

Deliberative leadership: Sustainable practices for public universities?

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Abstract

The higher education landscape is experiencing a period of serious uncertainty, an interregnum wherein there is considerable disagreement as to its orientation and sustainability. Some suggest that ongoing incremental adaptability is sufficient, while others insist nothing short of radical transformation will suffice. These disagreements are reflected in competing, and conflicting, discourses on leadership, into which we posit the potential of deliberative leadership, not as a silver bullet, but a work in progress; a reconsideration of the public good mandate of higher education, recognising that what counts as 'public' or 'good' is increasingly contested. Using data from a larger study on formation in higher education, we describe deliberative leadership, its characteristics, and underpinning values. We provide empirical evidence from one institution as to how deliberative attitude and deliberative communication, when combined and stretched over an organisation. In doing so, they create conditions where, through horizontal and vertical brokering, individual webs of commitments are acknowledged, yet legitimate compromises are forged without compromising on values. This paper commends the quiet resolute melody of deliberative leadership to readers, recognising that the case made here is advanced on evidence from one institution, yet recognising its potential contribution to forging a more sustainable deliberative leadership praxis.

Keywords: deliberative leadership; public good; webs of commitment; legitimate compromise; deliberative attitude

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Introduction

Higher education is in 'a time of profound, unrelenting change of a magnitude and scope unequalled since the Industrial Revolution' (Levine & Van Pelt 2021, p. ix).

This present ‘flux’ (Bebbington, 2021), ‘in-between time,’ or ‘interregnum,’ is challenging public universities’ traditional ways of fulfilling their social responsibilities to serve public good (Grant, 2021, p. 3). The term ‘public’ in ‘public good’ is seriously contentious (Clarke & Mills, 2022), while global forces are inimical to it as a core responsibility of public universities (Choon-Yin, 2021; see also Esen et al., 2020, p. 218; Pinheiro et al., 2019; Tampanila et al., 2020; Walker 2018). There is, for example, a persistent habit of using the terms ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ interchangeably. We concur with Branson et al. (2020, pp. 4-7) that ‘management’ is about ‘controlling and directing’ by following policies, rules, and prescribed procedures to be ‘publicly accountable.’ In the context of public universities, this includes, inter alia: budgeting, timetabling, quality control and quality assurance systems. ‘Leadership’ indicates more ‘guiding’ and decision-making through ‘participation’ and a more generalised responsibility or goal setting, communicating and culture building to indicate institutional direction to fulfil its societal mandate (Branson et al., 2020).

Against this backdrop, we advocate for ‘deliberative leadership,’ addressing the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of, and embedded values and virtues in, deliberative leadership?
- What conditions and interactions are conducive to the cultivation of deliberative leadership as a way of leading as and for public good?
- What is the potential of deliberative leadership to cultivate sustainable leadership practices in uncertain times for public universities?

First, we identify dominant discourses in leadership literature on higher education, its trajectories, and tensions over time. Second, we describe the characteristics of deliberative leadership. Third, we present the methodology of the paper. Fourth, we provide empirical evidence that indicates and illustrates how, in a Norwegian university, the contextual and relational factors and communication patterns create conditions conducive to enacting deliberative leadership. Fifth, we provide a synthesis of the paper’s argument and implications, commending deliberative leadership as a possible sustainable practice in uncertain times—a work in progress rather than a panacea.

Literature review: Leadership in higher education

Beginning with Google Ngram (Michel et al., 2011), we provide a general mapping of the terms ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ in published books in English since 1800. Though this exercise has limitations, Figure 1 illustrates that management has been the dominant term, with a particular spike in its presence in the later decades of the 20th century. This is consistent, we suggest, with the emergence of New Public Management (NPM; Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020).

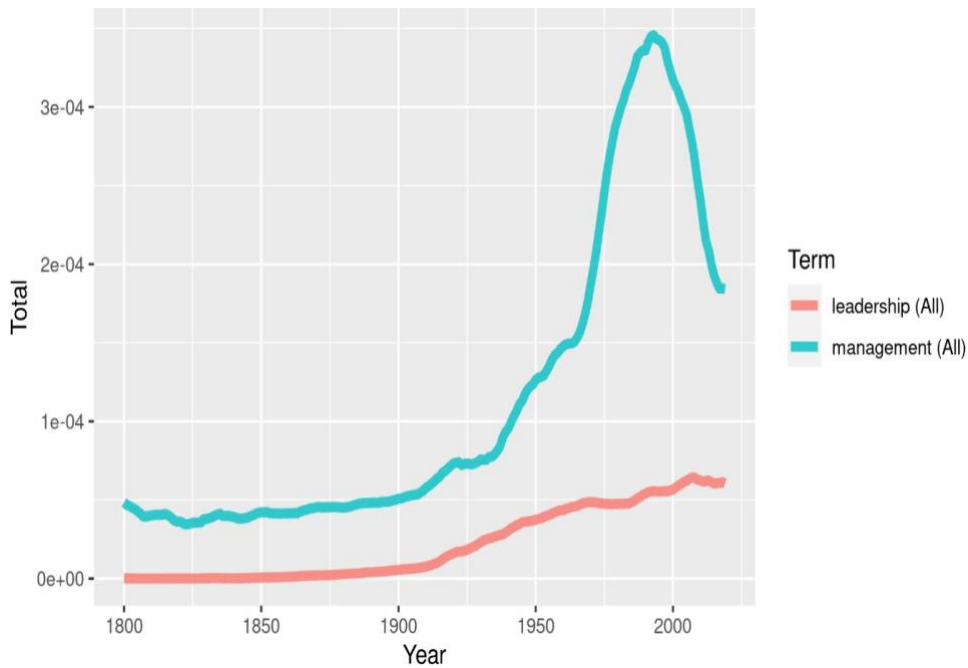


Figure 1. *The trajectories of management and leadership over time*

When we cluster management, higher education and universities and combine leadership, higher education and universities, the prevalence of leadership in texts emerges with greater prominence in the past two decades with a corresponding decline in the pervasiveness of management (Figure 2).

