Crossman and Crossman (2011) provide excellent insight into the nature and importance of followership. They begin by restating the three parts of the tripod. If leadership exists, then there must be those being led to somewhere. Much of the assessment of how effective leadership is has been based on the feedback of those being led and the measurement of their achievements under the guidance of their leader. However, "leadership can occur not only amongst formally appointed individuals but also amongst informal leaders who emerge from group interactions. Multiple leadership encompasses what has been variously termed shared, dispersed, collective, distributed leadership, team leadership and self-managed teams." (Crossman & Crossman, 2011, p. 485).

Being a good follower is often viewed as someone who is compliant, follows direction or orders, carries those orders out effectively. This adheres strongly to a sense of 'heroic' leadership. However, we know that followers also exert influence on leaders and for the tripod ontology to work leaders and followers need to come to some agreement on a shared goal. This suggests that the relationship between leader and followers is vital and is very much a mutual relationship where often leadership can emerge from within the follower group, so much so that some literature suggests that in a shared leadership approach there is little if any distinction between the two (Crossman & Crossman, 2011, pp. 485-488).

Leadership & Leader Development

Leadership Developing "seeks to understand, predict, and intervene effectively in addressing the questions of how: (a) individuals develop as leaders, and (b) collections of individuals develop a capacity for leadership" (Day, Riggio, Tan, & Conger, 2021, p. 1).

Day and Dragoni (2015, pp. 134-135) state that the scientific development of the study of Leadership Development is still relatively new. They suggest previous focus on behaviours, skills and effectiveness miss important elements. This includes the relationship between leaders and followers, the development of capacities over longer periods of time, and a confusion between or conflation of 'leadership' as a focus on 'social influence', that is changing or promoting a broader culture of an organisation, with 'leader development' which is concerned more with skilling people in particular leadership tools.

Day and Dragoni (2015, p. 134) define 'Leader Development' as "the expansion of the capacity of individuals to be effective in leadership roles and processes" while 'Leadership Development' is "the growth of a collective's capacity to produce direction, alignment and commitment". Later Day working with Riggio, Tan and Conger (2021, p. 3) would remove the DAC ontology from that definition, stating only the "increased capacity of the collective to engage in leadership".

In what has become a foundational work, Day (2001, p. 583) begins tackling the misunderstanding that leadership has been "conceptualized an individual level skill". That implies the elements of that skill can be learned, practiced and mastered meaning one can be 'good at leadership' if you work hard at the component parts, behaviours and capacities.

Learning these skills has been the content of most of the billion-dollar leadership development industry's manuals and training courses.

Day argues that improving these individual skills is in fact 'Leader Development' and is concerned with intrapersonal development. Organisations value these outcomes which lead to better self-confidence, dependability and flexibility (2001, p. 848) as they increase the organisation's human capital.

Day (2001) suggests that it is also important to consider leadership as experienced by others, meaning leadership is predominantly about behaviour. Organisations require people to both manage others and procedures as well as making contributions to strategy and being adaptable to meet challenging situations. That means 'Leadership Development' is about increasing social capital by building networks and relationships. These kinds of developments are made by improving interpersonal skills or 'emotional intelligence' as the increasing of our understanding of others' mood, motivations and ambitions (Gardner, 1993, pp. 23-38).

Having made a case for Leader Development and Leadership Development as two related but distinct areas, Day then seems to confuse the two. This leads to a lack of clarity in that the description used of 'leader development' seems like improving in the tasks associated with 'management'. This could be because of a move away from the language of 'boss' and 'subordinates' to 'leader' and 'follower'.

Dalakoura (2010, pp. 423-433) supports the differentiation Day makes between Leadership and Leader Development and warns that failing to see them as separate means we miss important aspects of both. For her 'leader development' is developing techniques, skills and theories which in turn increases the human capital of the organisation. 'Leadership development' moves away from management to something that involves all parts of the organisation where that leadership is experienced, building social capital. Dalakoura reminds us that people are not now seen as 'the boss' but are expected to be able to arrange activity, and to educate and encourage colleagues, rather than simply making sure the work gets done to a suitable standard within a deadline. We see this change reflected in a move away from compliance type language to something that sees leadership as more strategic and interested in supporting development across the whole organisation. This is a required response to a rapid move away from organisational hierarchies to ones that enable decision making across the organisation in response to quickly arising opportunities and issues. To make this possible, leaders need to move beyond their own area of responsibility to understand the whole organisation and how their area of responsibility fits within that whole, as well as realising how their contribution can impact the rest of the organisation (Dalakoura, 2010, p. 438). This requires leaders to be open to learning and reflective practice.

Adult Learning

The roots of this approach are found on the work of the Liberation Theologian and Educationalist Paulo Freire's (1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed where learning is seen as at its core a problem-solving exercise where those without power gather the knowledge and skills required to overcome their issues or improve their situation. Learning gives access to

power when the solution to issues brings together acquiring of new skills, developing networks, and strategically working across sectors to flourish. This seems to describe the aims of leadership development. Freire's work also acknowledges that those with experience of a situation are the ones who should be central to any solution. Day suggests 'leadership development' is most effectively seen in contexts away from the classroom in a practice-based environment and supported by reflective practice. According to Day, classrooms are the location in which 'leader development' takes place. Given that leadership development happens in an adult learning environment it follows that the focus of this learning approach would encourage a development approach to leadership (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014, p. 64).

For Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm and McKee (2014) the difference between Leadership and Leader development rests in whether human or social capital is being built, but, again, I would argue that it would seem obvious taking part in classroom-based training also improves social capital as this training happens with others, so relationships are formed and networks expanded. Similarly, engaging in reflective practice, the bedrock of 'leadership development', also improves human capital, leading to question if the distinction should be made on these grounds.

Methodology

Aims and Objectives
The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the role of the Minister as leader by uncovering how they understand the concept of leadership.

Research Question
How do Ministers understand their role to provide and promote leadership?

Research Objectives
To discover the experience of Ministers of their roles as leaders
To understand if and how they create cultures of leadership
To understand how they promote leader development

Introduction
The study of leadership is in many ways problematic. Removing an observable phenomenon from its environment often radically changes the nature of what is being observed and potentially overlooks a range of associated elements that may have contributed significantly to the leadership being studied (Ladkin, 2010, p. 15). This is particularly true given the 'tripod' nature of leadership, requiring all three elements: leader, followers, and shared goal(s), to be present. It seems, therefore, that any exploration of leadership and leading would be best undertaken using qualitative methodologies, and in particular phenomenological approaches which are designed to understand human experiences and help find meaning.

Phenomenological approaches help the researcher to take time to appreciate and understand the depth of the contexts, experiences and understandings being described before bringing those into conversation with the available literature and, indeed, my own experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, for this study, consideration was given to a range of possible methodologies rooted in phenomenological approaches including Case Study and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Both these approaches may have gone some way to addressing Ladkin's (2010, p. 15) concerns about separation of leader and context, but I decided to adopt a narrative approach which is also located within the qualitative or interpretive research method (Gudmundsdottir, 2001). A focus group with all or some of the participants was also considered but ultimately rejected due to the amount and quality of data already gathered.

Narrative research is the study of how human beings experience the world. A narrative approach sets out to collect stories and write narratives of participants' experiences (Gudmundsdottir, 2001) with narratives capturing both the individual and the context (Moen, 2006).

