Style and substance: Towards an integrated framework for research into leadership and creativity

Summary
This paper is a preliminary stage in a research project on leadership and creativity in the media industries. The treatment of these issues in media management research, ‘mainstream’ management research, and published accounts of creativity-focused leadership in the media are reviewed. It finds that these issues have been under-addressed by media management researchers that leadership theory does not focus explicitly on creativity and that theories of organisational creativity do not address leadership directly. Four contact points are identified between the bodies of theory: intrinsic motivation, vision, the leader’s actions in establishing an environmental context conducive to creativity, and emotions. The paper proposes that subsequent empirical research should be exploratory, phenomenological, processual, contextual and pluralist. It identifies potential research themes: where leadership is situated with a focus on collaborative leadership, the tension between optimising current operations and boosting creativity, and the role of emotions.
Style and substance: Towards an integrated framework for research into leadership and creativity

Abstract
This paper is the first stage in a cross-disciplinary research project on leadership and creativity in the media industries and their inter-relationship. It reviews the treatment of these issues in three bodies of literature – media management research, ‘mainstream’ management research, and published accounts of two examples of creativity-focused leadership in the media: Greg Dyke at the BBC, and Michael Eisner at Walt Disney. It finds that leadership and creativity have been under-addressed to date by media management researchers. Leadership theory although extensive does not focus explicitly on creativity. Theories of organisational creativity are more concise but do not address leadership directly. Four contact points are identified between the bodies of theory. The first is intrinsic motivation: this is central to transformational and charismatic leadership theories and also to creativity theories, although it confers different benefits. A second link is vision: in both research streams a leader develops a vision which influences the nature of the creative challenge. A third link involves a leader’s actions in establishing an environmental context conducive to creativity. A fourth, less obvious, point of connection concerns emotions: emotions on the part of leaders and those led are involved in leadership processes, and also fundamental to the intrinsically motivated state, which is central to organisational creativity. This analysis is used to provide insights for how empirical research might be approached. It proposes that this should be exploratory, phenomenological, processual, contextual and pluralist. The paper also highlights potential research themes. The first concerns who is actually leading in the media industries, with a particular focus on collaborative leadership. The second is the tension between optimising current operations and boosting flexibility and creativity. A third concerns the role of emotions in leadership, creativity, and the media industries.

Introduction
Leadership and creativity are pressing issues for the media industries. There are commonalities between these two elements: both are underserved in the fast-growing field of media management research; both involve underlying psychological factors within an organisation, both concern emotional energy, and both can make singular contributions to the performance of media firms.

This paper represents a first stage in a cross-disciplinary research project seeking to increase understanding of leadership in the media industry and its interaction with creativity. First it reviews treatment of these issues in media management literature. Second it explores understanding of these phenomena and their interaction from the mainstream ‘management cannon’. Third it reviews two cases of leadership in media organisations drawing on secondary data. Finally, it makes proposals for empirical research into the link between leadership and creativity in the media and creative industries.

Media management research into leadership and creativity
Media management is an emergent field (Küng, 2007). To date, the topic of leadership has been inadequately addressed – ‘arguably the single most neglected area of research and theory development in the field of media management’ (Mierzejewska and Hollifield in Albarran, Chan-Olmsted and Wirth, 2005). This is despite the fact that the leaders of media
organisations have historically commanded intense scrutiny from government regulators and policy makers, the press, and the general public. The importance of ongoing creativity for the cultural industries has also been recognised (see, for example, Towse, 2000; Caves, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2000; Davis and Scase, 2000). However there are relatively few empirical investigations into the management implications of this.

There is a slim body of research into leadership and creativity in the media. Findings in the main highlight leadership style. It is suggested that consensus-based approaches are more appropriate than hierarchical and authoritarian ones because creative employees resent being told what to do (Davis and Scase, 2000), and will not accept unquestioningly directions from above (Lavine and Wackman, 1988). News journalists often seek editorial freedom and protection from managerial or owner influence (Curran and Seaton, 1981).

Aris and Bughin (2005) identify two leadership styles for media organisations seeking to attract and retain creative talent: an inspirational, charismatic, hands-on-style, and a performance-orientated, structured style, involving systematic setting of strategic corporate and individual goals. They address context also: if the organisation generates original content then team leaders will often be creators also since expertise will be necessary for acceptance. Such leaders are therefore appointed due to their creative rather than management skills. Corporate level leaders will need management skills to gain acceptance, but creative skills will not be relevant. Rather, corporate leaders need to set boundaries within which creators can act freely.