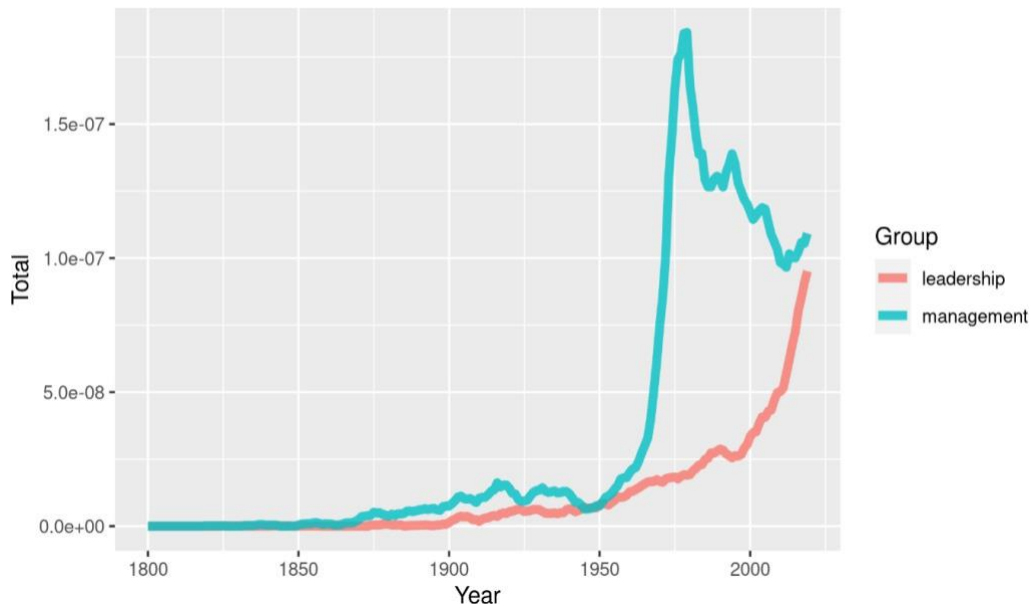


Figure 2. *Prevalence of management and leadership in higher education literature*

Figure two indicates a growing recognition of a necessary symbiosis between management and leadership (Branson et al., 2020) although it may also be indicative of a tendency for managerialism to masquerade as leadership (Lumby, 2013). Perhaps because there is increasing acceptance that leadership is ‘complex, multilevel, and socially constructed’ (Xie, 2019, p. 76) in this climate of uncertainty, there are many competing conceptualisations of leadership that seek to fill the void, to find a new accommodation between management and leadership: including servant, spiritual, transformational, transactional, and transrelational, although this list is by no means exhaustive. A more recent inclusion has been ‘distributed’ (Youngs, 2017), a concept borrowed from school reform literature (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006).

Other leadership literature advocates for sustainability (Rieg et al., 2021), gender (van Helden et al., 2021), and inclusion (Aboramadan et al., 2022). All are intended to enhance leadership practices, and possibly public good (Sutphen et al., 2018).

Research on the effectiveness of leadership at departmental level identifies the following concerns: vision, communication, fairness, integrity, trustworthiness, and participation—matters that have recurred since initially documented by Bryman (2008). Even those who suggest that leadership is a ‘myth’ (Evans, 2022; Goedegebuure, 2021) recognise that leadership is relational (Branson et al., 2020), described by Clarke (2018) as: ‘A new way of thinking about leadership’ to achieve

‘greater social responsibility, enhancing leadership capacity and recognising the importance of context as affecting how leadership occurs’(p. iv). Such claims underline the importance of leadership as a set of practices, resonant with a clamour for more evidence regarding the nature of leadership dynamics. Nonetheless, we are allergic to framing such interactions as encounters between leaders and followers (Kellerman, 2007). We consider that all members of an organisation have a leadership responsibility, individual and collective (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020), distinctions between formal and informal leadership notwithstanding (Jian, 2022). Other research has focused on the consequences of NPM for leading public universities (Barnett, 2011; Pinheiro et al., 2019; Stensaker et al., 2017). It emphasises the struggle between external policy demands and internal resistance to retain spaces and opportunities to exercise professional autonomy, the potential of the former to dis-orient, and destabilise academic communities, particularly an emerging ‘precarariat’ in higher education (Fitzsimons et al., 2021); arguably a triumph of management over leadership. Others emphasise the significance of language and underlying logics in external policies and governance as evidenced by the Bologna process (1999), which advocates stronger management (dressed up as leadership) to render public universities more flexible and transparent (Karseth & Solbrekke, 2016), more ‘autonomous’ and ‘competitive’ (Kohtamaki, 2022), leading to accusations of increasing ‘managerialism’ and ‘leaderism’ (vozhdism) (Brankovic, 2018; Pinheiro et al., 2019). Such practices tend to confine decision-making to an executive function, creating a sense of alienation among the wider academic community (Ese, 2019; Esen et al., 2020). Specific concern for public good has generated disagreement regarding pursuit of ‘excellence’ in the academy (Kronman, 2019), while there is advocacy, too, for greater attention to values, ‘integrity, fairness, kindness, excellence, sustainability, passion and reason,’ drawing attention to ‘what is important in life’ (Carney, 2021, pp. 4-17).

Tensions between management and leadership, between external policy prescriptions and professional autonomy are captured insightfully by Solbrekke and Englund (2011) in the language and logic of ‘accountability’ and ‘responsibility.’ They argue that the introduction of NPM in the governance of higher education institutions as a way of managing administration has changed public accountability from being based on a moral responsibility to a more technical accounting to policy-makers and funders. Similarly, managerialism implies compliance with an external ‘audit control’ based on economic and legal rationales, while professionally responsible leadership suggests moral and epistemic rationales, as well as commitment to contribute to public good utilising the latter as a ‘moral navigator’

(Taylor, 1989/1992). These logics and attendant language have significance for the dynamics of deliberative leadership (see Table 1).