There are three major theoretical underpinnings in narrative research: human beings classify their experiences of the world into narratives or storytelling; narrative researchers maintain that the stories shared very much depend on the person's past and present experiences, their values, the listener, time and place; the multivoicedness or perspective of more than one person that occurs in the story (Moen, 2006).

One of the main characteristics of narrative research is the collaboration process between the researcher and her or his research subjects. Within this approach, the research subject is regarded as a collaborator rather than an informant guided by the agenda of the researcher. Implicit in what has been discussed so far is that narrative research is an ongoing hermeneutic or interpretive process (Moen, 2006).

Stories matter because "human beings organize their experiences of the world into narratives" which are told in the light of experiences, values, context of the events and the telling, the listener and even the timing of the telling (Moen, 2006, pp. 60-63). Explaining our experiences to others helps us make sense, create meaning and understand the world. But stories are messy and it can be difficult to work out what constitutes data, even in an interview where we would generally assume that everything said counts (Andrews, 2020, pp. 353-357). Meaning is constructed by the teller in how they choose to tell their story, but also in how the listener hears and interprets. Meaning is, therefore, a co-construction, an ongoing hermeneutic or interpretive process which starts immediately when one story is selected out of any number of other possible stories, and it continues during the entire research process (Moen, 2006, p. 62)

Rich narratives and thick descriptions (Younas, et al., 2023) were gathered through semi-structured interviews which focused on the participants' own descriptions of their experience across a range of contexts, not just one.

Interviews – Interpretation & Meaning Making

Interviews are useful for "Obtaining unique information or interpretation held by the person interviewed." and "Finding out about "a thing" that the researchers were unable to observe themselves" (Stake, 2010, p. 95). Given that the primary focus of this research is the participants' experience and understanding of their own leadership, and that I am unable to observe their previous practice, interviews were the most suitable method to illicit that data. An interview schedule was produced (Appendix 1) covering the areas highlighted by the literature review as significant. Questions were open ended to encourage reflection. The same question areas were covered with each participant but sometimes asked in a different order in response to the answers given and areas covered. This approach allowed participants to reflect on their experience and explain their understandings, giving examples to help elucidate. This provided a rich series of narratives. Interviews were conducted on Zoom each lasting around one hour.

Transcription and Coding

Understanding that qualitative field notes are an essential component of rigorous qualitative research (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018) I took notes during the interviews of key points I thought were interesting or that I was curious to know more about. I also noted when the question had not perhaps been fully addressed to remind me to return to it later or to ask for clarification.

Each interview was transcribed using Microsoft Word with notes made as interesting statements appeared during the interview or to mark something I found intriguing. It was

helpful to engage in 'analytic memoing' which, although most associated with the grounded theory (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008), I found the process helpful in sorting thoughts and bringing order to the findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, pp. 93-96).

I did consider using AI or an external service to transcribe the interviews as it is a laborious and time-consuming task. I decided against this as the transcription process gives the researcher the chance to become immersed in the data

Anonymity

Interviews have many benefits, including a sense of confidentiality not felt in group settings, meaning participants are more likely to speak more candidly. That in turn poses issues around confidentiality and later in presenting the findings in ways that protects both the anonymity of the participant but also the contexts and people they may have spoken about. Pseudonyms were used throughout to ensure anonymity. Names and locations of churches remain confidential (Stake, 2010, pp. 206-207).

Issues

Member Checking

I am mindful of how my experience, understanding and knowledge of the participants will affect this study as the responsibility for meaning making beyond the interview lies primarily with me. This will be mitigated through 'member checking', presenting the interview transcriptions to the interviewees to check for accuracy and that they have expressed themselves in ways they are content with (Stake, 2010, p. 126).

I recognise I am reliant on their ability to describe their experience and make sense of it together with my own ability to present and interpret their experience accurately. Although I have some first-hand knowledge of participants' contexts, it is not enough knowledge to add any reliable insights into their experience beyond what they describe in the interviews.

Data Analysis - Thematic Analysis

I employed a thematic analysis, reading each of the transcripts closely and identifying themes that emerged from each interview. I then compared these themes with those from the other interviews and looked for areas of similarity and of difference.

Purposive Sample

I deliberately engaged in purposive sampling when selecting participants given the specific area of experience being explored (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, pp. 31-32). Six participants, three female and three male, were invited to participate with five choosing to take part. The sixth potential interviewee, a female, was willing to participate but was unable to make time due to personal circumstances.Six participants, three female and three male, were invited to participate with five choosing to take part. The sixth potential interviewee, a female, was willing to participate but was unable to make time due to personal circumstances.

Each participant met 2 criteria:

- Experience as a minister in a local church context
- Experience of providing leadership, support, training or advice at a Presbytery and/or National Level

Each of those invited to participate has many years of experience working in and for the church with at least 5 years in a parish setting.

I did give serious consideration to inviting someone in the first five years of ministry to participate but I decided not to include someone at this stage as they would have no comparison to their own later experience. I believe this decision was validated by the data gathered. Studying those in the early stages of ministry would be a worthwhile future area of research.

Consent

Having gained ethical approval from the college, the gathering of informed consent among participants was essential (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, pp. 59-60). Participants must be fully aware of the scope of the study, the process the research will follow, how the information and insights they provide will be presented and where. Full disclosure is key to enabling them to make a truly informed choice to participate or not.

Following a conversation explaining the purpose of the research, process and issues like confidentiality and storage of data, each potential participant was issued with an information sheet (appendix 2) and consent form (appendix 3) detailing their expected role and explaining they could remove their consent and leave the research at any point without the requirement to state a reason. Any issues relating to the conduct of this research could be raised with my Supervisor or the Director of Studies.

Recording & Storage

Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed to digital files, and password protected. These transcriptions were printed and stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. All data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted or destroyed as appropriate.

Rigour

It is important for this research to be as accessible as possible while presenting the findings honestly and making any implications clear without claims unsupported by data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This research is rooted in the experience of five individuals and so as I analyse those experiences and bring them into conversation with each other we move cautiously towards more generalised statements. In research, being able to generalise findings is often seen as the goal but in qualitative research there is more focus on transferability, that is: the possibility of moving findings from one group to another where comparison and learning may occur through bringing the experience of others into conversation with our own experience of similar phenomena (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). The reader should

therefore be able to evaluate the findings in relation to their own knowledge, experience, and understanding (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

In terms of measuring validity, qualitative research seeks to move beyond the checking of the measurable statistics of quantitative approaches. Instead, 'validity' is more usefully thought of in terms of 'credibility' or 'trustworthiness', asking if the data presented has credibility (in that data is rich, reflexivity is acknowledged and findings are verified), transferability (thick descriptions, clear description of sampling approach) , dependability (clear methodology and audit trail), and confirmability (review of findings, minimising of bias) (Ahmed, 2024).

Positionality

Epistemic reflexivity, or positionality, is the process of acknowledging the researcher's own beliefs, biases, and assumptions. This shows that while qualitative research can never be fully objective, we should be as transparent as possible about how the researcher's position may colour understanding, interpretation and presentation. This research represents a subjectivist epistemology through which meaning is created by the participants describing their experience and the interaction of that experience with that of the researcher.

