Analyzing leadership attributes in faith-based organizations: Idealism versus reality

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to the growing discussion about leadership in the contemporary Church of England with a particular interest in the complex interaction between social context and leadership practices. Implicit leadership theory is used to explore mutual expectations around distributed models of lay and ordained leadership as well as 'ordinary' members'' of congregation. Applying a qualitative research method, we conducted 32 semi-structured interviews in six Church of England parishes. Through the systematic analysis of relevant contextual factors at multiple levels, we identify limited congruence between ideal leadership attributes and actual behavior. We contribute to the implicit leadership theory literature by identifying ethical attributes, such as the ability to help others flourish, as particularly pertinent to the religious setting. We also identify the malleability of some leadership attributes. We further contribute to the literature on organizational studies in faith-based organizations by offering novel insights into the relationship between leadership, followership and contextual factors at local parish level which have significant practical implications for recruiting and training church leaders and followers.

Key words: contextual factors, ethical leadership, implicit leadership theory, leadership attributes, faith-based organizations, qualitative

Introduction

Recent political and societal developments have stimulated significant change in faith-based organizations and put many parochial clergy under pressure to supplement their established spiritual and pastoral responsibilities with organizational and effective leadership skills (Grandy and Sliwa, 2017). In addition, church organizations are heavily dependent on contributions from volunteers, extending existing relationships of mutual interdependence between church leaders and congregational members (van Brackle, 2011). The quality of this relationship is influenced by the level of congruence between leaders' and followers' expectations and preconceptions on leadership (Coyle and Foti, 2015; Epitropaki et al., 2013). These preconceptions vary significantly, and the quest to explain this variance continues to receive attention in the leadership literature (e.g., Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Junker and van Dick, 2014). As indicated in earlier research (Lord et al., 1984; Lord and Maher, 1991), implicit leadership theories (ILTs) fundamentally shape perceptions of leadership and responses to actual leaders. Further, given that leadership is also in some sense a social construction, the contextual factors which influence leadership perceptions require more detailed attention (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005).

Building on this, we analyze the level of congruence between the expectations of leaders, lay leaders (followers with leadership responsibilities) and followers about ideal and actual leadership attributes (as perceived by these three groups). Reviewing various contextual factors, we explore how this level of congruence affects relationships between leaders and followers. We identify leadership attributes looking specifically for qualities which might be perceived important in faith-based organizations such as ethical, servant and spiritual attributes (e.g., Low and Ayoko, 2018; O'Keeffe, 2000). This study makes a number of contributions to multiple constituencies. It

contributes to the current literature on implicit leadership theory and the literature on faith-based organization studies in six main ways:

First, we advance existing research by investigating interpersonal (leader-follower) (e.g., Engle and Lord, 1997) and intra-personal (implicit-explicit) ILT congruence (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005) in the context of the same analysis (as proposed by Foti et al., 2012). We suggest that by better understanding this matching process we gain insight into the quality of the relationship between leaders and followers. Despite van Gils et al.'s (2010) conceptual paper, very little integrating research has been carried out on the way implicit and explicit leadership interact.

Second, we expand current research by using a multi-level approach to analyze the ideal-actual profiles across three subgroups (leaders, lay leaders and followers), assuming that perceptions of ideal and actual leaders' behavior vary because of the different proximity to leaders. Instead of using a single-source approach (Epitropaki and Martin, 2004, 2005), we offer a more differentiated perspective (Foti et al., 2012).

Third, because of the specific setting, we explore the prevalence of ethical values in ILTs and therefore contribute to an area previously overlooked in ILT studies. We further enrich the discussion of the generalizability and malleability of ILTs across different organizational settings as called for by Epitropaki and Martin (2004) and Liden and Antonakis (2009).

Fourth, we extend previous studies based on theory or experimental designs (Cronshaw and Lord, 1987; Lord et al., 1984) by focusing on faith-based organizations, a relatively uncharted organizational setting. By exploring the complexities of related contextual factors in a 'real-life' faith-based organization, we follow calls of researchers who recognized that the impact of contextual restraints on ILTs has received insufficient attention (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Derler and Weibler, 2014). This study, to the best of our knowledge, is the first to explore the implications of

ILTs in a religious context. According to Grandy and Sliwa (2017), church organizations provide a fruitful site because of the growing interest in leadership in churches in response to challenging social and organizational changes. Church leadership could further be seen as a "special case" (Harris, 1998a) in that participants explicitly draw on theological reference points to makes sense of leadership practices. Thus, we advance current understandings of the dynamics of leadership by exploring the relevance of theological and ethical factors as well as relevant institutional, organizational and individual concerns. By showing how structural elements of an organization lead to interpersonal and operational issues and differing views on what constitutes leadership, we provide important theoretical insights.