Some research focuses on the capabilities required of media leaders. Sanchez-Tabernero (in Küng, 2006) sees the ability to ‘build great teams’ as central. This involves a long-term orientation, an ability to motivate, strong beliefs, and an understanding of consumer tastes. Although not addressing the media industry specifically, Burns and Stalkers’ (1961, reprinted 1994: 102) research into environments where creativity and innovation are required identify two leadership abilities as critical. The first is to understand the changing dynamics of the strategic environment, particularly technological ones, and recalibrate the internal organisation in step. The second is to ‘define the work situation, displaying … the commitments, effort, and self-involvement which the individual …should attempt to meet’.

Burns and Stalker’s conclusions are echoed by a study applying socio-constructivist theories of creativity to BBC News Online, HBO Original Programming Division, and Pixar (Küng, 2004). This found that leadership underpinned creativity in two ways. First was setting a vision that inspired creativity. Second was providing an organisational architecture conducive to creativity. In two of the cases (BBC News Online and Pixar) there were dual leadership structures where two individuals performed the leadership function in tandem. The titular leader set the vision that encapsulated the creative challenge, established the legitimacy and importance of the project in the eyes of the wider organisation, and allocated the necessary resources. The second leader turned this abstract vision into an implementable plan, inspired staff to achieve this, and ensured the autonomy of the creative team was not compromised by the inertial factors present in the parent.

Examples can be found endorsing the concept of collaborative leadership. For example during Disney’s earliest days ‘Roy was the guardian, the protector who allowed genius to flourish. … not only freeing Walt to make creative decisions, but running the business side of Disney with great skill’ (Bennis and Biederman, 1997: 45). Eisner, a later Disney CEO, also acknowledged that ‘the most successful movie studios and television networks have had at least two strong executives at the top, supporting and counterbalancing one another’ (Eisner, cited in Stewart, 2005: 142). Ironically, while he himself benefited enormously from the leadership team he constructed during his first decade at Disney, once this was disbanded Eisner had problems sharing the leadership function again. Andy Duncan, Chief Executive of
the UK’s Channel Four, ascribes the success of Freeview, an initiative he led at the BBC, to collaborative leadership:\(^1\): ‘The leaders of projects have to realise that they don’t have to supply all the answers, the real trick of getting the best out of people is to accept that answers come from everyone’.

Media management research on leadership therefore focuses on two dimensions. The first is leadership style. Here a common recommendation is for a participative, inspirational, charismatic approach that demonstrates commitment to both individuals and organisational goals, and where the behaviours required from followers are modelled by the leader. The second concerns substantive skills required to lead media firms. Most frequently mentioned is an ability to decode the strategic environment and use this to create a vision. Additionally, mention is made of the provision of autonomy for teams required to be creative\(^2\). Additionally, there is evidence pointing to a correlation between collaborative leadership structures and creativity.

**Theories of leadership**

How do these findings fit into leadership theory in general? Leadership is a diffuse area comprising many incompatible research approaches and complicated by terminological ambiguity, methodological divisions, and fundamental debates concerning what leadership is and where it occurs (Yukl, 2002; Northouse, 2004; Bass, 1990). The distinction present in media management research between the style and content of leadership can be found in the mainstream leadership ‘cannon’, where leader-centric approaches that see leadership as a property, that is qualities or characteristics attributed to individuals who carry out the task of leadership (Jago, 1982), are distinguished from process-centric ones where leadership is understood as a social influence process that seeks to move a group of individuals towards a specific objective (Northouse, 2004; Jago, 1982; Kotter, 1988).

**Leadership as a ‘property’**

Also known as ‘great person approaches’, trait approaches represent some of the earliest systematic research into leadership. They were in vogue from the turn of the century to the 1940s and view leadership as residing in a set of definable, measurable in-born traits that are possessed by a ‘natural leaders’ (Jago, 1982), which range from physical characteristics such as height, to aspects of personality and temperament, motivation, needs and values (Yukl, 1994). Researchers sought to identify the traits that were linked positively with successful leaders and often looked to historical leaders such as Napoleon or Gandhi. The assumption was that once the ‘right’ traits had been identified, potential leaders could be identified by screening for these (Jago, 1982). Trait approaches held great intuitive appeal, but despite extensive research a definitive list of leadership traits was never created (Jago, 1982).

Trait approaches are absolute: they assume there is one best way to lead and that depends on a set of immutable characteristics that are genetically determined and cannot be acquired.

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\(^1\) Cited in Küng, L., *Digital Terrestrial Television in the UK: The BBC and the Launch of Freeview*, European Case Clearing House Case Study, Ref 305-293-1.