My own experience includes my undergraduate degree in Community Education and I have worked for both Church of Scotland (CofS) and United Reformed Church (URC). My roles included Youth Development Worker, Young Adult Development Officer and National Adult Education Advisor for the CofS Board of Parish Education, and Children & Youth Development Officer for the URC National Synod of Scotland. My degree and subsequent work centred on adult learning, helping people to lead groups and facilitate learning and discipleship. This experience plays a large part in how I understand both the purpose of the church and my current role as a Minister. I hold a MSc in Social Research.

At present I serve as a Minister of the URC in St Ninian's Church in Stonehouse, Scotland, a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) between the URC and CofS. I have been in this role for eight years. Working in the LEP means I relate to both denominations and take part in the decision-making bodies of both. I serve as the Convenor of the Training Committee of the Presbytery of Forth Valley & Clydesdale, responsible for the placement element of initial ministerial training within the presbytery and for training opportunities for Ministers and members.

My training for Ministry with the URC differed significantly from the training required on the CofS in several areas. I was allowed to train part-time and to the minimum required diploma level in recognition of my previous qualifications and experience. A significant proportion of my training was formational, focusing on what Chappell, Delbecq and McCready (2020, p. 53) describe as the interior work necessary "to move beyond the intellectual" and recognise the place of spirituality and relationships as key to effective leadership.

I would describe my own values as theologically inclusive, egalitarian and open and I consider leadership to involve an element of calling.

Finally, all the participants are know to me.

Findings

In this chapter I present a narrative review of the findings of five semi-structured interviews. Direct quotes from participants are italicised and provide rich examples of the raw data collected allowing further exploration of emerging themes. Each interview began by asking the participants to offer a definition of leadership to aid our understanding of what the concept means to them.

Defining Leadership

Definitions offered demonstrate clearly how multi-faceted leadership is and how it is understood and misunderstood.

> Bob: *"…journeying with others in a way that allows you to reach a common goal and taking as many people with you as possible along the way."*
>
> Paul: *"The deliberate use of influence. I mean by that, that we all have influence one way or another whoever you are. But it's knowing that, appreciating that, understanding the scope of that, and then being deliberate about what you're going to do with it."*
>
> Julie: *"a leader is somebody who you can trust, who you would be willing to follow, clearly. You need to be able to follow a leader. So, if it's someone you're going to follow then they need to inspire trust, and em… maybe that's it, actually." "… so inspirational, trustworthy, competent, and has integrity."*
>
> Ralph: *"For me leadership is about enabling people on a journey. Em… providing some context. Some guidance. Some inspiration. Some encouragement… and trying to discern... or lead a group of people to discern what is the right way forward for that particular role."*
>
> Margaret: *"Leadership for me in my context is being the Minister with a team of people around me in that I try to be collaborative… I think there's a huge amount of trust in leadership that you do get a team that you can trust and that when they say that they're going to do something it's going to get done."*

Paul, Ralph and Bob were initially the most comfortable giving a definition of leadership with Bob and Ralph offering definitions that would fit comfortably with the 'tripod ontology' noting the presence of 'a leader, followers, and shared goal'.

We should note Bob has recently taken part in a Masters level 'leading change' course so his ability to define leadership in the widely accepted 'tripod ontology' (Northhouse, 2016) is unsurprising.

The definition Paul offered was couched in the language of deliberate use of influence, with the presence of leader and followers, and a goal, outcome or destination implicit. He goes on to describe his children as 'natural born leaders', a phrase that indicates a belief in 'heroic' leadership. He suggests everyone can use their influence for good or bad, meaning

everyone, no matter their position, has potential to lead. This frames leadership as a moral imperative (Day, Riggio, Tan, & Conger, 2021, p. 6).

Interestingly, Julie initially spoke more broadly about the personal characteristics of a leader rather than offering a definition. She added to these as elements occurred to her throughout the conversation. Trust and the ability to inspire followers suggest elements of the tripod ontology are present in Julie's understanding of leadership.

Margaret approached the question much more in terms of what she thought her ministry looked like and in doing so offered a view that was again consistent with the tripod ontology, featuring her as the leader, with followers and some sense of a collaborative endeavour to set and achieve shared goals.

What are Ministers for?

Ralph considers the broader role of ministry as "*… an interesting juxtaposition because you're providing that leadership for other people to explore who they are, their understanding, but you've also been called as the professional Minister whatever we understand that means. And so sometimes, actually, we do have to say in leadership 'right guys, come on. You've called me to be Minister. Actually, I think this is going to be the best way to move forward. Do you trust me?*".

For Margaret, being visible in her role was an important aspect of leadership: *"I suppose in the parish it's about being recognised as the Minister.*" For her this was a recurring theme. She also drew on previous experience and said she would "*still see Ministers' jobs, to a great degree, as a community education worker. And Com Ed is always about supporting people to do the thing"*.

Julie identified the conflict between what the church in its widest sense expects of the role not matching with the expectation of providing effective leadership: "*… what the church thinks Ministers are for is to preach and to deliver the sacraments. And I guess provide leadership… the church probably has a sense that the Minister is meant to enable the congregation... there's no sense actually of what a Minister actually is… is (that they are) a leader. The best kind of leader who enables and equips and sends out.*"

Despite the lack of clarity, it seems as though when a Minister is not present the leadership void is filled. As Julie observes: *"They do seem a bit rudderless without a Minister. Either that or somebody will take charge and that's not always a good thing either."*

First 5 Years in Ministry

In posing the question 'Does the definition you offered of leadership relate to your own experience?' no matter what definition of leadership was offered all five agreed that their experiences, particularly in their first five years of ministry, did not meet the definition of leadership they shared.

Each of the interviewees described their first five years in post as the most difficult period of their ministry. There are several factors at play in this. The most obvious is that this is the first time they have been deployed in this capacity and any role where you move into a

position of responsibility as someone relatively inexperienced provides challenges. They all describe a period of learning what the job is, while at the same time all but one of them tried to implement, or perhaps impose, significant changes to their congregations.

Margaret admitted to going in *"… all guns blazing, full of ideas and tried to say 'come on, we'll do all of these things' without actually recognising properly that these were folk that had been keeping their parish afloat for 5 years in vacancy and they were tired of having to do all of that and so they were quite happy to leave me to do everything."* Similarly, Julie was met with what seemed like apathy or lack of enthusiasm which she later discerned to be the exhaustion of a congregation who had worked hard for several years to keep things going while they did not have a Minister. She noticed the exhaustion in the congregation admitting that she was also *"just exhausted"* when she came into the parish.

Paul publicly committed to making no changes in his first year. *"I gave my first five years every afternoon, evenings too sometimes, pastoral visitation. I was doing 25/30 visits a week. I'm not saying they were high quality or intensive, but I was getting seen by people"* chiming with Margaret's sense of the importance of visibility. He now reflects that Ministers probably do not have the luxury to spend a year only spending time getting to know their congregation and the context.

Ralph spoke of entering an established culture where people seemed willing to change and experiment but now reflects that, on leaving after five years, from his perspective, the new structures and processes fell apart without him to drive them.

Bob viewed the first five years as a chance to *"make mistakes and then go somewhere else*". His problem was asking a willing congregation to do too much. *"I knackered the congregation because we had built it up and built it up until it was at a point where it needed to rest. But I wasn't ready to rest."*

Initial Training

Training for ministry for all the participants involved a full-time degree in Divinity alongside placements in local churches with a longer final fulltime placement at the end known as 'probation'. Participants were invited to reflect on whether their initial training prepared them for their role.