Fifth, the literature on faith-based organization studies so far provides only marginal evidence of interest in empirical studies of leadership tending instead to focus on theoretical constructs (e.g., Tidball, 2008). Our contribution is to draw out the contrast between the ideal and actual notions of leadership operating in local parishes in the Church of England, rather than at a more 'senior level'.

Finally, following the calls of Junker and van Dick (2014) and Uhl-Bien et al. (2014), we adopt a qualitative methodology to gain in-depth insight into the level of ILT congruence between sub-groups studied.

The paper is structured as follows: first, we review existing literature on implicit leadership theories and leadership in faith-based organizations. We then introduce the research methods applied before proceeding to the presentation and discussion of our findings. Finally, the analysis is followed by concluding remarks on the significance of this research.

Literature Review

Our model of perceived leadership is based on a relational scheme between leaders and followers rooted in social and contextual factors which influence the implicit theories of both leaders and followers (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005). People in organizations are sense-makers who arguably aim to construct a simplified understanding of complex human behavior and systems (Meindl, 1995). In particular, leaders and followers' attempt to make sense of leadership by filtering their unique experience through an in-built model of leadership (Junker and van Dick, 2014). The early work of Lord et al. (1984) applied social cognitive theory to study these underlying implicit knowledge structures, which subsequently have been coined implicit leadership theories (ILTs) (Lord et al., 2001; Ritter and Lord, 2007). Lord et al. (1984) developed leadership categorization theory arguing that followers have a mental representation of an ideal leader, or an ideal leader prototype and describe how these categorizations influence perception, memory and interactions with a potential leader. If leadership is inferred from outcomes of salient events, it is based on an inference-based perceptual process (Lord and Maher, 1991) in contrast to recognition-based perceptual theories which focus on the degree of fit between observed leader-behavior and an individual's implicit leadership model. Individual ILTs can differ for a number of reasons, for example, personality factors (Keller, 1999) or demographic dissimilarity (Mehra et al., 1998).

Early research on ILTs focused on single specific attributes such as attractiveness (Dipboye et al., 1975) and masculinity (e.g., Schein, 1975). Barsalou (1985) argued that norms (typical or ideal) offer a useful structure to categorize attributes. Junker and van Dick (2014) added a second dimension, valence, to the categories, distinguishing attributes between positive, neutral and negative prototypes.

Over time, whole sets of relevant attributes were identified. Lord et al. (1984) were the first to generate a pool of 59 leader attributes, (e.g., intelligent, honest, educated, and dedicated), based on a free-form narrative exercise of undergraduate students writing down as many attributes as they thought applied to a leader. Offermann et al. (1994), also using a free-form approach, reduced these to eight distinctive attributes.

More recently, Epitropaki et al. (2013) have argued that the characteristics found in ILT studies all appear remarkably similar, with most of them referring to attributes such as dynamism, motivation, honesty and intelligence (e.g., Gerstner and Day, 1994; Offermann et al., 1994). Epitropaki and Martin (2004) revisited the original eight attributes posited by Offermann et al. (1994) and reduced them further to six key attributes: sensitivity, intelligence, dedication, dynamism, tyranny, and masculinity.

The level of congruence between these perceived ideal or typical attributes has been shown to influence the relationship between leaders and followers (Coyle and Foti, 2015). Research confirmed that better matches between the ideal and the actual produced more favorable perceptions towards the leader, which in turn resulted in better job attitudes, task performance, the well-being of all actors and higher effectiveness (Shondrick and Lord, 2010; van Quaquebeke et al., 2014, Verlage et al., 2012).

Following Lord and Maher (1991), we argue that leaders also develop ILTs to evaluate and generate own behavior. Thus, in this research, we also explore this dimension and hence the level of congruence in ILTs held by both leaders and followers.