\(^2\) This appears to be one of Rupert Murdoch’s leadership principles. While often viewed as an autocratic leader, a number of observers have noted he grants significant autonomy to those in leadership positions within News Corporation (Auletta, 1997; Chenoweth, 2001; Coleridge, 1993; Neil, 1997) with ‘multiple (and proliferating) styles of control and decision-making being tolerated at different parts of the network’ (Louw, 2001: 64).
Skills approaches, which followed trait ones, are more egalitarian: they view leadership as residing a combination of skills which can be acquired through experiences such as training programmes, career progression, mentoring and so on (Northouse, 2004). Thus leadership is within the gift of many, rather than a few. This research stream tries to identify the skills an individual needs to possess to perform effectively in a leadership role (Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly, Marks, 2000). As research progressed, various sets of skills were identified. Katz, who carried out much initial work in the field, identified three core categories (Katz, 1955): technical skill (the ability ‘to work with things’); human skill (the ability to work effectively with colleagues at all levels); and conceptual skill (the ability to work with abstract ideas and hypothetical notions).

During the 1990s the concept of skills was broadened into ‘capabilities’, understood as the ‘knowledge and skills that make effective leadership possible’ (Mumford et al, 2000:12). Again, three core elements were identified: problem-solving skills (as the creative ability to solve new and unusual, ill-defined organisational problems); social judgement skills (the capacity to understand the governing social dynamics in an organisation and work with these to solve problems); and knowledge (the information and mental schemes necessary for a leader to define and solve organisational problems). A later study (Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly & Marks, 2000: 157) honed in on a single leadership skill they identified as critical, namely the ability to solve the novel, ill-defined problems. They viewed this as necessary to help organisations, as complex systems, clarify goals, remove blockages and identify solutions: ‘unless leaders can identify significant organisational problems, and formulate solutions to those …, all the planning and persuasion in the world are to no avail’.

Leadership as a process
In the late 1940s, dissatisfaction with trait approaches led researchers to focus instead on understanding how a leader’s behaviour affects others (Andriessen and Drenth, 1984), that is, on the impact of a leader’s ‘style’ on the satisfaction and performance of those led (Yukl, 2002; Stogdill, 1974; Jago, 1982). Thus leadership began to be conceived of as collective, processual, and existing in the perceptions of others (Jago, 1982; Calder, 1977; Conger and Kanugo, 1998). As Gardner (1999:1010) describes, leadership occurs ‘the mind of the leaders, the minds of followers, and the interactions and transactions occurring between and among those minds’.

Some of the first theories to emerge were the ‘style theories’. These drew on a combination of scientific management and the human relations school to identify different dimensions in leadership behaviour and the factors that distinguish effective from ineffective leaders. The first empirical studies were conducted at Ohio State University in the late 1940s. Two dimensions of leadership were identified: consideration - the degree of two-way communication and consultation, mutual trust, respect and warmth a leader exhibits towards his followers; and ‘initiating structure’ - the degree to which a leader defines and organises relationships between group members and establishes well-defined channels of communication and methods of establishing the group’s task. These were used to identify the optimal leadership style. Research suggested that an effective leader developed good rapport and two-way communication, and took an active role in planning and directing group activities. Subsequent research by the University of Michigan identified two critical dimensions of leadership style – employee-centred (concern for people) and job-centred (concern for production). In the mid-1980s Blake and Mouton used these dimensions as the basis for a diagnostic tool, the ‘managerial grid’, which identified five different leadership archetypes.

A more recent and prominent stream in process approaches is ‘transformational leadership’. This concept is credited to political sociologist Burns (1978) who identified a leader who
changes organisations elementally – transforms them – by evoking and harnessing followers’ intrinsic motivation to get them to commit to and realise performance outcomes that exceed expectations. The focus on intrinsic motivation distinguishes transformational from transactional leadership, since the latter is based on contingent extrinsic motivation whereby a follower acts in a certain way in return for specified extrinsic rewards - praise, compensation and so on (Conger, 1989).

The transformational leader uses the social architecture of an organisation to effect change (Senge, 1990). An important instrument is vision. This is used to heighten awareness of the importance of the new goals, stimulate followers’ higher order needs (such as self-actualisation) encourage followers to transcend self-interest to reach these, and justify uncomfortable alterations to the status quo (Bass, 1985; Kotter, 1996; Hitt et al, 1998). Vision therefore influences the mental models of those led, determining how they perceive their environment and select courses of action (Senge, 1990).

In addition to altering tacit knowledge structures, the transformational leader also changes cultural values, the deeper harder-to-access underlying assumptions that are expressed symbolically (Schein, 1992; Morgan, 1986; Sackmann, 1991). Specific mechanisms are used to embed new assumptions in the culture, for example what a leader pays attention to, reactions to critical incidents and crises, and criteria for the allocation of resources and status, and the selection, promotion, and ‘ex-communication’ of group members (Schein, 1992: 231).