Bob spoke about an epiphany moment. "I was led to believe that all I needed to learn was what I had in my training. Then I realised that didn't even come close... I don't think training really sets you up for what you're going into." Paul agrees. *"You were being trained to be a Minister that had certain roles and expectations: leading worship, visiting; those kinds of things. But I honestly think I went through my entire training, and nobody probably used the word 'leader' once".* Ralph reflected *"I wasn't overly able to find my own voice. I was kind of directed in the style and directed in the things I should say... I knew the chances of me using much were slim… however, it's still quite unsettling when you realise you really don't have a road map".*

Entering any new situation as a leader means a period of acclimatisation and a sense that, although status is conferred, leadership needs to be earned. Only Paul spoke specifically

about deliberately getting to know people through prolific visiting in the first years of his ministry allowing him as a young Minister to gain the trust of his congregation. Even though that was deliberate he spoke of a moment when *"it clicked with me; you've got influence in this. But I think it's not just by your job title. You've got to earn it. And I did. And then I began to think, right, okay, I need to start reading about this whole area: what leadership is".*

Similarly, Ralph reflects that depth of relationship is important: *"I don't know what I would do if I moved to another charge because a big part of it is about the length of time and the relationships that you build up as well".*

Change

The case for change is seemingly clear: membership has fallen; therefore, the perception is that people do not like church and, therefore, church must change to appeal to those who do not attend. That case has at least one problem. Namely, that people who are involved in church are generally people who like it, find comfort, inspiration, meaning and purpose and are, therefore, unlikely to wish it to change. Given that the church is essentially a membership organisation that means making the case for change is of the utmost importance.

When discussing further training Margaret said: *"I did the Church Plant Pioneering Ministry course last year with the grand idea that this was going to kick start it all off.".* Although enthused by the learning, time pressures and competing demands have meant initial plans to engage in a new build estate in the parish have not happened yet, much to her and other's frustration. Part of that frustration was that Margaret was the person with the knowledge, but she knew she could not do this piece of work by herself. Julie described a similar situation when the Presbytery Youth Worker *"came out to my Parish to do sessions with my folk and she did really good sessions and changed not one thing. I mean because they were the wrong people.".*

Both experiences point to the importance of agreeing shared goals, helping members to align their efforts and then ensuring the correct support or skills building are in place with the right people. It could be that this training experience was part of the Minister and congregation recognising that this area of work was not for them at this time.

Julie also referred to the Church Without Walls Report (The Special Commission anent Review and Reform, 2001) which she thought of as *"enabling"*. She refers to Robert Warren's assertion that to sell a vision you first must sell discontent. "*And actually, that's really, really difficult when people are comfortable*."

Ralph spoke about a culture of creativity being risky and the need to make failing a normal part of doing new things. ***"****I think showing people and demonstrating failure is okay. And failure we tend to think of a negative word but it's really not. It can be a really positive thing in what we do. That's something we've tried to look at as well, that failure is not a negative."* Similarly, regarding supervising students he states: *"… I've tried to do with students is push them into trying those new things… encouraged them into new places, then they found something in themselves".*

Inner Work

A better understanding of self is important in leadership (Wallace, Torres, & Zaccaro, 2021, p. 2). This certainly reflects the participant's experience as Bob asserts *"actually it's about who we are. You know, leadership is about identity."*

Ralph shares that *"I probably found myself a lot more and was more comfortable with me. I was more comfortable being the me as the Minister God has called and so developing that idea of leadership".* He also discovered the *"ability to encourage people to find their own voice and be the best version of themselves. I suppose I would probably put myself in that category as well. Of kind of giving me the permission that what I'm saying to other students and those I'm supervising, actually, I have to say to myself as well."*

Finding the right help and support can be key for developing leadership. Pastoral Supervision has been invaluable to some. Paterson & Crumlish (2022, p. 3) describe supervision as "the dynamic process between: Soul (the individual's deep underlying motivation), Role (what they give their time and effort to), and Context (the 'nitty gritty' realities of the everyday). Supervision is an intentional and facilitated conversation between all three (Paterson M. , 2020, pp. 11-15).

Julie noted *"one of the biggest culture changes when I went to the parish was that there was nobody looking over my shoulder. That was the bit that took me by surprise in a way that I wasn't expecting... I think it [pastoral supervision] also creates a culture of saying actually my health is valuable and I shouldn't be working myself into an early grave.".*

Margaret told me *"I get pastoral supervision. Best thing I ever did. I'd make it compulsory for every Minister… I do reflect more. And I've also got a safe space to take stuff". She also reflected on things she did outside the parish, saying "these [outside] things sustained and fed me. I was probably in relationship with people in these other spaces that kept me sustained" and "I was actually doing what I'd promised to do in my ordination vows.".*

Accountability

Accountability is one of the key issues addressed by Collinson, Smolović and Grint (2018) in their thoughts on the romanticism of leadership. They address the potential problem created in faith-based communities by the idea someone is 'called' by God to a leadership position, raising them above normal accountability systems.

Ralph gives voice to this issue when talking about his role supervising students. *"I might disagree fundamentally with what they stand for and what they are preaching about and their theology. It's still God who has called them into ministry and my responsibility as a leader in that, as a supervisor, is to allow them to hone that, not to shave off the bits that I don't particularly like as that's not my way of thinking."*

Margaret reflected on the lack of accountability for Ministers in relation to others in leadership roles, asking the question **"***… who else in a management role, leadership role, doesn't have some kind of annual appraisal? It would scare a lot of Ministers shitless. And it shouldn't."*

Culture

Communicating clearly and honestly was seen as a big part of leading well and in creating a culture where people may disagree with a decision or direction, but they can understand the thinking. As Bob points out *"the majority are prepared to try something if it's communicated well".*

Ralph spoke about *"having a whole shift of use of words".* He said *"we don't talk about the congregation. We talk about the church family. Families tend to be a bit more encouraging than an organisation type thing. It doesn't mean we all like each other all the time, but it means that we have a stronger bond there."* Ralph goes on *"And I think my leadership style has always been… to do that from a very… a very natural place of conversation rather than people feeling they're being led in a particular discussion because it is more about their voice and understanding that this is part of a wider conversation".*

Margaret reflects on good communication and her role as leader. *"That's a cultural thing, isn't it. Bringing people along with you. I would never want to dampen other people's ideas. The only time is if I thought something they were doing was not in our ethos or going against us as a church or actually wasn't a very Christian thing to do... I think what we've got is good and I can't claim all the credit because I think the credit rests with the people. There's a trust there. I think that's what it is. Mutual trust and respect."*

Part of communication is encouraging people to be involved. Bob shared *"it was never a case of allowing people. It was that thing… it's going from waiting for the offers of help to the actual saying, I need you to help me. I have a way of being able to sit down with the convenors or even go along to one of the nights and say, you know, I wonder if we maybe should look at something different here because this may not be going the way that you thought it would. But they're able to do the same with me."* This approach shows a real commitment to mutuality and respect.

As well as language used and good communication the participants spoke about how they reflect on their effectiveness demonstrating a willingness to dig deeper towards a better understanding of self in their role.

Julie was tough on herself. *"In the parish I felt as though I was not the best leader I could have been. I was better when I was in* [a training context]. She reflected that much of the difference was about clarity of her vision in each context and about both the congregation's energy and her own wellbeing.