Table 1

The language and logic of professional responsibility and accountability

Responsibility	Accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based in professional mandate • Situated judgement • Trust • Moral and epistemic rationales • Internal evaluation • Negotiated standards and criteria • Implicit language • Framed by academics • Relative autonomy personally inescapable • Proactive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined by current governance • Standardised by contract • Control • Economic and legal rationales • External auditing • Predetermined indicators • Transparent language • Framed by political goals • Compliance with political/institutional requirements • Reactive

Note. Developed from Solbrekke and Englund, 2011, p. 9

To act in a professionally responsible manner, contemporary leaders of public universities are obliged to engage with both logics and reach ‘legitimate compromise’ (May, 1996) in the tension between them. Consequently, leaders of public universities are challenged to discern a set of values from which a vision may be forged, and leadership practices enacted that are most appropriate for cultivating collective endeavour, sufficiently robust to contribute to ‘public good’ (Clarke et al., 2022). This paper contends that deliberative leadership is such an approach.

Deliberative leadership: Genesis and characteristics

Deliberative leadership is not a new concept (Simonton, 1988). Simonton’s primary focus was leadership styles and personal traits (Simonton, 1988, pp. 930-931); our concentration is on deliberative leadership as a set of characteristics and practices to promote a public good mandate in public universities.

Deliberative leadership: Characteristics

Deliberative leadership has resemblances with dialogical, democratic, or collegial leadership (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020) and, like distributed leadership, it needs to be ‘stretched over’ the entire organisation (Spillane, 2006). However, what distinguishes deliberative leadership most acutely from distributed leadership is its recourse to the significance of ‘public good’ as an anchoring value. Thus, institutional purpose recognises and embraces a moral orientation and responsibility in ongoing deliberations and decision-making for leaders in particular and community members generally. Thus, all members of a university community—staff and students—have responsibilities for leading higher education as and for public good, and to speak up and speak out in its defence and promotion when necessary, whether inhabiting formal leadership roles or not (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020, pp. 159-173). Deliberative leadership also builds on the principles of ‘deliberative communication,’ its philosophical roots evident in the work of Habermas, Dewey, and others (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020). Core principles include the necessity to hear all voices, be listened to, tolerated and respected, where disagreements and different perspectives are regarded as potentially generative and integral to negotiating legitimate compromises for action and democratic processes. The ambition is to move from ‘practice to praxis’ by making the values underpinning action explicit to promote public good. The term practice tends to focus on doing and action, to the relative exclusion of reflection. Praxis, by contrast, is intent on combining ‘thought and action’ through ‘critical reflection,’ embracing other ‘essential ingredients such as expertise, humanity, morality and finesse,’ concern for community and public good (Sugrue & Solbrekke, 2011, p. 178).

When enacting deliberative leadership, principles of deliberative communication are combined with values (ideals), and put into practice as a dynamic process. When these values are embedded in the routines of practice, they become intellectual virtues, hard won on the anvil of practice (Baehr, 2011). However, in this context, we advocate for the deliberative process rather than a ‘winner takes all’ approach of advancing the ‘better’ argument, conscious of power differentials within the academy and positions of seniority and ‘authority’ occupied by (potentially) powerful vested interests rather than a greater reliance on a sense of responsibility garnered from a public good mandate. Figure 3 captures characteristics of deliberative leadership, while also indicating that when these resonate, deliberative leadership constitutes a relational and dynamic process, as and for public good.