The transformational leader draws on a number of personal behaviours to effect change (Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1993, Conger, 1989; Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). Charisma, or idealised influence, is the most significant of these and ensures followers engage emotionally with the leader’s new vision. Inspirational motivation encourages them to engage with the new shared goals and emulate the leader’s behaviour. Intellectual stimulation leads them to question assumptions that might hold back the change process and find new solutions to existing problems. Individualised consideration involves individual attention to the followers - coaching, mentoring and providing growth opportunities. Each of these relies on communication skills, and Mintzberg and Westley (1992) note that transformational leaders often have a strong facility for language, particularly symbolism and metaphor.

Charismatic leadership is closely allied to transformational leadership (Hunt and Conger, 1999). It involves a leader employing personal magnetism to evoke followers’ trust and to influence them to act in certain ways in the pursuit of specific goals (Bass, 1985, 1996; Yukl, 2002; Conger, 1989; Conger, 1999; Conger and Kanungo, 1998). Charismatic leadership involves a number of behaviours. As with transformational approaches, foremost is articulating an inspiring vision and using this as a basis for new goals for the organisation. This is often a marked departure from what has gone before, but is not so dramatic that followers might reject it. Kanungo (1998) found that a crisis is not a necessary pre-condition for successful charismatic leadership, but follower disenchantment with current conditions is important. To embed the vision the charismatic leader can act in unconventional ways, and employ strategies and tactics that are unusual for the organisation. They may also make self-sacrifices or take personal risks to underline the importance of the changes that need to be made. They will also model the behaviours, norms and values followers should adopt. The vision and ensuing goals are described in ideological terms, in a way that appeals to followers’ higher order needs and links with their own values and ideals. Thus emotional commitment is engendered. Commitment also increases individual and group feelings of self-efficacy. In this way group members are encouraged to cooperate to achieve their collective task. There is evidence that it has a positive impact on employee satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Yukl, 1999).
The distinction between transformational and charismatic leadership is not easy to establish. The fields certainly overlap. Conger (1999) sees charismatic leadership as an offshoot of transformational leadership that is now of almost equal stature. Certainly, charisma is central to transformational leadership, however Bass (in Yukl, 1999) argues that a leader can be charismatic without being transformational. It is suggested that the emotional element, on the part of leaders and followers, distinguishes charismatic leadership, as does the compelling nature of the vision and the way this is communicated (Conger and Kanugo, 1998).

Charismatic leadership is also more value-laden. While transformational leadership is normally understood as a positive concept, charismatic leadership has a shadow side. Howell (in Conger, 1999) describes it as running a spectrum from leaders who empower and develop their followers, to authoritarian and narcissistic ones who use their power for personal gains and Conger (1999) argues that a charismatic leader may well probably possess elements of both poles. Charismatic leaders can also be blinkered about external threats: while there is evidence that they improve employee satisfaction, motivation and performance, they can also under-estimate threats in the organisational environment, screen out negative information, be overly self-confident, and have an inflated sense of their own importance (Yukl, 1999).

Organisational creativity
Creativity is not explicitly addressed in leadership theory. A preliminary stage this project therefore involves establishing a connection between these two bodies of theory. Research into creativity from a management perspective is a relative compact body of theory which is dominated by socio-constructivist approaches (see, for example, Amabile, 1983; 1988; 1993; 1996; 1998; Amabile et al., 1994; 1996; 2002, which provide the theoretical foundations for the following text unless otherwise indicated). These explore the influence of social context on levels of creativity in organisations and although seldom applied empirically, shed insight into performance differences in the media industry (Küng, 2005). They build on a componential model of organisational creativity which identifies three elements that are necessary for creativity to occur: creativity-relevant skills that allow individuals to think creatively and generate different alternatives; ‘domain-relevant skills’ or expertise; and intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation supplies the cornerstone to this body of theory – indeed it is also known as the ‘intrinsic motivation theory of creativity’. Also termed ‘flow’, this involves ns wanting to do something for its own sake, because the task is pleasurable and rewarding, rather than because it provides a means to meet an extrinsic goal. Cognitive flexibility and the ability to deal with complexity are highest when intrinsic motivation is high (McGraw, 1978). In this state, individuals are more likely to take risks, explore new cognitive pathways, experiment with ideas and materials, and thus generate creative solutions.