Paul's focus became *"Strategic leadership". "Our elders were looking around and thinking we're doing a helluva lot better than the neighbouring church. And we were. But I began to detect that and I said, 'so, is good enough or do we want to be great?'".* This turned out to be a helpful motivator for his church, but he also notes comparisons can be destructive as no two church contexts are ever the same.

Entrepreneur

There is a strong wish to encourage entrepreneurial leadership as a way of innovating out of the current situation. Ralph said:

> *"...at the heart of it [entrepreneurial church] is where a lot of leadership needs to be; trying and seeing if it sticks. If we're not adventurous in what we do we will die. And we are dying very quickly. If we allow ourselves to be adventurous in leadership and adventurous in entrepreneurial spirit we might just find what it is that we're looking for or what God's leading us to".* For him, trying new things *"Very much depends not only on the group of people involved but on their engagement in the situation… I do think that given the right environment, and the right ethos and safe space, people have to test some of these things".*

Starting

Beginnings are important in setting a tone for any relationship. It was interesting to hear how the participants set about starting new ministries in different contexts and if they changed their approach with experience.

Following a difficult time in her first charge, in Margaret's second charge she *"spent the first year learning what wasn't my job... it gave me space and time to just watch what was happening. Who the movers and the shakers were and who were the leaders within the congregation and what were they leading and how were they leading".*

In Bob's later contexts he tried *"not just diving in and saying, I'm going to pull you out of this. It's about taking time to learn how people tick and working out why they're behaving that way. And when you do that, it's not that you're then going to dismiss the other people's concerns or upsets, it's about trying to help one another understand how we all tick and why we're in this place."*

Given the current policy discussions about moving away from unrestricted tenure Bob noted *"if you went in with that knowledge that you had a fixed timeframe... you are going in with the mindset of a diagnostic approach and that approach is different."*

Leader Development

Enabling the 'whole people of God' was a notion that appeared several times in the dialogue. The CofS has long espoused this as a core principle with the hope of equipping people to play as full a part in the life and work of the church as they are able. The participants saw this as an area of concern as there was no real sense that it had been achieved. If anything, they considered things were in a poorer place than they had been previously. It is interesting to observe the disconnect between them as part of that decision and policy-making process but also the people who then must enact that policy and finding it under resourced.

Ralph posed a significant question: *"What skills do leaders have in churches, other than they used to have a job or their dad used to be an elder or whatever... we've not been good at judging what skills it is that we require in leadership".* He describes how he and his church encourage development within the boundaries of what is acceptable. *"I think that my leadership style has always been if someone wants to try something they do it and if someone wants to do something they try it and we see how it goes... we try and give them support if we are able to do that. And sometimes that's even if that doesn't match fully with*

the ethos of the church or the direction in which we are going but it's that understanding that sometimes, if something is important to someone in the congregation… and there are limits in this".

Julie relates her own experience of similar encouragement. *"Just looking at my journey and thinking, all I needed was a bit of encouragement, a bit of help and a bit of opportunity. And other people can do it too. So that's been one of my things. To try to enable people. One of the exercises I used to do with supervisors was to ask them what are the conditions for a good learning experience? What qualities does a good teacher need? And self-awareness would be one of them, and vulnerability. To be strong enough, to be able to make yourself vulnerable. To allow them to like the student better than they like you."*

Paul notes that he *"started off doing it all and finished off equipping everyone else to do it",* is an acknowledgement of a significant transformation in approach. For Bob *"It's not about being the big spiritual God bossman. It's about saying that you are there as an enabler of others to continue to trickle that down in a way that enables more and more people to lead people to God. If we do that well then we're doing it right."*

Paul spoke about a leader development programme he delivered to a group of young people for several years. He said *"We need to sharpen our vision for what church is going to be going forward. So, I committed to that group. The model would be Jesus and the disciples. You can't reach everybody, so you reach these 12. Build them up and send them out. I saw that one of the fruits of our ministry is how we raise people up… make a deliberate investment in people".*

Training for Leadership

Ralph speaks for all the participants in their frustration about a lack of development support from the denomination. *"There are virtually no requirements. We could go for a 40-year ministry or 50-year ministry without actually having to think about any development at all. We're not creating a culture that will allow Ministers towards flourishing leadership and therefore help other people to flourish.* Where provision does exist it is very limited, leading to the feeling that *"As Ministers we are not invested in".*

Despite this, each of the participants has found their own way to learn and develop. For Ralph *"Most of my stuff is shaped by conversation and people and encounter."*

Paul took a very different approach. *"All through my early years I took every opportunity to go to like training days, conferences… I went everywhere".* Later Paul studied for a Doctor of Ministry. *"It was absolutely the critical game changer for me… because of the study and all the reflection, the reading, it was then being done in context".* He reflects that it transformed his ministry, particularly in how he saw his role as a leader. Bob *"attended the Trinity College course on managing church change which was a really good introduction to adaptive leadership which was an area I had… well I did know but I didn't actually know I knew it, if that makes sense?".*

Bob had previously been part of a learning cohort called 'Path For Renewal', a CofS initiative which worked alongside a small group of leaders in a congregation on a process of

understanding their context and adaptive change. Bob thinks *"the whole church should've been on a path for renewal. And we should all have been learning about adaptive change".* The programme was ended. He also suggests *"there needs to be space to come together and say I'm going well, or I'm struggling, which we really didn't have to the same extent as they [Ministers in their first 5 years] do now".*

What Ministers do has changed throughout history, often in response to theological or societal change. It appears that the church believes that every congregation having a Minister is a 'good thing' but as fewer Ministers are asked to cover larger areas and multiple churches, and to develop new forms of worshiping communities, perhaps some consideration should be given to what the church thinks Ministers are for? And in answering that question we should address what resources, learning and support they would need to be able to fulfil that role effectively.

Part of that conversation must be what Ministers are not for and what they cannot do. Despite the seemingly obvious truth that doing everything is unsustainable each of the participants tried and discovered the truth of this in a variety of ways.

For Paul it meant that visiting very frequently meant there was no capacity to develop other leaders or to innovate. For Julie it was the toll the constant nature of the work took on her wellbeing. For Margaret it was the sheer quantity of work coupled with constant criticism. For Bob it was the congregation who could not maintain the pace. For Ralph it was constantly trying to embed a new culture and practices which seemed to never quite stick.

In each case, something had to give. All but Paul left their first charge at around five years. Leaving seemed to each a more attractive prospect than staying. Based on their experience aiming support at Ministers in their first five years is a logical response, but all of the participants recognised their needs as experienced Ministers to still have access to support and learning to become better leaders.

Discussion

Defining Leadership

How we choose to define leadership exposes something of what we think it is, how it relates to others, and how it should be exercised. Given Ministers are charged with exercising leadership and developing it in others, one would expect a developed understanding of that role and how it might be exercised. This study explores a somewhat complicated 'multiple leadership' (Crossman & Crossman, 2011) with people who are, depending on their further learning, unlikely to be fully aware or understand the differing natures of these various forms of leadership.

The descriptions of leadership offered by participants fell broadly within the two perspectives of the relational leadership theories described by Uhl-Bien (2006) as entity perspectives and relational perspectives but, interestingly, the participants all described leadership in ways that began in entity perspectives but revealed an aspiration to see their leadership move towards relational perspectives.