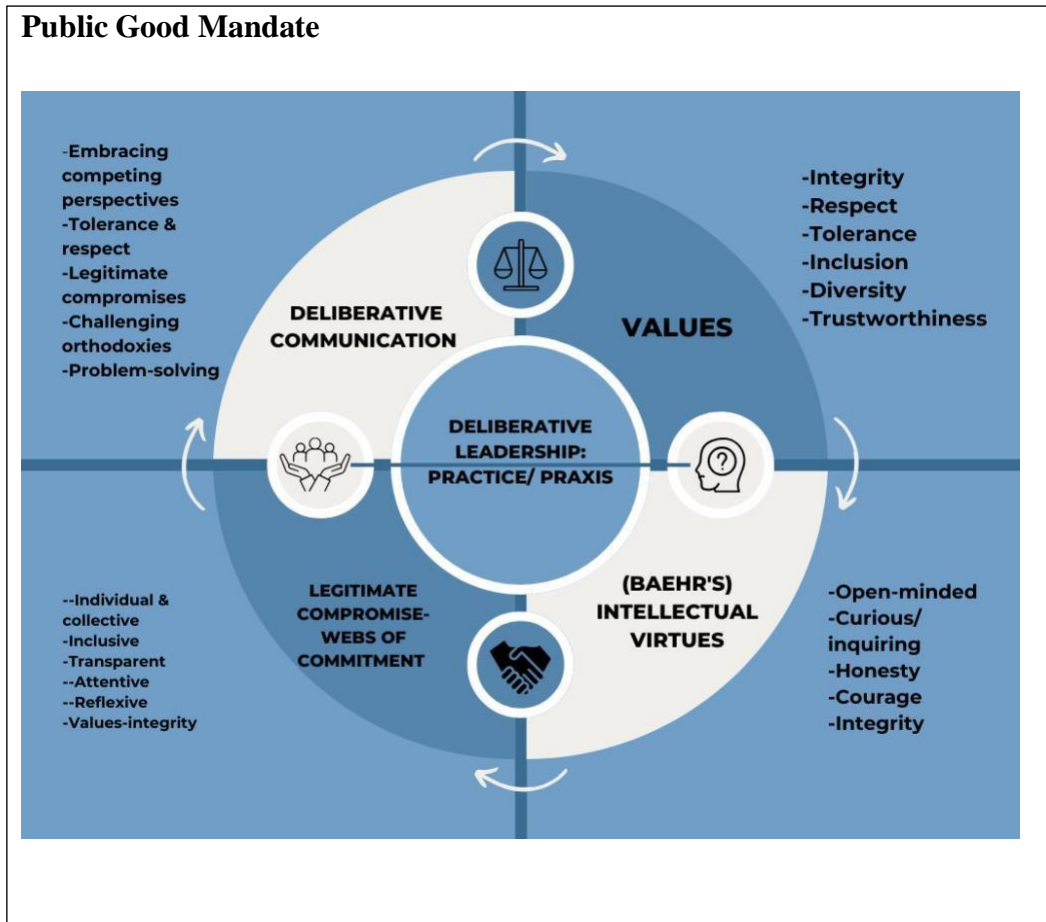


Figure 3. *Deliberative leadership in higher education: characteristics and dynamics*

Note. Adapted from Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020

The dynamic process represented above when in productive ‘flow,’ notwithstanding inevitable tensions, nonetheless facilitates the creation of professionally responsible actions characterised by deliberation, inclusion, problem-solving, and reflection.

The general stance of a deliberative leadership orientation is to acknowledge that staff and students have a responsibility to contribute to the leadership of their academic institution, recognising that those in formal leadership positions have a particular responsibility to promote and vindicate their institution’s societal mandate, from which its moral responsibilities flow. However, the relative positional power of participants in deliberative processes is consequential for having confidence and courage to contribute and understand deliberation as a

'brokering' process, both horizontally and vertically within institutions (Brew & Cahir, 2014). A 'deliberative attitude' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), stretched over an organisation's various leadership levels is vital for encouraging brokering practices within the institution. We consider that such an attitude is particularly apposite for the contemporary flux of higher education since it enables us to 'confront emergent problems and possibilities across the variety of contexts within which we act' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1013). These authors elaborate on what Mead (1932) names our 'sociality,' that which enables 'the situatedness of actors in multiple temporally evolving relational contexts' and in this manner 'contributes to the development of reflective consciousness' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1013). This consciousness has three levels, and while intimately connected, the first of these is 'contact experience, characterized by immediacy of response to sense and feeling' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 969), implicitly recognizing that individuals live and practice within different 'webs of commitments' (May, 1996). The second dimension of our sociality is 'distance experience,' indicating our 'capacity to use ideation and imagery in remembrance and anticipation', intimately connected with the principle of deliberative communication, to listen, remember and anticipate (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, p. 969). The third element culminates 'in communicative interaction, in which social meanings and values develop out of the capacity to take on the perspectives of (concrete and generalized) others' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 969). As Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue, interactions encouraging deliberative practices are 'temporal-relational contexts ... fundamentally an intersubjective process' thus enabling us simultaneously to 'hold ... to one's own and to another's viewpoint' (p. 1013). Thus, deliberative leadership, formal or informal, is an individual and collective responsibility. Where deliberative attitudes are evident, multiple voices are encouraged, listened to respectfully, and recognised as a resource, contributing to the ongoing reflective-deliberative process at individual, inter-subjective and institutional levels, building leadership capacities in sustainable ways, facilitating negotiations of legitimate compromises as a public good.

In the empirical section of the paper, we indicate that when deliberative attitudes are evident across different leadership levels, deliberative leadership practices are encouraged, necessitating horizontal and vertical 'brokering' (Brew & Cahir, 2014) of 'legitimate compromise' (May, 1996), and leadership capacities are enhanced through ongoing deliberative processes. Following an account of research methods, we provide empirical elaboration on those practices, surfacing less visible dimensions and enabling the reader to conjure its dynamic processes, possibilities, and potential.

Context, method, and research design

Our conceptualisation of ‘deliberative leadership’ evolved over time, nested within the international formation in higher education project over a period of six years, 2015-2021 (see Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020). Ethical approval was secured.

Central to this project was an investigation into the relational influence between institutional and individual practices. It had a normative starting point with an emphasis on leading higher education as and for public good (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020). The research focus was academic developers’ formation as they deployed deliberative communication pedagogically when leading and teaching (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020). During the analyses and preparation of various publications, perspectives on deliberative leadership emerged with further significance (see Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020). From the outset, an insider-outsider approach to data gathering and analysis was adopted (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Initially, 27 in-depth interviews were conducted in 2016-2017 with leaders occupying different leadership positions at macro (institutional), meso (Deans and Heads of Departments) and micro levels (heads of academic development units) within five universities, having undertaken systematic analysis of these institution’s strategic plans. In the interest of continuity, the same outsider conducted all these interviews, in collaboration with an insider from each of the five universities. Subsequently, more focused data gathering was undertaken in the five institutions, where an academic developer sought to deploy deliberative communication as integral to pedagogical engagement, while two critical friends worked collaboratively with them; observing teaching, recording conversations, and video recording classroom engagement for subsequent reflexive and abductive analysis—moving between theory and data (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). All interviews were recorded (60-90 minutes), transcribed, and entered into MAXQDA for coding and analysis with careful consideration of triangulation of coding taking place at each stage of analysis. It was during this ongoing process of analysis, over time, that deliberative leadership emerged with significance.

To learn more about deliberative leadership conceptually and practically, we reanalysed the data from all five universities, and decided to concentrate on the Norwegian university where micro, meso and macro leaders most explicitly articulated deliberative attitudes, creating conditions for, and practices of, deliberative leadership. This decision was reinforced by having undertaken a systematic analysis of prevalence of the language of accountability and responsibility (see table 1) contained in each of the institutions strategic plans that were current at the time of data collection with the following ‘picture’ emerging

(Figure 4). This picture indicates that the language and logic of responsibility had greater prevalence in the University of Oslo than in the other participating universities, suggestive of being hospitable to deliberative leadership.