Five aspects of the work environment influence levels of intrinsic motivation and therefore creativity. The first is encouragement. If creativity is required from staff then this needs to be made explicit. The way in which ideas are evaluated is critical: this must be constructive otherwise experimentation will be discouraged (Kanter, 2006). Setting external rewards for achieving a creative end is normally detrimental to creativity, since extrinsic motivation will narrow cognitive focus. The second factor is the nature of the creative challenge itself. An exception to the rule that extrinsic motivators hinder creativity is the finding that creativity is enhanced by clearly defined overall project goals (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1989). The degree of challenge needs to be calibrated carefully and match the expertise and creative thinking skills of the individuals working on the process. Should the creative task be too extreme staff will feel overwhelmed and threatened by a loss of control. Third is autonomy. Staff required to produce creative results require autonomy, but this needs also to be carefully gauged. There should be freedom concerning the means by which the goal is to be achieved,
but not concerning the nature of the goal itself. Autonomy concerning process fosters creativity because it heightens a sense of ownership, and therefore intrinsic motivation, and allows employees to approach problems in ways that make the most of their expertise. A balance needs to be found between freedom from organisational distractions and the ability to tap into the resources of that organisation. The fourth factor is resources. The critical resources are money and time, and both need to be carefully judged. Financial resources should be sufficient but not over-generous since resource slack can reduce project focus and discipline (Nohria and Gulati, 1996). If deadlines are unrealistic staff will have no time to ‘play’ with concepts and solutions, this is important since creativity results from the formation of a large number of associations in the mind, followed by the selection of associations that are particularly interesting and useful. Time pressures tend to remove scope for such combinatorial play and bring the risk of burnout. The last element concerns the nature of the team working on the project. This needs to represent diversity of perspectives and backgrounds. Homogeneous teams inhibit creativity social cohesion can inhibit the exchange of ideas. Further, creative challenges are often epistemologically unsolvable by any one person, and require insights from a variety of specialist disciplines. Working practices need to be open to encourage the constructive challenging of ideas and shared commitment, which in time can allow the development of a sub-culture. Attention needs to be given to communication skills: these must allow expertise and emerging tacit knowledge to be shared (Kanter, 2006)

**Theoretical links between leadership and creativity**

There are three obvious contact points between theories of leadership and organisational creativity. The first is intrinsic motivation. This is central to transformational and charismatic leadership theories, and also to creativity theories, although it confers different advantages: in creativity theory, intrinsic motivation catalyses expertise and creative-thinking skills in the pursuit of novel solutions; in leadership theories intrinsic motivation promotes followers’ receptivity to higher order goals and suppresses self-interest.

A second link is vision: in both research streams the leader, whether of the organisation or of the creative project, crafts and promulgates a vision and communicates its strategic importance. This sets the creative challenge and establishes the scope of innovation. In cognitive terms, the leader’s vision is an individual interpretation of the world which becomes a collective reality.

A third link involves establishing an environmental context conducive to creativity. This is not mentioned explicitly but an inter-relationship can be inferred, since the leader is the ultimate arbiter of the work environment, dictating, the nature of creative challenges, how resources are allocated, and establishing wider contextual elements such as structure, coordination mechanisms, culture, business processes, and management.

A fourth, less obvious, point of connection concerns emotions. Emotions on the part of the leader, and emotional engagement on the part of followers, are fundamental to the processes of transformational and charismatic leadership. Emotions – desire, enjoyment, interest\(^3\) – are also fundamental to the intrinsically motivated state, which is central to organisational creativity.

\(^3\) There are a number of categorisations of emotions. Those mentioned here come from Fridja’s (1986) list of ten basic emotions.
Linking leadership and creativity in practice
How well does theoretical understanding of leadership, creativity, and their putative relationship correlate with industry experience? The next part of the paper presents two cases that allow discussion of theory to be reflected against empirical experience. These cases have been chosen first because quality of data available, and second because they both concern media leaders who made creativity a stated priority. Coincidentally they also fit the dimensions of the media leadership task identified above, in that one focuses on the process of leadership and its impact on followers, and the second on methods of leadership and their impact on creative and financial performance.

Greg Dyke at the BBC
Dyke took over as Director General of the BBC in January 2000. By the end of 2001 Dyke and his executive committed concluded that radical change was needed to improve creativity, serve audiences better, make staff feel more valued, build trust and collaboration, and improve leadership and internal communications. The result was ‘Making it Happen’ a culture change initiative officially launched in February 2002. This was designed to transform the organisation, make it the most creative organisation in the world in five years, and ensure its survival as a publicly-funded broadcaster. The project was driven by Dyke and the Executive Committee and supported by seven teams each handling a core theme: creativity, audiences, valuing people, improving leadership, transforming work spaces, attacking internal bureaucracy, and developing a set of written values. In addition seventeen divisional teams were responsible for organising local activity.