Implicit Leadership Theories and Context

While Lord et al. (2001) still argue that broadly similar contexts activate comparable prototypes, more recent research has shown that the particular socialization experiences of individuals, together with situational cues and the misalignment of objectives can cause leaders' and followers' ILTs to vary (van Gils et al., 2010). Contextual factors (e.g., organizational culture and leader qualities, but also job demand and self-identity) significantly shape impressions of leadership (Shondrick and Lord, 2010). As a result, Lord and Maher (1991) argue that perfect congruence is unlikely to occur in leader-follower relationships.

In one of the first studies investigating the ILTs of employees in different work positions, Epitropaki and Martin (2004) found that employee groups of different age, organizational position and tenure hold similar perceptions of ideal leadership, thus suggesting that ILTs are largely context-free and generalizable. However, there have been several calls for further research to substantiate this claim (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Junker and van Dick, 2014).

Given the importance of context (e.g., Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014), and acknowledging the wider role faith-based organizations play in society, we consider leadership in these organizations to be embedded within a societal, organizational and theological framework, something which is particularly salient in relation to the Church of England as an established Church (Demerath III and Schmitt, 1998).

Church and Society

Locating the Church of England as an institution in society requires careful sociological analysis (Demerath III and Schmitt, 1998). Brown and Woodhead (2016) have drawn attention to a number of factors which subtly but fundamentally shape the social context within which the Church of

England operates, including patterns of family life, increased mobility, cultural shifts such as the growing emphasis on individualism and (alleged) individual autonomy as well as the pressures of late capitalism in terms of employment, population growth and migration. Further, the increasing anonymity of urban life pushes more and more people into niche groups with different aspirations and values, alongside political pressures such as the withdrawal of the welfare state and the 'privatization of religion'. All of this, Brown and Woodhead (2016) suggest, contributes to a loss of shared social meaning and pushes the Church increasingly to the margins as one of many choices for individual consumers.

Davie (2015) points out that the belief in God or 'a greater power' has morphed away from institutional to more individualized belief structures and summarizes these changing perceptions as 'believing without belonging'. Shifting social norms such as the emphasis on (perceived) freedom of choice and suspicion of authority mean that churches are increasingly disregarded by most people until they are needed for some particular service, for example, life transition points or pastoral support (Styhre, 2014). The effect of all this on numbers is clear: fewer and fewer people are active members in the Church of England (Humanist, 2019).

For Brown and Woodhead (2016), the response of the Church of England to these significant social changes has been "managerial". As a result, the language of 'line management' and accountability appears in Church of England discourse with increasing frequency.

Another change in the culture and ethos has been the impact of an evangelical revival, which has effectively become the norm in the contemporary Church of England (Alexander and Higton, 2016). In addition, it remains true that the Church of England is overwhelmingly middle class in terms of active membership (Church Times, 2019), which almost certainly has an impact on leadership expectations.

Structural organization of the Church of England at parish level

Hovorun (2017) points out that faith-based organizations have always lived in a symbiotic relationship with the wider social environment. The Church of England, in particular, is a product of complex social, political and theological dynamics. It inherited many of the organizational structures of the medieval Catholic Church, particularly the network of dioceses (led by bishops) and local parishes (led by priests). The theological and political controversies of the Reformation also had a major impact in that they resulted in a network of dispersed authority which significantly limits the power of bishops to act unilaterally (The Archbishops' Council 2015). Drawing on the concept of the Church as the egalitarian 'body of Christ', the Church of England operates in a broadly flat organizational structure, consisting, as Harris' (1998b) shows, of at least two different strands of authority: clerical religious authority and lay administrative power. This means that at local level, elected lay leaders such as churchwardens and Parochial Church Council members (PCC) have considerable influence over day-to-day activities and holding clergy to account as well as the appointment of new clergy (Davie, 2008). Moreover, in recent decades, there has been a growing emphasis on 'collaborative ministry' and the development of 'Ministry Teams' of lay and ordained people sharing the management and delivery of church-based activities. This has increasingly empowered many more members of the congregation to participate and share decision-making within the synodical system of government (O'Keeffe, 2000; The Archbishops' Council, 2015).