For example, Paul's description of leadership as 'the deliberate application of influence' is an entity perspective of leadership, assuming a separation of individuals, each with a mind and access to their own knowledge and understanding to enable them to decide what they feel are the correct goals to pursue (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 654). In entity perspectives the development of trust between the individual leader and the followers (a group of individuals) is the key to convincing followers to work towards a shared goal. Followers must believe the leader has the necessary skills and competence to fulfil their leadership role.

Each of these relational ontologies assert that our experience depends on interaction with others and the context we find ourselves in, rather than relying on what we alone bring. Organisations are therefore understood as communities fuelled by conversation and experience rather than regulated by systems and structures. Others are not there to be convinced or influenced but as those to be encouraged in a trusting and honest relationship with each other (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1431)This enables the building of deep and lasting bonds so the leader and followers can discover shared priorities and move forward together. It would seem there is more opportunity for other leaders to develop when adopting this approach.

There is a common view among participants that leadership is at least in part an individual set of innate characteristics or skills, that some people are 'born leaders'. This reveals the persistence of the idea of 'heroic leadership'. Collinson, Smolović and Grint (2018) suggest there is a strong element of romanticism at play here. Our cultural life is full of heroic leaders with movies and books ensuring we remain inspired by heroic leaders, both fictional and real. Carlyle (1795-1881) in 1840 espoused the Great Man Theory suggesting that heroic leaders are born with the capacity to lead and given the right circumstances they will rise to greatness. According to Carlyle there are six types: The hero as divinity, prophet, poet, priest, man of letters, and king.

These six types fit closely with Lamdin's (2012) six leadership styles for ministry which he draws from Biblical archetypes: King, Warrior, Servant, Prophet, Elder, and Contemplative.

Lamdin suggests that Ministers might find their own leadership style among these types. It is interesting to note that Lamdin offers choice in styles but much of Christian leadership literature pushes strongly towards Servant Leadership, citing Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet in John 13:1-17 (NRSV, 1989). I would argue that to limit Christian leadership to only this one type is to ignore the various models of leadership Jesus employs with service out of love as the underpinning motivation of them all.

Servant Leadership has become a popular approach in the business world and, perhaps paradoxically, it may be that some of that work might help the church to clarify what it means by that term. Servant leaders are described as stewards responsible for empowering and helping to develop others to achieve their potential founded on moral development (Beck, 2014, pp. 299-301). This approach seems to best describe participants' experience of leadership and their supervision of students. Paul spoke at length about this regarding his experience mentoring a group of young people in his parish. Servant Leadership is different to Transformational Leadership which tends to focus on the organisation. Instead, Servant Leadership focuses on the individual. It should be noted that Servant Leadership theories separate this approach from solely religious context.

Emerging, non-hierarchical leadership

When Drath, et al (2008, p. 636) offer an alternative DAC ontology, suggesting that leadership is present where "production of Direction, Alignment, and Commitment" all exist, they open the possibility that a 'post heroic' leadership can be non- hierarchical, emphasising the social, situational, relational and collective nature of leadership dynamics (Collinson, Smolović, & Grint, 2018, p. 1628). However tentatively, each of the participants describe some their leadership experience in these terms.

Leadership without 'leaders' may seem like an anathema but this DAC ontology may help us to move away from the persistent idea of 'heroic leadership' where only people with appointed positions, vested authority, or specific skills or characteristics can lead. Instead, the DAC ontology allows for the idea that leadership happens all the time and in ways we often overlook when we only view it through the 'tripod ontology'. The DAC ontology takes us towards 'relational leadership' where leaders enable, encourage and co-create, all based on trusting relationships.

What are ministers for?

Day and Dragoni (2015, p. 134)define 'leadership development' as "the growth of a collective's capacity to produce direction, alignment and commitment" while 'leader development' is "the expansion of the capacity of individuals to be effective in leadership roles and processes". IIf Ministers are responsible for "enabling and discipleship of others to exercise their own ministry as part of the people of God" (The Church of Scotland, 2025) then they are in the business of both Leadership and Leader Development in their local settings. It should also be stated that the CofS is in the same business at an organisational level. If Ministers are responsible for "enabling and discipleship of others to exercise their own ministry as part of the people of God" (The Church of Scotland, 2025) then they are in the business of both Leadership and Leader Development in their local settings. It should also be stated that the CofS is in the same business at an organisational level.

First 5 years

It was disheartening, but not surprising, to hear from every participant that their experience, particularly in their first five years of ministry, did not match the perception they had of leadership. Several tried to impose change from the outset, leading to an unbalanced tripod, to borrow from Northouse's (2016) ontology, where the leader had a strong sense of goals but was unable to take followers with them. There are of course several issues at play here, including the leader's understanding of their role, the training they have or have not received, and their own sense of how to exercise leadership in their context. There is a responsibility to also understand the role of 'followers' and develop 'good followership' (Crossman & Crossman, 2011).

Initial Training

Each of the participants' initial training comprised of being sent to university to study a full-time Degree in Theology alongside church placements where they observe and learn from a Minister and gradually increase participation in the activities of the congregation. There have been several developments in that training process, but when we measure these against Fulmer's (1997) evolving paradigm of leadership development (table 1) it seems that even with recent development, the CofS is only now moving from the 'past' to 'transition' stage with some aspiration to look towards the future.

	Past	**Transition**	**Future**
Participants	Listener	Student	Learner
Program Design	Event	Curriculum	Ongoing Process
Purpose	Knowledge	Wisdom	Action
Period	Past	Present	Future
Players	Specialists	Generalists	Partners
Presentations	Style	Content	Process/Outcome
Place	University Campus	Corporate Facility	Anywhere

Figure 1: The Evolving paradigm of leadership (Fulmer, 1997, p. 60)

It was uniformly reported that initial training did not prepare participants for their role. Given that their training was undertaken some time ago it is not for me to comment on the present suitability of initial training. What is within the scope of this study is to offer reflection on how that shortfall in learning might be addressed, which I will return to later.

Accountability / Spiritual Leadership

Spirituality is a central element of participants' experience as leaders, not only in faith communities. Chappell, Delbecq and McCready (2020) suggest the interplay between spirituality and leadership is vital as what we believe informs who we are and how we behave.

Much work has been done in the role of spirituality outside of faith-based leadership settings which may provide helpful insights. Weinberg and Locander (2014, p. 391) define spirituality in relation to the organisation as "a psychological characteristic encompassing meaningful life, wholeness, and interconnectedness with others". This seems to resonate deeply with how participants describe their roles.

Participants regularly spoke about the idea of their 'call' from God. Call is a key marker of Spiritual Leadership (Collinson, Smolović, & Grint, 2018, p. 1651), but it should be noted that without proper accountability 'call' has the potential to elevate the leader beyond normal organisational constraints. Call is never just to one person, the Minister. Call is always confirmed by others and so should be an ongoing process and partnership where the leader is both called by God but also by their congregation and this call is concurred by Church through the Presbytery.

The participants all spoke of trying to discern what God was calling them and their congregations to be and do. Some reported good engagement with members around strategic plans. Others spoke about initiatives they tried that people did not join in with. There was no sense from anyone of the wider church being engaged as a critical friend. There is a danger that without robust appraisal mechanisms for ministers in place there is no meaningful ongoing discernment of call. Participants all recognised this issue and all of them agreed with the need for much greater accountability for Ministers with Margaret suggesting regular appraisal.