A major challenge was to involve the BBC staff. They had been scared off change by a controversial and complex initiative introduced by the previous DG, John Birt known as ‘Producer Choice’. This involved the introduction of a highly bureaucratic internal market between ‘producers’ and ‘broadcasters’. Dyke’s solution was ‘Just Imagine’, brainstorming workshops which involved over 10,000 people that focused on BBC challenges and how these might be overcome. It generated over 25,000 ideas and suggestions. To demonstrate that this initiative was serious and that staff contributions mattered, a number of suggestions were implemented rapidly and publicly. Dyke also demonstrated a commitment to ending the formal, controlled management style of his predecessors. All staff were on first name terms, meeting documentation was reduced to a minimum, and he invented yellow ‘referee’ cards, stating ‘Cut the Crap, Make it Happen’ to be used when good ideas were being rejected or bureaucracy was surfacing.

In January 2003 new BBC values were published and sent to all staff by Dyke who made it clear that he wanted them to become the bedrock of the culture. These distilled over 4000 individual suggestions from the ‘Just Imagine’ sessions. Also in January 2003 the teams presented their change plans, which were consolidated into a BBC-wide change plan with five main sections: Providing great Leadership; Making the BBC a great place to work; Getting closer to our audiences; Inspiring creativity everywhere; and Working as One BBC guided by the BBC values. In total this made up over forty separate initiatives, many of them involving

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4 This text draws on four sources. Descriptions of leadership initiatives are based on a BBC Policy and Planning Department Presentation to Roffey Park Institute OD Conference, 2 March 2004. Analysis of Dyke’s leadership style and of the Hutton Report and Gilligan crisis draw on Kanter’s Confidence (2004) and Daniels and Miller’s case ‘Greg Dyke: Hero or Villain? The Hutton Report and the BBC (IESE Case 2-4040040). Comments from Dyke himself come from his autobiography Inside Story (2004).
radical changes to the status quo. Awareness was created through ‘The Big Conversation’, a massive staff communications exercise where 17,000 staff took part in a live, televised, interactive BBC-wide conversation at more than 400 meetings. Internal BBC research in March 2004 showed that 62% of staff were convinced that ‘Making it Happen’ would make a real difference to the BBC, 22% were actively championing change; 58% felt valued by the organisation (up 28% on 2001) and 50% felt management behaviour was consistent with BBC values (up 18% on 2001).

A personal perspective on his leadership approach can be found in Dyke’s biography. Concern is central ‘if you are the leader of an organization you must care about the people who work for you, all of them, and show them you care. Only then can you succeed’ (2004: 204). He also used emotions as a lever: “The real point about ‘Making it Happen’ was that I engaged people’s emotions, not just their brains. Culture change is above all an emotional experience, not an intellectual one” (Dyke, 2004: 215). Symbolic acts are an important instrument for culture change: ‘I also held a party in the atrium [that had been closed since the building’s inception on bureaucratic grounds]… The opening-up of the White City atrium became an incredibly important story around the BBC. It symbolized what ‘Making it Happen’ was trying to do and helped convince people that things could be changed. … It also told the jobs worth bureaucrats that we were after them” (Dyke, 2004: 213).

However Dyke’s leadership came to an inglorious end. In 2003 a BBC reporter (Andrew Gilligan) accused the UK Government of inserting a false assertion in an intelligence dossier on air. Subsequent events (including the suicide of a weapons expert involved) led to what was termed the worst crisis in the BBC’s history. The Hutton Enquiry was established by the UK Government to investigate these events. It found both BBC management and its editorial systems to be at fault, and it was suggested that Dyke’s delegated management style was incapable of responding to a crisis. Both Dyke and the BBC Chairman resigned in 2004.

However criticism was far from universal. Dyke’s resignation brought thousands of employees into the street outside BBC buildings protesting for Dyke’s reinstatement, and a full page newspaper advert was taken in his support. At the BBC Governor’s Private Session at which Dyke resigned the BBC’s Human Resource Director described Dyke’s ‘huge personal impact on the BBC’ [saying that] His emotional connection with staff at all levels was very different from the previous management regime

Dyke has the hallmarks of a transformational leader. These accounts show he employed vision, culture change, charisma, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation to communicate and gain commitment to his goals. He also had charisma: his vision represented a departure from that of his predecessor, and indeed he used staff disenchantment with ‘Producer Choice’ to create positive leverage for his initiatives. He displayed emotions and evoked them in his followers. He raised levels of satisfaction, motivation and performance. He modelled personally the behaviour he required from staff, and was a passionate communicator. He also failed to perceive the threat that the Gilligan Affair posed to the BBC, and its possible consequences.

Published analyses of Dyke’s leadership (Kanter, 2004; Daniels and Miller, 2004) identify mechanisms that contributed to his transformational/charismatic leadership style. For example, he rebuilt personal and organisational self-confidence by delegation, making himself

accessible, and public demonstrations of trust, and his positive, upbeat, and direct communication style, and discouragement of politicking contributed to the culture change.