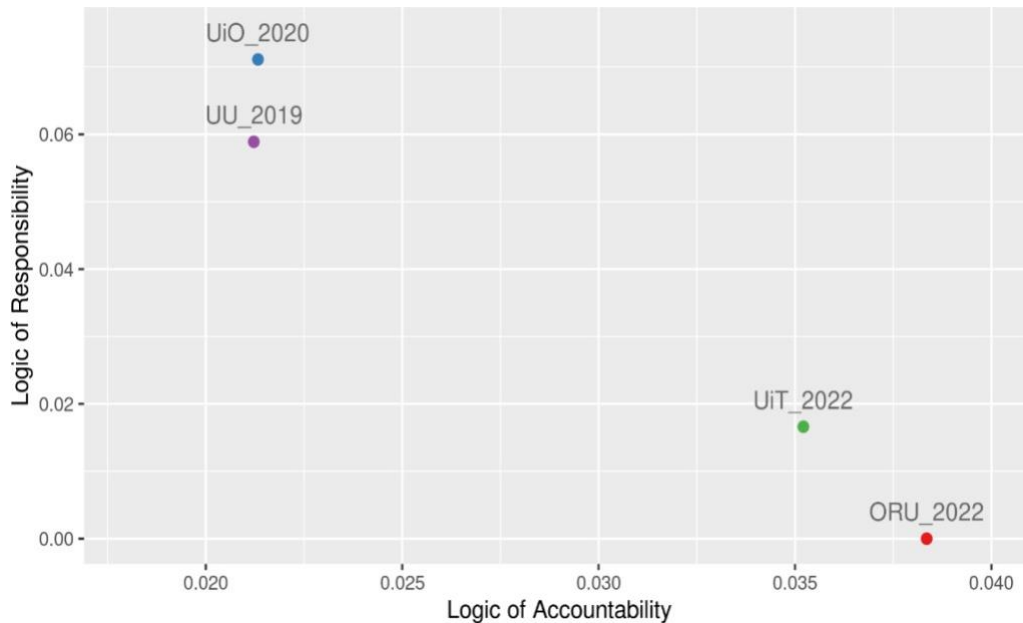


Figure 4. *The prevalence of the language of accountability and responsibility in strategic plans*

The narrative of deliberative leadership below is ‘co-constructed’ (Mehta & Peterson, 2019), a process of ‘co-action’ whereby ‘participating in a community of meaning makers’ enables these ‘meaning makers to achieve goals valued by this community’ (Gergen, 2011, p. 238). Through this iterative collaboration and ongoing deliberations between both authors (insider and outsider), we put flesh on the bones of deliberative leadership, attentive to the warrants of the entire study. This abductive and reflexive approach enabled us to address possible bias in the analyses and writing process when critically questioning each other’s interpretations.

The data sub-set includes interviews with a macro leader (Pro-Rector for education), two meso leaders (Dean of Faculty; hereafter, Dean), and Head of Department; hereafter HoD) and one micro leader (Head of Academic Development Unit; hereafter ADU), and one co-author. Focusing on one institution enables a fine-grained analysis of the dynamic interplay between institutional commitment to contribute to public good and individual agency, while acknowledging individual’s webs of commitment, a delicate ecology between

individual and collective agency that is mutually reinforcing, sustaining, yet susceptible to turbulence. While building the narrative's 'trustworthiness,' individual interpretations were challenged and triangulated, recognising also that our understanding of deliberative leadership continues to evolve (Schwandt et al., 2007).

Deliberative leadership: Empirically evident and elusive

The narrative of deliberative leadership is constructed cumulatively, under a series of sub-headings derived from the characteristics of deliberative leadership to reveal understandings and insights into its complexities, its more obvious and more subtle 'transrelational' dynamics (Branson et al., 2020). While wary of the limitations of a single case, the intention is not to describe 'best practice' but to indicate and illustrate that when there is a collective understanding of the societal mandate, and deliberative attitudes are present across different leadership levels in an organisation, the agency to enact deliberative leadership is fostered enhancing leadership throughout the organisation.

Deliberative leadership: Creating shared understanding of normative mandate, moral, and social commitments

Living the mandate of a public university, the micro leader expressed pride in her institution's mission, claiming 'it is an important societal institution,' strongly identifying with its remit to 'contribute to the formation [of students] as professionals, persons, and as citizens.' This includes doing 'research and dissemination for the good of society, to contribute information to society and education.' This web of commitments is underpinned by her belief 'in a very strong normative function when it comes to being an independent voice but also being aware that, both the research and teaching we are doing have enormous formative impact on citizens who graduate from our institution.'

The macro leader confirmed a similar commitment to public good. She articulated pride in being a leader in an institution with a strong 'traditional and scientific orientation,' with power and autonomy to define societal development as a public good (Sugrue et al., 2019) She related the present commitments to the university's legacy, recognising this as foundational for a sustainable future:

A part of its past has always been to build a nation. But, in a global world, such commitments have become borderless global challenges while the

university is committed to finding solutions to all, although not to the detriment of commitment to build a nation ...

Responsibility for moral and social commitments were similarly emphasised by the meso leaders, indicating also how these values are increasingly challenged. The HoD stated: 'The university as an institution ... is under challenge these days for different reasons, but I think there are some core values, especially in the more social perception of the role of education in our society and universities especially.' The Dean, too, recognises more implicitly a similar commitment to the traditional values of universities, indicating how external forces create a 'contradiction between being a player in a global market or knowledge economy and being an institution that has a strong societal responsibility.' The micro leader echoes similar concerns, stating: 'The university's strategic plan promotes values such as critical thinking, independent citizens, contribute to the public good, democracy, but it might very well be that different academics interpret this very differently.' Despite their different institutional leadership positioning, there is shared respect for the mandate of the university, its underpinning values and attendant virtues, but with ambiguity that recognises the necessity for ongoing renewal due to the encroachment of external forces.