In response to these concerns, it is good to see The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team of the CofS bringing proposals to introduce a "Competency Framework for Inducted Ministers of Word and Sacrament', as the basis for a Capability and Competence Process" to the 2025 General Assembly (The Church of Scotland, 2025, pp. 25-29). Little detail is given beyond the framework. I would hope it is used not only as a capability measure but as a supportive framework to identify future training needs and support as identified by participants. Training requirements are not retrospective, so no matter the improvements regarding a competency framework for ministers there remains no mechanism for ensuring Ministers are being enabled to meet the demands of their role beyond training for those supervising candidates. I would suggest this is a major area to address.

Development of leadership requires both human capital (knowledge and skills) and social capital (relationships that facilitate action and create value). Social capital is not inherited. It is gained through interacting with other people, and it is in this learning that social networks are formed. These become the critical locus to enable action. Human capital is developed through creating and maintaining wider networks and the capacity to understand the wide strategic needs and challenges of an organisation and to contribute to meeting those needs and challenges (Leitch, McMullan, & Harrison, 2013, pp. 349-351). This requires deliberate development. It is important that institutions are proactive in promoting the building of social and human capital. In turn, institutions are strengthened by their people having high levels of social and human capital (Leitch, McMullan, & Harrison, 2013, p. 360).

While the CofS encourages learning after initial training, at present Safeguarding training is the only mandated continuing education for Ministers. There is a study leave entitlement for Ministers of two weeks per year (allowed to accumulate over 5 years to 10 weeks) with funding of £275 per year (£1375 for 5 years). It has been recognised that funds would not cope if all Ministers used their entitlement each year. It was noted by participants that there

was no mechanism to check if Ministers took study leave, and that funding was so low that 5 years of funding would only cover a third of a Masters level degree.

Participants who had engaged with further learning all reported it helpful in improving their practice by addressing their developmental needs. For Bob a Masters level module in Leading Change helped him to recognise some of his existing practice and to locate it within a wider framework. Paul spoke of studying for a Doctorate in Ministry as transformational in his understanding and approach. Julie's Masters and Doctorate both enabled her to enact significant changes to future training.

Iles and Preece (2006, pp. 322-324) remind us that training should be deliberate to ensure both the needs of the leader and the needs of the institution are properly identified and addressed.

Wallace, Torres and Zaccaro (2021, pp. 1-3) assert that leadership is as much about maturation as the acquisition of skills, something deepening spiritual practice can improve. "Qualities related to the spiritual journey are increasingly relevant to leadership: vulnerability, not-knowing, being a reflective beginner" (Chappell, Delbecq, & McCready, 2020, p. 52). In other denominations regular pastoral supervision for ministers is compulsory, but this is not the case in the CofS. It was positive then that participants reported much greater engagement with Pastoral Supervision as a helpful "regular, planned, intentional and boundaried space in which a practitioner skilled in supervision (the supervisor) meets with one or more other practitioners (the supervisees) to look together at the supervisees' practice" (The Association of Pastoral Supervision & Education, 2021).

One of the benefits of continued professional development and pastoral supervision is their contribution to sense-making.

The process of sense-making, understanding our context and purpose, is an important task for any organisation. It enables the discernment of the activities and processes which will enable us to understand our world and our place in it. We do this together. Leadership in this task is crucial as sense-making helps us to discover our identity and make decisions from that understanding of who we are, what has occurred and the reasons for that (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p. 59).

Parkinson (2020, p. 12) warns that the way the church has relied almost exclusively on unhurried theological understandings that, while virtuous, can seem disconnected from the experiences of members. This could lead to a breakdown of trust in the decision-making bodies.

This disconnect was identified by participants, despite all of them having been central players in these key decision-making bodies. They worried that the remoteness of decision-making, even at a local church level, means that achieving a sense of the 'Direction, Alignment and Commitment' of Drath et al. (2008) becomes increasingly difficult.

Change

To help consider how organisations allocate leadership resources to change, Dover and Dierk (2010, pp. 50-52) provide a helpful insight to three archetypes of organisational leadership and their focus:

- Managers focus on complexity and plan, organise and control. They are focused on the short term and are risk averse. They want to improve efficiency.
- Leaders focus on change, setting direction, aligning resources and motivating. Leaders are open to taking risks but would at the same time work to minimize the potential negative outcomes.
- Entrepreneurs focus on opportunities; identifying them, innovating solutions and creating value. 'Entrepreneurs' are happy to embrace risk'.

They suggest these archetypes exist separately but with overlapping areas of concern (figure 2). Participants see themselves as occupying that segment at the centre where all three overlap. They are expected to function as Managers, Leaders and Entrepreneurs all at the same time. The critical question for them is how much time and energy they can and should devote to each function, and how much choice they have in making that allocation.

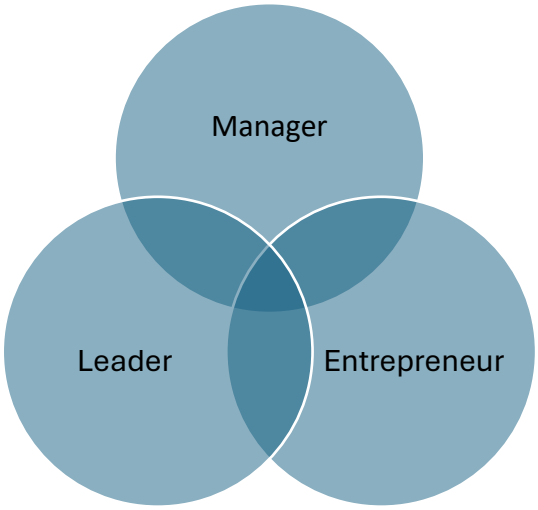

Figure 2: Archetypes: manager – entrepreneur – leader (Dover & Dierk, 2010, p. 50)

Rae (2017, p. 487) reminds us that a sense of peripherality, that is, being on the edges of something, can be a creative place to occupy. When discussing their part in leading change, I suggested to the participants that people who go to church generally do not see any great need for change and there was general agreement. That means pressure on Ministers to maintain what exists especially as this is the primary source of church income. In this they are Managers. At the same time there is an expectation they will be Leaders encouraging their church in change, and they will be Entrepreneurs creating new expressions of church.

We might perceive Ministers among those who very much see themselves as connected to the institution of the church. Those who participated in this research, however, each of whom has either worked for the central institutional bodies or Presbytery or occupied significant roles, do at the same time, paradoxically, maintain a sense of peripherality

regarding their parish experience. Perhaps this is not a negative in that to progress with change and innovation they will indeed have to sow the discontent they experience.

It is here the idea of Ambidextrous Leadership (Dover & Dierk, 2010) may be helpful.

Ambidextrous people can use both hands effectively and I am drawn to this as a concept to help make some sense of the reality of holding these competing demands where there is no option to simply stop doing one part of the expected work. We could instead use our left hand for one and our right for another. For me this is where the idea of being ambidextrous falls down a little. Most people are not ambidextrous. We have a dominant hand and a non-dominant hand. We do the things that require fine motor skills with our dominant hand. We hold things with our non-dominant hand. For me this is a more helpful metaphor where we can decide what needs to be held and what requires shaping.