**Michael Eisner at Walt Disney**

Eisner was Disney’s CEO for two decades. When he took over Walt Disney Productions was described as an ‘all but dead duck’: struggling to maintain its independence, it was not even classified by the industry as a studio. During the mid 1980s to mid-1990s the Walt Disney Company (it was renamed in 1986) underwent a rapid expansion and creative renaissance attributed to the new ‘Team Disney’ that was appointed in 1984. This comprised Michael Eisner, 42, as Chairman and CEO, Frank Wells, as President and COO, and Jeffrey Katzenberg, also from Paramount, who was appointed to run the film studio.

In just four years Disney became the number one ranked studio. Existing areas such as animation were revitalised (*The Lion King*, released in 1994 had by 1995 become the second largest grossing film ever) and new businesses were developed (publishing, retailing, baseball). By 1987 Disney was a vertically integrated conglomerate and its operating income had jumped from $300 million when Eisner had taken over to nearly $800 million\(^7\), and in the early 1990s Disney was one of the most valuable brands in the world. A case study on its tight internal management and aggressive exploitation of synergies was taught in MBA schools worldwide\(^8\).

However the following years were a ‘decade horribilis’ for the company. In 1994, Wells killed in helicopter crash, Eisner underwent quadruple heart bypass surgery, and Katzenberg, having been denied Well’s job, left to found what was to become a serious competitor, Dreamworks SKG. Dreamworks’ and Pixar’s animated films started to outperform Disney’s. Live action films were disappointing. Video sales and merchandising income fell, and 1999 saw a marked drop in earnings and stock price. Disney’s internet portal, Go.com, was closed in 1991 with $800 million charge. Unsurprisingly, Eisner’s reputation soured. In 2003 Roy Disney and Stanley Gold started a campaign to oust Eisner, blaming him for ‘cultural decay’. A year later, Comcast launched a hostile bid, and negotiations concerning the renewal of the Pixar joint venture that had contributed so handsomely to Disney’s profits fell apart. In March of that year forty five percent of shareholders voted to withhold support for Eisner’s re-election, Eisner subsequently announced he would resign earlier than anticipated in 2005.

The majority of analyses of Eisner as a leader are instrumental rather than processual: they focus on the skills and knowledge he employed. These include self-analysis. Eisner described himself as a leader who had institutionalised an environment that furthered creativity. In an article in the Harvard Business Review (Wetlaufer, 2000), he describes the key elements of

\(^6\) This case draws heavily on Stewart’s (2005) analysis of Disney during the Eisner era. This in turn draws on transcripts, testimony and exhibits in Jeffrey Katzenberg vs. The Walt Disney Co., Case No. BC 147864 in the Superior Court of California, and deposition testimony, trial testimony, and exhibits from In Re The Walt Disney Co. Derivative Litigation, Consolidated Action No. 15452, which concerned the hiring and firing of Michael Ovitz. These provided access, amongst other things, to Michael Eisner’s extensive private notes documenting his actions and state of mind during his tenure.

\(^7\) Increased profits stemmed from three main sources: raising admission prices at theme parks; greatly expanding the number of company-owned hotels; and distributing the animated classics on home video (Stewart, 2005)

this approach, and these fit surprisingly neatly into the key precepts of socio-constructivist
creativity theory.

Eisner stressed the importance of creativity via regular ‘Monday staff meetings where people
are not afraid to speak their minds and be irreverent … an environment in which people feel
safe to fail [and where] criticism for submitting a foolish idea is abolished…. We like to think
we have fun here – we’re loosey-goosey’ with a ‘freewheeling, spontaneous exchange of
ideas’, but at the same time discussion is ‘brutally honest’, which was ‘confidence building’.
In terms of resources, he provided creative staff with time to incubate ideas by deliberately
delaying green light decisions. Autonomy was furthered too, and long creative meetings on
Mondays were ‘non-hierarchical – everybody becomes equal’. Eisner describes himself as ‘a
great believer in initiative and responsibility at every level … But there have to be limits to
autonomy’. Eisner also supported diversity in creative teams because this was ‘a great force
towards creativity … the more diverse the organisation, the more diverse the ideas that get
expressed’ with ‘team unity is the critical component of our success’ (Stewart, 2005).
In the last years of Eisner’s tenure critiques of his leadership style mounted. He was accused
of ‘extinguishing the company’s creative spark’9. If these criticisms are correct (and they
stem primarily from business journalists who conceivably sympathised with Disney’s
beleaguered creatives and were perhaps envious of Eisner’s compensation package) they
suggest that although Eisner did institute mechanisms to further creativity, other aspects of his
management priorities undermined these. Theories of organisation creativity suggest how his
might have happened.