The micro leader, while acknowledging rhetorical commitments to mandates and values, recognises these as ambiguous. Turning such aspirations into virtues and a leadership praxis is more challenging:

I have been doing research on this for years; how hard it is to ... find a moral language for the social responsibilities. It is easy to find critical thinking; independent academic autonomy as an autonomous institution etc... but [what] it means in practice is harder to define since we lack a language for this in higher education.

She is aware of the significance of language to cultivate a conversation with academics and leaders at different levels and in the process to 'champion' and foster common commitments to public good and the relational dynamics of leadership (Branson et al., 2020).

Although the micro leader draws on her research in her leading and teaching practices, she definitely also reaps the benefit of the increased political focus of university leaders' responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning (Gaebel & Zhang, 2018). The institutional environment regarding teaching and learning has shifted, as indicated by the HoD:

[...] teaching and learning ... at university, both on the top but also in general ... is an asset that we can try to identify more in the way we stand out as a university. That we have high level teaching and learning, if you come to our university as a student, you will need good, qualified teachers and so forth and that was not the case so much earlier on.

While such a statement may be understood as a rhetorical reaction to an accountability logic, meeting political requirements to improve university teaching (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2015), it may also indicate a moral and societal responsibility for enhancing teaching and learning for the benefit of individuals and society (Solbrekke & Sugrue; Walker, 2018). Within the changing philosophy and ecology of university education (Barnett, 2021), it is an opportunity to build leadership capacity through relational engagement (Branson et al., 2020). This meso leader extends this confluence of circumstance when he indicates ‘the university’s top level is very conscious of the necessity to develop this institution ... not only epistemological research orientated but also to create a good social environment and learning environment for students in different ways.’ Consequently, he predicts that the ADU will grow, indicative of trust in its work across the university with empowering effect on the micro leader’s agency and her colleagues. When there is a degree of congruence between different layers of leadership institutionally, to which value commitments contribute, relational trust is deepened, fostering individual and collective agency and rendering the conditions for deliberative leadership a shared enterprise. Without trust, there is no leadership (Branson et al., 2020).

Deliberative leadership: Attentive listening, respectful deliberations, and courageous brokering of legitimate compromises

In the larger study, courage emerged as an important leadership competence significant to cultivate a deliberative attitude encouraging ‘holding environments of mutual support and trust’ (Berg & Seeber, 2016, p. 15). For example, when the university leaders increased the provision of doctoral supervision courses without consulting the ADU, the micro leader responded to the macro leadership that, although the ADU had the competence, additional human resources would be necessary to provide more courses. While enacting her professional responsibility, she demonstrated that in the absence of agency and courage to engage in vertical brokering to secure additional resources to execute the expanding portfolio of responsibilities, the quality of the work may be compromised. Consequently, she indicates, speaking in the collective ‘we’: ‘Deliberations were initiated with the

HoD and Dean, and we have written to influence the university board in the budget negotiations.’ The correspondence argued an additional two positions were necessary, with obvious budgetary implications. The micro leader’s brokering work at the macro and meso levels was rewarded by a decision to allocate one position and make two temporary positions permanent. While this demonstrates how the micro leader proactively initiated vertical brokering, it simultaneously indicates a deliberative attitude among macro and meso leaders, enabling the negotiation of a legitimate compromise (May, 1996). For deliberative leadership to facilitate brokering, a deliberative attitude needs to be enacted by leaders at different levels and stretched over the organisation to enhance individual and collective agency, simultaneously reinforcing shared values, building trust, and individual and collective leadership (Bystydzienski et al., 2017).

Within the ADU, the micro leader encouraged colleagues to be open, to share ideas and develop an inclusive approach to all faculties. As part of the university’s strategy to improve educational quality, academic development consultation to all faculties was extended from 100 to 300 hours per annum, and two positions were sanctioned for a three-year period (2012-15). The challenge for the micro leader was to secure these resources on a permanent basis, and additional resources to meet institutional needs in a sustainable manner. Consequently, she initiated multiple interrelated initiatives, collaborating with unit colleagues, building both individual and collective agency, fostering a deliberative attitude through proactive initiation of both horizontal and vertical brokering, including more voices, quietly building leadership capacity.

Within the ADU, a collective decision was made to contact the pro-deans for education (leaders responsible for their faculty’s study programme portfolio). This consolidated collective leadership capacity within the ADU, while connecting with the pro-deans. Having reminded them that they had forgotten about the services they were entitled to from the ADU, they were asked: ‘what do you think you will need us for?’ This brokering enabled the micro leader to detect ‘a stronger sense ... about the way we can offer help in all faculties.’ This assertion intimates that the micro leader gained confidence and courage to proactively initiate horizontal brokering with peers, vertically with pro-deans, cultivating the conditions for collective action and legitimate compromises.

Fortified by an awareness that faculties appreciated the support offered by the unit, the micro leader invited all pro-deans to meet with her and unit colleagues. Their purpose was to listen to faculties’ experiences with consultancy work while her colleagues shared cutting-edge research on teaching and learning. This demonstrates a deliberative attitude while practicing deliberative leadership

principles, resonating with a process described as ‘imaginative reformulation and practical reasoning ... undertaken in common through inquiry into moral and practical problems’ (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, p. 1013). Thus, by creating an atmosphere of openness, extending relational support to the pro-deans, while simultaneously cultivating a tolerance for diverse perspectives, more elusive synchronicity amidst competing priorities is established, consistent with the view that sustainable leadership necessitates ‘broad stakeholder input and commitment’ (Rieg et al., 2021, p. 1). The pro-deans indicated that they appreciated this collective deliberative opportunity and requested the regularisation of these meetings once per semester. Emboldened by their reactions, the micro leader sallied forth with further vertical brokering with the university leadership to secure long-term financial resources and, in the process, build trust and deliberative leadership capital; through such transrelational dynamics, threading deliberative leadership density into the fabric of the organisation, the dynamic interdependence of its constituent characteristics become evident.