Leadership talk within the structures of the Church of England

The language of leadership was largely absent in Church of England discourse until it starts to appear in the literature produced by the Church in the 1960s and 1980s when the ordained minister

was explicitly asked to "lead his people in prayer and worship" (*Alternative Services Book).* This theme is further developed in the most recent Ordinal found in *Common Worship* (Church of England, 2007). According to this, priests are called and authorized by the Church to share an episcopal oversight of the local church and set a pattern of Christian living as they build up, support and maintain the congregation through a ministry of preaching and worship.

However, in times when resources such as declining numbers of clergy, diminishing income and reduced social capital have started to undermine the influence of the Church of England, parish clergy in practice have a far broader agenda than only pastoral care, spiritual growth and liturgical leadership (The Archbishops' Council, 2015). They now need skills to act, to some extent, as social workers, plan and implement budgets, work with internal and external stakeholders, manage paid and/or volunteer staff members, and cope with internal political conflict just like other managers (Simpson, 2012; Styhre, 2014). As a result of this growing range of tasks, researchers found that a number of church leaders feel under-prepared (Hodges and Howieson, 2017; Simpson, 2012). While leadership programs have been developed for senior clergy, as set out in the Report of the Lord Green Steering Group (2014), limited training has been provided for clergy at parish level.

Theological background to leadership attributes

In contrast to this managerial shift in Church of England discourse, leadership language is surprisingly rare in much of the biblical material which the Church regards as foundational. The authors of the New Testament, in particular, provide a fluid picture of leadership and seem to have consciously avoided the most obvious words for "leader". The terms used for *de facto* church leadership place an emphasis on *function* rather than position (The Archbishops' Council, 2015).

According to Percy (1998), ecclesial power should be modeled on the way God exercises power, reflecting not only God's way of working in relation to humanity but also the power equality amongst those involved (Alexander and Higton, 2016). Torry (2014) argues that the authority behind the work of all ministers, lay and ordained, is always God, though in practice it is experienced as a mediated authority through the hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons. The underlying theological values behind all of these claims are contested, but broadly, Peel (1991, p. 28) suggests

> *Christian leadership is the believer's initiative humbly and responsibly to exercise his or her skills, authority and power, both intrinsic and extrinsic, in order to encourage, inspire, and enable others to work together for the accomplishment of agreed goals which are acceptable to God.*

Looking at distinctive attributes and values of biblical leaders, Paul lists a number of personal attributes required for leadership in the ministry of the word: wisdom and knowledge, teaching and instruction, encouragement and exhortation, prophecy and revelation, the gift of tongues and their interpretation. Hansson (2012) adds that Ministers need to be professional in approach to confidential matters around pastoral care, in the preparation of liturgy and in standards of personal ethical behavior.

Through all this, Christian ethics play a vital role as day-to-day decisions are relocated in a framework of values framed by scripture, tradition and reason. For many Christians, the heart of the matter is the centrality of love which reflects the idea of serving others and forms the root of servant leadership (John 13.12-13) (Melé and Fontodrona, 2017).

Research on ethical-related leadership styles

Many of these attributes, such as a leader's honesty, dignity and servanthood can be related to ethical-related leadership styles. Ethical values reappear in many contemporary leadership theories, such as transformational leadership (Burns 1978), servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977; van Dierendonck et al., 2014), spiritual leadership (Fry et al., 2011) and authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Although these theories are based on different concepts, they share a focus on the implied moral values through which leaders seek to inspire followers (Ko et al., 2008). Treviño et al. (2003) found that ethical leadership is associated with a leader's traits (e.g., honesty, integrity and trustworthiness) and behaviors (e.g., openness, concern, fairness, trust and ethical decision making). Attributes such as motivation, integrity, empowerment, role modeling and ethical decision-making have been found to be essential components of ethical and transformational leadership (Bedi et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2005). Attributes such as responsible morality, empowering others and helping others grow have been particularly associated with servant leadership (Lemoine et al., 2019), whereas authentic leaders are said to be concerned with altruism, ethical decision-making and the effect of role modelling on followers (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011). Spiritual leadership seems to relate more to aspects such as religious and spiritual values (Fry et al., 2011).

Existing research into church leadership has tended to focus on particular styles (charismatic, servant, ethical and transformational) and behaviors (competencies, skills and personality factors) (see e.g., Boyatzis et al., 2011; Grandy, 2013). Surprisingly, researchers found that studies on spiritual leadership are to be found mostly in the corporate literature (e.g., Day et al., 2014).