In terms of the creative challenge, the profit-multiplier business model was the engine behind
Disney’s stellar financial performance (Slywotsky and Morrison, 1997). This however
prescribed the creative challenge by limiting it to consumer characters that could be
repackaged, and ‘endless iterations of existing properties’10. Further, since compensation
levels were tied to synergies achieved, there was contingent extrinsic motivation, which
theoretically would ‘crowd out’ intrinsic motivation. Eisner saw his Monday staff meetings as
central to establishing a requirement for creativity. Ovitz (brought in as Eisner’s second in
command but sacked acrimoniously soon after) reported that although these were ‘the focal
point of [Eisner’s] management of the company, extolling the freewheeling, spontaneous
exchange of ideas and the ‘synergy’ that he was so proud of, there was actually very little
exchange if ideas. Most of the lunch was a stream of consciousness monologue by Eisner. No
one disagreed with anything he said’ (Stewart, 2005:219). Financial control was tight. For
Eisner, ‘discipline is also part of creativity’, but he was perceived as ‘rapacious, soul-less, and
always looking for a quick buck’11. According to theory, parsimony in terms of financial
resources restricts intrinsic motivation, and circumscribes experimentation.

Eisner favoured micro-management. He was criticised for a ‘centralised and controlling
management style [which led]… managers [to] feel second guessed; artists fear surrendering
creative freedom’ and ‘obsession with synergy at the expense of individual business units’12.

9 New York Times, 29 April, 2004
10 Fortune, 6 September 1999
11 Roy Disney’s Letter of Resignation from Board
12 Fortune, 6 September 1999
slow... '13. All of these factors would compromise creative autonomy, as would the ‘cut-throat’ politics (Stewart, 2005)

**Conclusions: Implications for empirical research**

This final section explores what implications this analysis has for the design of empirical research into leadership and creativity in the media industries may be conducted.

The overall goal of the project is to investigate an aspect of management that is not well defined and its purpose is to generate models and hypotheses. This mandates an exploratory methodology. Because leadership is a constructed rather than natural object and involves interaction between leader and followers, the approach will need to be phenomenological in order to capture the perspective of the actors involved and also processual to capture the development of the leadership process over time. This implies high levels of primary access to organisations over a relatively long time period, which implies a small sample.

A multi-lens approach may be appropriate for data analysis. This involves applying a series of theoretical lenses to the data and allows cross-disciplinary and cross-paradigm interpretation. This will reduce ontological bias on the part of researchers, redress the fractional nature of management theory, and permit contextual, processual and overall more profound insights of the phenomena observed (Morgan, 1986; Gioia and Pitre, 1990; Rumelt et al, 1994; Mintzberg et al, 1998; Rajagopalan and Spreizer, 1996; Pettigrew, 1995).

To ensure practitioner-relevance the research needs to encompass leadership outcomes (socio-constructivist approaches to creativity have robust assessment tools which could be applied in this respect), as well as a contextualist orientation that places the research within a broad frame including the internal as well as external competitive environment will be necessary.

This paper, while serving as a preliminary stage, also highlights some issues that should be borne in mind as research progresses. First is defining where leadership is taking place and by whom, with a particular focus on collaborative leadership. Creativity theory implies two levels of leadership, the leader of the creative project and the leader who sets the overall strategy. Leadership theory displays no consensus concerning where leadership is situated. Media management theory does not address the issue overtly, and the business press looks for a singular leader. Empirical research indicates that multiple leadership structures are common among high performing media organisations. The complexity of the leadership task - decoding external environment and managing internal ecosystems – would suggest that collaborative structures would be appropriate.

A second theme is the dualities and dilemmas associated with leadership in the creative industries, specifically the tension between focusing on optimising current operations and boosting productivity, and boosting creativity and flexibility. It could be argued that failure to manage these competing demands led to the downfall of both Dyke and Eisner: Dyke emphasised innovation and flexibility at the expense of management controls, and Eisner favoured optimisation and productivity at the expense of creativity. In the current industry environment, this dilemma is likely to gain in importance. Because society is fragmenting, demand is fickle, demands on time are increasing and attention spans are shrinking, media firms need to produce a wide range of different creative products, which mandates specific types of organisational environments, particularly small group autonomy. However the cost of content is increasing dramatically, and ‘bet the farm’ content investments require not only deep pockets, but also the critical mass to ensure multi-platform use can be exploited, tight
coordination to ensure potential synergies are found, and control mechanisms to ensure maximum returns from content investments.

A final potential theme concerns emotions. Burns (1978) argued that the genius of Mao Tse Tung was his understanding of others’ emotions. Emotions would appear to be involved in processes of leadership and of organisational creativity. The citations that appear in the cases here on leadership in the media in this paper use emotive language, and suggest that leadership initiatives in creative organisations are emotionally charged. Academic understanding of the role of emotions in organisations is embryonic, but may well be of relevance to further stages in this research.

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