The micro leader’s actions focus attention on the subtleties of doing deliberative leadership, whereby the doing ensures its principles are deployed more routinely, recognizing, too, that there is ongoing need for brokering legitimate compromises, thus deliberative leadership remains a work in progress—a journey, not a destination. A generative melange of formal structures and general trust in the ADU facilitated deliberative leadership practices. This implicitly recognises that all leaders need to have ‘a more enriched, proactive and aware consciousness about the effect and affect of their presence and communication on others, which provides the groundwork for continual growth and development’ (Branson et al., 2020, p. 51).

Deliberative leadership: The dynamic reciprocity of values, virtues, and deliberative communication

Organisational structures and culture in the university create conditions conducive to brokering across different leadership levels. The ADU has existed for more than 50 years, and all members occupy academic positions. The micro leader has a seat (but not a vote) on the central institutional committee for education. The ADU has established a significant track record, as articulated by the micro leader: ‘I think the vice-rector trusts us to decide how to do academic development.’ The centrality of ‘mutual trust and respect’ in leadership is well established (Bryman, 2008, p. 699), facilitating the creation of spaces for initiative, for deliberative leadership dynamics enabling a deliberative attitude to grow and proliferate. Core elements of sustained engagement across faculties are based on the agency of the micro leader and her

colleagues: ‘we need to be able to be good listeners, to listen to ... needs they come to us with. And we need to be good at collaborating ... not to protect our own field, but to share.’ Thus, trust—conducive to cultivating a deliberative attitude that becomes a shared repertoire—is forged through interactions with others, reinforcing shared values and virtues.

The committee membership creates conditions for both formal and informal opportunities to be heard, and heeded, to question and challenge authorities and orthodoxies, thus influencing deliberations and brokering across all leadership levels of the institution. Such practices are described as ‘transrelational leadership’; it seeks ‘to move others, the organisation, and the leader to another level of functioning by means of relationships’ (Branson et al., 2020, p. 49). This encourages her to engage with the other leaders, and the ensuing spaces enable legitimate compromises to be forged; ‘loose ties’ rather than ‘ties that bind’ (Achinstein, 2002). She articulates this awareness and propensity for action as follows:

So being a member of that committee, I can pick up the phone and call the pro-rector ... So, we also have an informal contact and the advice the leader of the unit gives in this committee on how ... to develop good university pedagogy courses and consultation ... are valued.

The quotation indicates the extent to which formal and informal meld in generative ways, building trust through collaborative relationships. Agency and access coalesce, enhancing a deliberative attitude, where macro and micro leaders forge practices that are woven into the fabric of deliberative leadership, enhancing its weave. Such practices resonate with the view that ‘taking ownership and recognising that the success of the institution rests on the shoulders of all and not only those in senior management positions’ (Frantz et al., 2020, p. 5). The ongoing deliberations cultivate a more collective institutional contribution to public good while building leaders’ capacities.

Deliberative leadership: Ongoing, elusive, fragile, sustainable

There is no Valhalla where deliberative leadership is assured. Evidence above indicates: conditions that facilitate relationships at micro, meso, and macro levels create reciprocity whereby individual and collective endeavour are mutually beneficial, enabling deliberative leadership to be productive in meeting new and emerging issues. In research intensive universities, all teaching is required to be

research based, an obligation in which the ADU acquits itself very well, as articulated by the macro leader:

That faculties can get some help and to trust that that help is based in research. That is the important thing for those who need help. ... we can all read small articles, but we are not sitting down and reading PhDs from the faculty of education, no. And it shouldn't be like that [laughs].

Rather, trust in the expertise of the academic developers becomes an important element of the fabric of deliberative leadership. She states: 'What the pedagogues can do is to "translate" their research and communicate it to peers in other disciplines: to do that translation and to show what is important.' When trust and respect become part of the dynamic processes, the density of deliberative attitude and leadership are fortified through imaginative transformative translation. Nonetheless, the interwoven nature of deliberative leadership, its more elusive dynamics, necessitate consideration of the wider institutional context. Interviewees pointed to the social democratic values contextualising governance and leadership of public universities in Norway, simultaneously recognising that these values are being challenged, as the HoD indicates:

I think the Norwegian society or the role of universities in our society is quite different than in the UK or the US ... Because education is free, it is also very strongly defined within social development and the policies around social development and the role of education.

The Dean indicates that since universities have become more competitive and more internationalised: 'we are very concerned with publishing because we have a merit incentive system to publish in highly ranked journals.' Consequently, she continues: 'those practices ... might be counterproductive to being more collaborative—a culture that we also actually want to develop.' She articulates how external governance influences internal leadership commitments:

... I am very aware of expectations towards the faculty ... to be competitive to get the good money, to get the publications, to get all these things, to produce capital in that market ... on the global scene, but does this have any influence for helping students in the classrooms? As Dean, I feel the contradictions.