Our literature review underlines the tendency of researchers to focus on explicit leadership behavior, and one obvious area of weakness is the lack of engagement with underlying ethical

values in the discussion of implicit leadership theories. In one of the very few studies on ethical perceptions, Keck et al. (2018) found that the level of congruence between a follower's current and ideal ILTs influences how that follower evaluates a leader's ethical standing. This supports the argument that ethical leadership is not a behavioral prescription, but a perception. Thus, the prevalence of ethical attributes might be perceived differently by leaders and followers.

A detailed analysis of Lord et al.'s (1984) and Kenney's (1996) research findings suggests that ethical-related attributes such as honesty, fairness and trustworthiness, respect and openness are woven into ILTs. Yet, little work appears to have been done on developing this area of research. Offermann et al.'s (1994) and Epitropaki and Martin's (2004), for example, do not appear to consider ethical perceptions in their lists of key leadership attributes.

This study therefore sets out to identify which leadership attributes are relevant in a faith-based organization. We analyze how the implicit theories of ideal leaders vary at the level of clergy, lay leaders and followers and draw conclusions on the level of congruence with actual behaviors in the Church of England focusing on various contextual factors. We further aim to explore the malleability of leadership attributes. The application of ILTs to faith-based organizations and the comparison with actual leadership behavior seems relatively uncharted territory, particularly in the United Kingdom as much of the work on leadership in religious settings has investigated churches in the North American context (e.g., Boyatzis et al., 2011; Grandy and Sliwa, 2017).

Methodology

Following the call by Junker and van Dick (2014) and Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) for qualitative research on ILTs, we used a qualitative, comparative approach to draw out the contours of the specific context we were investigating. Such design was adopted to allow for an in-depth

exploration of leadership and followership phenomena within the lived experiences of participants in this particular organizational context (Miles et al., 2014).

Two members of the research team are actively involved in faith-based organizations, so are in a position to contribute an 'insider perspective' in dialogue with the more theoretical models on offer (Iszatt-White et al., 2006). We used six Church of England parishes as our unit of analysis following Stinchcombe's (1990) advice on conducting organizational research in sub-parts of one organization as these all are situated in different organizational environments and face different challenges which would allow gaining rich insights.

We set out to interview the clergy in these parishes, together with two lay leaders and two members of congregation. Purposive and snowball sampling was adopted, drawing on the existing networks known to the researchers and the participants (Silverman, 2004). We conducted 32 in-depth, semi-structured interviews at three hierarchical levels, with clergy in recognized roles (n=7), lay leaders who are both followers and leaders in subsidiary roles (n=15) and regular members of congregation as 'ordinary' followers (n=10). After a pilot study, interviews were conducted between April 2017 and July 2018 and built around a framework of questions adjusted for the three different hierarchical levels. The interview questions were designed to explore, for example, the background, motivation, and support of the participants, their perception of leadership and followership, context-specific issues such as volunteering, and the importance of faith-related themes. The interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription and lasted around 80 minutes each.

Although the data used in this paper draws primarily on these interviews, additional information was gathered from existing parochial documents such as Parish Profiles, which set out the proposed job description for the in-coming incumbent and thus provide a useful benchmark for

comparison with the interview data. Some observations were also conducted as appropriate to triangulate overall conclusions.

Data analysis followed the six phases recommended by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach. We also used the techniques suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to compare intra- and inter-case differences and similarities. We carefully read the data to identify meaningful units of discourse relevant to our topic before grouping together units of text dealing with the same aspect. Alongside, provisional definitions were developed. The same unit of text could be included in more than one category. We reviewed the data to ensure that a name, definition, and exhaustive data set supported each category identified. We then discussed, negotiated and agreed on the definitions of our coding and themes; a step which was revisited on several occasions as the analysis progressed. We used the process of axial coding to go beyond descriptive statements about our data. Finally, we refined the coding and themes before using the matrix query tool in NVivo to report on the similarities and differences between three hierarchical levels. During this process, and guided by the literature, 44 leadership attributes started to emerge from the data, and these were systematically regrouped and recoded to refine the developing categories. The epistemologically flexible version of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to identify and report meanings and patterns as well as deduct themes. As a result, the 44 attributes initially identified were merged into fifteen higher order attributes. We agreed on definitions for these terms based on our findings and the relevant literature.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of the 32 interviews, augmented where possible with information from relevant Parish Profiles, showed that the importance attached to the leadership attributes varied between participants. The attributes identified in this research are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Definition of identified leadership attributes and related examples from the literature