This would give Ministers permission to allocate the right amount of focus both on what is and what could be and perhaps prioritise innovation. Recognising they are pulled in different directions forces Ministers to help create resource to meet demand. Different solutions could and should emerge locally, but it seems logical that prioritising the development of leaders locally is a significant part of meeting the competing demands.

It would be helpful, following Paul's experience of purposefully developing a small group to lead, for ministers to clarify how they see themselves in relation to each other. Are they individuals deployed on their own to do a particular job with little relation to others, or are they members of a team who can support and resource each other?

Starting

It was interesting to me that Margaret spoke about a Community Education approach to ministry as that was the subject of my undergraduate degree. I have often reflected that the skills and knowledge I gained through that experience have served me at least as well as the ministry training I received. Community Education is based on the empowerment of groups to improve their situation. To help in that task practitioners need to understand how groups and communities function, how to map a community to identify assets and areas of need, how people learn, and how power is utilised and controlled. These are necessary components of any scheme aimed at "enabling and discipleship of others to exercise their own ministry as part of the people of God" (The Church of Scotland, 2025).

Serious questions must be asked about how Ministers are to be enabled and supported to do this by the institution. This becomes even more important with the introduction of the capability framework meaning minister's performance can be assessed. Given this, we should take account of Wallace et al. (2021, p. 3) in their observation that if "leadership is a social construct" what leaders do affects functioning of the group. As the successful outcome of the group depends on how the group performs, then their successful operation is often measured by evaluating how well the leader performed. Lencioni (2002, p. 216) reflects that "The ultimate dysfunction of a team is the tendency of members to care about something other than the collective goals of the group" meaning the leader might be blamed for something that they have very little influence over.

The Institution

Participants agree the CofS lacks what Teece (2012, p. 1395) identifies as an organisation's dynamic capabilities; those attributes governing how quickly it can adapt to new circumstances. The church has been famously and deliberately slow to change, resisting trends and fads. Given the insights of participants, the slowness to react, and frustration around direction when it does, is perhaps also because the Church lacks the human, social and institutional capital required to assess its relationship to the culture it now finds itself in.

When the Church Without Walls Report (The Special Commission anent Review and Reform, 2001) was published mapping out the kind of church required for the coming decades I wonder if the church really understood the report's implications? It was welcomed as visionary, but very little change happened. It took two decades for Presbyteries to unite and in many ways church at local level has continued as usual. Perhaps the vision was so beyond their experience and understanding that they were unable to fully conceptualise it, grasp the implications and make the required changes. This may be an example of the desperate need for organisations to enable and develop the capacity for leadership across the organisation and to develop understanding of adaptive change leadership which brings a "daily opportunity to mobilize the resources of people to thrive in a changing and challenging world" (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

It could be argued that denominations, in this case the Church of Scotland, have failed to invest in either leadership development or leader development. None of those interviewed had received any training relating to leading change from the denomination despite the CofS embarking on a wholesale programme of change impacting every congregation.

Conclusions & Recommendations

While participants could all offer definitions and give examples of good leadership practice benefit would be gained from opportunities to learn more about the broader field. This is particularly true in relation to their role as leaders and their responsibility for leader development.

All of them struggled to find their feet in their first five years of ministry and now recognise that their training did not equip them for the reality of the task.

They identify the need for greater accountability and pastoral supervision.

There appears to be an expected correlation between those who have sought out and engaged with leadership training and a deeper sense of their own leadership role.

Ministers feel they:

- Have not been offered helpful definitions and understandings of leadership
- Have not been adequately supported or trained
- Have not been supported in growing the capacity of members to lead, or in the development of their leadership capacity, despite the clear expectation to offer leadership as a core facet of role

The Church of Scotland should consider:

1. reviewing its training provision around leadership
2. developing learning and support communities (including leadership development) for serving Ministers
3. providing training and materials to help Ministers develop local leaders
4. ensuring pastoral supervision is available to all Ministers

Proposed Dissemination

While this research is primarily a submission for a MA in Contemporary Chistian Leadership there is a responsibility on the researcher to share findings more widely and to contribute to the understanding of the area of research.

I propose to submit articles to various journals as appropriate, and to make my dissertation available on my website at stewartcutler.com.

As convenor of the Training Committee of the CofS Presbytery of Forth Valley & Clydesdale and a member of the URC National Synod of Scotland it may also be possible for my learning, including the findings of this research, to form the basis of a training course around leadership and leader development for Ministers to help raise their awareness of the issues involved.

Finally, to reach a different, and perhaps wider audience, I propose a series of podcasts exploring the findings of this research.

Future Research

This research has focused on the experience of Ministers in the Church of Scotland.

It would be interesting to compare the experiences of those in similar roles in other denominations and faith communities.

It would be helpful to compare the experience of those Ministers in their first five years who have recently completed training to assess if changes to training have been effective.

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Appendix 1 - Semi-Structured Interview Discussion Areas

Experience(s) of ministry in the Church of Scotland?

Understanding of role (as a Minister) as a leader in a parish context?

What were the challenges?

Did you have any training that helped?

Experience of developing leaders?

How do Presbytery and General Assembly support leadership?

Experience of working with local leaders?

Appendix 2 – Information Sheet

Masters' Dissertation Research: Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a student project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?
Stewart Cutler

Title of the Research
"Leadership matters - an exploration of how Ministers understand their role to provide and promote leadership (in Church of Scotland congregations in a time of change)"

I hope the following answers any questions you might have:

What is the aim of the research?

- To discover the experience of Ministers in the Church of Scotland of their roles as leaders
- To understand if and how they create cultures of leadership
- To understand how they promote leader development

Why have I been chosen?
You have:

1. Have experience as a Church of Scotland minister in a parish
2. Experience of providing leadership support from Presbytery and/or National Level

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
You would take part in an interview lasting up to one hour on Zoom. You may also be invited to take part in a focus group with other interviewees, also lasting up to one hour.

What happens to the data collected?
All data will be stored securely. Any video, audio recordings and transcripts will be stored locally and password protected. Transcripts may be printed. Any hard copies will be stored in a locked fireproof cabinet. All data collected will only be stored for the duration of the project. It will then be deleted or shredded.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All contexts and responses will be anonymised. Only the researcher will see the interview recordings and transcripts.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?
No

What is the duration of the research?
Each interview will last for up to 1 hour. Up to 6 people will be interviewed.

Where will the research be conducted?
Interview will be conducted on zoom.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?
The research will form the basis of a dissertation which will be submitted as part of a Masters in Contemporary Christian Leadership through the Scottish Episcopal Institute as an academic provider on behalf of Durham University. The dissertation will be available from their libraries. The information gathered may also result in journal articles, further publications, and the findings are hoped to inform the development of a training course.

Many thanks,

Stewart

Contact for further information:

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07718902366

Supervisor
Rev Dr John Carswell
revcarswell@gmail.com

Appendix 3 – Consent Form

"Leadership matters - an exploration of how Ministers understand their role to provide and promote leadership
(in Church of Scotland congregations in a time of change)"

Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include… being interviewed	☐	☐
being recorded (audio and / or video)	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time/before [DATE]; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐

How my information will be used during and after the project

I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		

Name of participant [printed] Signature Date

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Project contact details for further information:
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For further information about the Scottish Episcopal Institute or to raise any concerns about this research please contact Anna-Claar Thomasson-Rosingh, Director of Studies, at DoS@scotland.anglican.org