Having made these assertions, she maintains, perhaps tentatively, that such tensions are addressed in the university's strategic plan: 'by using a language that makes it possible to talk about all these things at the same time' (an assertion indicative of reaching legitimate compromises between the governance logics/languages outlined in Figure 4). An openness to possibilities is captured in her phrase: 'transcending borders,' which she explains 'includes ... the border between fields of knowledge ... between theory and practice, to create new forms of knowledge sharing, knowledge development, between different fields....' Her reflections suggest tolerance for ambiguities and uncertainties, displaying deliberative principles in formal and informal, horizontal as well as vertical, brokering. Her testimony indicates that the mood music internal and external to the institution has changed and continues to evolve, rendering it more difficult to find appropriate synchrony amidst competing, sometimes jarring, interests. Nonetheless, both macro and meso leaders revealed a deliberative attitude, encouraging deliberative communication and an institutional orientation towards pursuit of legitimate compromises between the language and logic of responsibility and accountability. Nonetheless, leaders may regress to the language and logic of accountability, underlining the fragility of deliberative practices if 'they cannot sufficiently influence others without using such things as diverse policies, prescribed processes, accountability regimes and performance management measures as a crutch' (Branson et al., 2020, p. 49).

Deliberative leadership: A sustainable leadership praxis?

This paper began by identifying challenges and uncertainties faced by contemporary public universities, situating these within the languages and logics of different governance and the tensions over time between management and leadership, positing deliberative leadership as a sustainable praxis within present flux. Characteristics of deliberative leadership, its values, virtues and communication principles and emergent praxis, its commitment to a public good mandate were identified and described. Empirical evidence indicated that when these characteristics were stretched over the organization, individual and collective leadership capacities were enhanced, and vertical and horizontal brokering, formally and informally, secured legitimate compromises while respecting individual webs of commitments. This evidence indicates that while deliberative attitudes of senior leaders in an institution are crucial, structures and processes,

formal and informal, are critically important enablers for interaction and building deliberative leadership capacities (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020).

Our third question considers the potential of deliberative leadership as a sustainable praxis for public universities in in-between times. The adage ‘one swallow does not make a summer’ (Μία χελιδὼν ἕαρ οὐ ποιεῖ) is attributed to Aristotle (Aristotle, 1999, p. 1098a18), is an accusation that may be levelled at the argument advanced above, since its focus is confined to one institutional swallow—bearing news of the ‘nesting’ of deliberative leadership praxis within that organisation (even if informed by evidence from four other public universities). How might deliberative leadership praxis fare in more uncertain and less hospitable surroundings? The following responses are intended to be generative rather than definitive or prescriptive.

It is indeed a truism to assert that ‘the road to the future is always under construction’ (Sparks, 1994, p. 226), and this rings true for public universities as much as it did for the author when writing about post-apartheid South Africa in *Tomorrow is Another Country*. Context matters, and it is important not to stray too far from the warrants of the narrative above. However, in a globalised world, it is necessary to recognise the dynamics of the local-global intersection, sometimes identified as the ‘glocal’ (Beck, 2000). Higher education institutions, and public universities in particular, are situated in this vortex of competing and conflicting forces. The external demands of policy prescriptions for greater accountability, preparation of graduates for ‘the world of work’ have the potential to marginalise a public mandate for the formation of citizens, and thus contribute to public good. Without entering into a full-blooded debate on the contemporary ‘war on the West’ (Murray, 2022) and avoiding falling into the ‘identity trap’ (Mounk, 2023), regardless of positioning, it is difficult if not impossible for public universities to avoid the necessity to engage in sustained deliberations on their particular mission, its distinct contribution to public good in response to its mandate, to create shared meanings and purposes. This requires individual and collective endeavour, with greater responsibilities falling on the shoulders of those in formal leadership roles, while simultaneously recognising that all students and staff have a responsibility to contribute. At the individual end of the collective spectrum, the case above illustrates what the German-Yiddish language refers to as ‘mensch’/‘mentsh,’ a ‘human being’ possessed ‘of integrity and honor’ and, according to Rosten (1968, p. 23), ‘someone to admire and emulate, someone of noble character.’ Earlier iterations of this etymology date back to Cicero (*humanitas*), at once recognising the importance of language while evoking the importance of humanity in the conduct of ongoing deliberations. What the case demonstrates is that when a

deliberative attitude is a shared characteristic, appreciated and deployed across varying levels of an institution, positive outcomes are brought into being, in a manner that contributes to the fabric of leadership, formal and informal, reinforcing the importance of sensitivity to language, respect for webs of commitment, recognising the necessity to broker legitimate compromises, embedding these in routines of leadership practice.

We have documented but one way in which deliberative leadership has been enacted. Different contexts and their communities will inevitably forge their own way, yet we anticipate that in cultivating its own future, its mission, values, and virtues, it will be necessary to arrive at a shared understanding of public good. Deliberative leadership insists on the importance of values; to be attentive to ‘what we value when we make decisions’ (Bowles, 2016, p. 8). Even in less fertile organisational surroundings, without recourse to values and virtues, compromise is transactional, contributing to a sense of demoralisation and alienation. Instead, a deliberative attitude and deliberations recognise that a long-term perspective renders it more feasible to embrace the challenges inherent in deliberative leadership, captured in the following: ‘our moral sentiments can live on as memes that multiply through values in the service of others’ (Carney, 2021, p. 522). Commitment to values (and attendant virtues) and deliberative communication become embedded in leadership routines, building leadership density through brokering; seeking out legitimate compromises that respect value positions and webs of commitment, putting humanity at the centre of the enterprise for staff, students, partners, and publics. Deliberative leadership is both a work in progress and a long-term project; an occasional ‘deliberation day’ is insufficient (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2004). Rather, such every day endeavours are likely to enable many versions of deliberative leadership to flourish, and those that are most reflexive in this regard are those most likely to have a more enduring shelf-life and become a sustainable praxis.

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Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke is a professor in pedagogy and higher education and an academic developer. She has vast experience as a researcher and practitioner in educational leadership in higher education and school leadership. Her research field include conceptualization of professional and academic responsibility, governance of - and educational leadership in - research intensive universities. She was the leader of the international research project (2015-2021) on the Formation and Competence Building of University Academic Developers which included the book Solbrekke, T.D & Sugrue, C. (Eds.) (2020) *Leading Higher Education As and For Public Good Rekindling Education as Praxis*.

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