Attribute	Definition of Attribute	Examples of related attributes identified in the literature
Authenticity	This is characterised by personal integrity (who you are as a person), consistency between who you are and what you do, lack of pretence - and for some, humour (based on Kernis & Goldman, 2006)	Kenney et al. (1996): being funny Verlage et al. (2012): humour
Busyness	This is characterised by 'workaholic symptoms' – always out and about at meetings, organising events, one-to-one visits (over) working long hours, missing days off and holidays, parishioners finding it difficult to make appointments to see the vicar	Offermann (1994): dedication Epitropaki and Martin (2004): dedication Lord et al. (1984): industrious Kenney et al. (1996): being active
Charisma	This is characterised by qualities such as: devotion, dynamic, enthusiasm, being inspiring, involved, energetic, committed, passionate, direct	Offermann (1994): charisma Epitropaki and Martin (2004): dynamism Lord et al. (1984): charismatic
Help others to flourish	This is characterised by an ability to draw the best out of others; empowering, facilitating, involving others, encouraging, thriving, affirming, appreciating and strengthen others. Note: we understand flourishing to be broader than thriving. Definition based on Keyes and Haidt (2002)	
Intelligence	This is characterised by an ability to deal with complexity and manipulate higher level information effectively (intelligently); being knowledgeable, wise and reflective	Offermann (1994), Epitropaki and Martin (2004), Lord et al. (1984): Intelligence Kenney et al. (1996): being knowledgeable Verlage et al. (2012): specialised knowledge
Managerial skills	This is characterised by effective time management, organisational and planning skills, ability to organise events, set priorities, build up teams and manage staff, gain access to human and material resources	Lord et al. (1984): organized, good administrator Verlage et al. (2012): administrative activity
Open mindedness	This is characterised by an ability to listen sensitively, and being ready to compromise, open to change, flexible, approachable, open to ideas, not being dictatorial or controlling	Kenney et al. (1996): open to other ideas, interested Lord et al. (1984): open-minded, informed, interested

Introvert-extrovert Personality	Introvert is characterised as being shy, deeply thoughtful, good on one-to-one, anti-social whereas extrovert refers to the opposite (definition based on Jung, 1921)	Lord et al. (1984): outgoing
Relational Skills	This is characterised by being welcoming, people focused, available, an ability to connect with others; caring, inclusive, respectful, visible, being friendly, guiding	Lord et al. (1984): caring, kind, concerned Kenney et al. (1996): kind, caring
Sensitivity	This is characterised by a sensitive approach, being sympathetic and compassionate towards others, understanding and able to remain calm	Offermann (1994), Epitropaki and Martin (2004): Sensitivity Lord et al. (1984): understanding
Serving/ Servant	This is characterised by a leader who puts service to others first – individuals, followers, institutional needs come first and the leader's own status and/or reputation is secondary. It is ethical leadership based on persuasion and humility rather than coercion, working for healing and the building up of community (Definition based on Greenleaf, 1977)	Lord et al. (1984): Unselfish
Spiritual mindedness	This is characterised by a prayerful approach to life, being called to vocation, informed by scripture, tradition and reason, directed towards facilitating the kingdom of God, developing an environment in which spiritual growth of self and others is promoted, rooted in a vision of Christ-like example (role model, leading by example), offering spiritual leadership to guide and support others, accepting God as leader, partly based on biblical leadership (definition based on Owen, 1834)	
Strength	This is characterised by personal resilience (referring to being strong, forceful and firm), a bold and visionary approach which speaks of authority; an ability to handle conflict appropriately and maintain self-confidence and personal well-being under pressure	Offermann (1994): strength Kenney et al. (1996): being authoritative, being in command, being determined Epitropaki and Martin (2004): Dynamism Lord et al. (1984): strict, determined, authoritarian, forceful, strong Verlage et al. (2012): Stress resistance, conflict management, assertiveness
Team-Mindedness	This is characterised by an ability to create a framework of autonomy within an agreed framework of shared values, goals and methods with a clear expectation of mutual accountability	Lord et al. (1984): cooperative Verlage et al. (2012): delegating trustfully, team-mindedness, ability to collaborate
Trustworthiness	This is characterised by the ability to evoke in others a sense of confidence, honesty, reliability and truth	Lord et al. (1984): trustworthy Kenney et al. (1996): being truthful, honest

All of these attributes were mentioned when ideal leadership behaviors were discussed. In addition, one other attribute, busyness, was associated with actual behavior. A comparison with the leadership literature on ILTs highlights the significance of two qualities in perceptions around church leadership: the ability to help others to flourish and spiritual mindedness.

Our analysis of the underlying contextual factors (such as the personality and the objectives of clergy, the structure of the job, and the characteristics of the congregation) enabled us to identify the prevalence of certain attributes as well as the degree of congruence between clerical and congregational expectations and actual behavior. As a result, we found that in five out of the six parishes, a mismatch existed between leaders' and followers' perceptions. Analysis of each specific context enabled us further to provide evidence of the malleability of some ILTs. Guided by the literature and the responses of participants, we identified the following key themes: the expectations and perceptions of all three groups around ideal leaders and their perceptions of actual leadership behavior.

Theme 1: Expectations around ideal leaders

Our findings show that the nature of the congregation strongly influenced expectations, which are far from homogenous (Demerath III et al., 1998). When asked about congregational characteristics, all respondents reported that the majority were elderly, tended to be somewhat passive and had high expectations around stability and continuity. Five of the six parishes had experienced regular changes in clergy staffing. In the one parish where the vicar had been in post for some time the congregation felt the priest had adjusted his style to meet the expectations of the congregation: "*I think he is doing what the older congregation want him to do*." (LL A, Parish J)

The smaller constituency of middle-aged members were felt to contribute most to church life. Although social developments such as the increasing busyness of family life had reduced their availability, this group was seen to be contributing significantly to the church.

All respondents perceived spiritual mindedness as crucial for leadership, particularly, the need to lead by example and provide a role model in terms of godly living. This aspect of ILT clearly coheres well with the moral dimension of leadership associated with both ethical and transformational leadership theory (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Brown et al., 2005). This finding also confirms previous research pointing to the relevance of spiritual leadership in a Church setting (Boyatzis et al., 2011): a key role for any religious leader is the promotion of spiritual growth and the well-being of others. It seemed that older people had lower expectations in terms of spirituality, however, and looked to the vicar more for love, encouragement and acknowledgement, in contrast to the mid-age members who had clearer expectations around growth in faith and spirituality. Our analysis further shows that lay leaders tend to rate spiritual development more highly than 'ordinary' followers.

Surprisingly, the data shows an emphasis on teaching and spiritual development rather than on the leader's intellectual capacity (attribute intelligence), as understood by both leaders and followers. Indeed, lay leaders in two parishes reported what they felt was a mismatch between the incumbent and a congregation unable to keep up intellectually: "*Sometimes I think that maybe she [the vicar] finds it a little bit frustrating that people are not of her intellect*." (LL A, Parish H) This suggests, perhaps, a clear (though usually unarticulated) distinction in these groups between academic learning and practical knowledge of the Christian tradition.

All participants saw strong relational skills expressed through a deep interest and care of people, particularly in terms of clergy approachability. These concerns surfaced, perhaps, because of the

increasing tendency for clergy to be involved in activities outside the parish which the congregation felt limited their availability.

Interestingly, open-mindedness (an attribute related to ethical behavior) and sensitivity on the part of clergy seemed more important to lay leaders than to the clergy themselves – only two clerics mentioned these qualities. It seemed also less relevant to 'ordinary' members of congregation, who generally tend to have less contact with clergy outside regular Sunday worship.

Another ethical attribute related to trustworthiness, which seemed to matter more to 'ordinary' followers than to lay leaders and clergy. One member of the congregation explained: "*people need to have a strong leader, they need to be able to have somebody that they can look to, that they trust, they feel secure with*." (MoC A, Parish M)

The attributes of team-building and shared leadership did not figure prominently in the qualities associated with ideal leadership by the clergy. This can perhaps be explained by lingering 'traditional' perceptions of the vicar as the sole source of authority in the parish. By contrast, we found that in at least four parishes, lay leaders stated explicitly that the ideal leader should delegate tasks and be someone "*who definitely will accept that they can't do it on their own, who will accept the help of the team."* (LL S, Parish H) Several lay leaders described what they felt sharing of leadership should mean in practice: that the laity would deal with the organizational aspects of the church while the vicar remained responsible for spiritual development. This higher expectation amongst lay leaders can perhaps be explained by a variety of factors. One, the practical organization of parish life during a vacancy not only tends to fall on lay leaders, but also influences future expectations as the lay leaders grow in confidence during the vacancy: *"We've had a period where we haven't had a vicar and that's made us all quite independent."* (LL C, Parish AR) In line with

Lord et al.'s (2001) prediction, our data thus suggests that ILTs do evolve in response to the dynamics of task.

Another factor driving change suggested by one lay leader was the falling number of full-time stipendiary clergy: *"because of the church's declining resources, the church is more and more reliant on lay people and self-supporting ministers."* (LL K, Parish A)

Finally, the institutional context of the Church of England with the established structures in the parish also seemed to influence ILTs: the current pattern of dispersed power in the Church of England actively promotes lay involvement in decision-making.

The attribute of strength in ideal leaders was mentioned by several lay leaders in all parishes who valued the ability to deal with conflicts, resilience and a mild authoritarian approach. We also identified a significant number of managerial qualities of leaders, which were clearly valued by both clergy and congregation: organizational skills, strategic planning, the ability to develop goals and deliver on them and the ability to manage staff. The importance of these skills was particularly prevalent in parishes where arrangements for clerical provision were more complex, such as part-time appointments or clergy shared between different churches. Overall, this attribute seemed to be more important to lay leaders than to clergy, suggesting a low level of congruence. We assume that closer proximity to the leader, and the often-established professional background of lay leaders, produced stronger management expectations than in 'ordinary' members or clergy. Societal developments around flattening hierarchical structures might have also shaped expectations (Brown and Woodhead, 2016).

As Roberts (2002) points out, however, the tendency to import managerialism into the Church of England means that assumptions about efficiency, effectiveness and economy have also been drawn into ministerial practice without a sufficiently robust theological critique. In fact, we found

that clergy often seemed to find it difficult to combine faith values and management practice, agreeing with Styhre (2014) who found potential explanations to this finding in the age of clergy and their training.

Authenticity was mentioned by three clergy and was broadly defined by some as '*being human, ordinary, but also humorous*', although this attribute was less important for followers. In line with research on authentic leadership, we found ILTs on authenticity to be related to ethical decision-making and integrity (Gardner et al., 2011).

Given the church context, we expected followers to have much stronger expectations around the notion of 'servant leadership', drawing, not least on such biblical texts as John 13.12-16. It was surprising therefore that this perception did not figure prominently. When investigating servant-related attributes, we found that 'helping others to flourish' did not feature highly in the attributes associated with ideal leaders. This stands in contrast to lay leaders 'expectation that clergy should help them grow and flourish: "*I think a good leader allows those people to make mistakes and just helps them on that journey of growing to a good leader that God's calling them to be."* (LL J, Parish F)

This attribute also seemed of importance to 'ordinary' followers, again suggesting limited congruence between leaders and followers around this attribute.

Three clergy highlighted attributes relating to 'charisma' such as being energetic, committed, passionate and inspiring. Interestingly, this quality was highlighted in two parishes where the lay leaders felt that their clergy seemed exhausted, maybe because they had been in post for a number of years or worked part-time. Peyton and Gattrell (2013) found that clergy would often sacrifice their own needs in order to be obedient to what they saw as their calling.

Theme 2: Actual leadership attributes and resulting levels of congruence between leaders and followers in comparison with ideal attributes

Analysis of perceptions by congregation members of actual leadership behavior invites some interesting reflection. About half of the participants suggested that their clergy adopted a democratic style; whilst two clergy were perceived as leaning towards the autocratic. Most followers described their leaders as driven, passionate and proactive in taking the initiative across the parish. In terms of specific qualities, the interview data suggests that both clergy and laity identified many of the 'ideal attributes' in the actual leadership behavior described.

The personality of clergy is clearly a major factor influencing the level of congruence. In fact, three of the seven incumbents seemed uncomfortable with the overall expectations of the congregation. Two of these clergy suggested themselves they were not a 'good fit'. For example, one said:

"*People like a story and a firm verse by verse application, I mean they don't get that from me most of the time, you know, this emotional connection. I am a sort of odd fit, because I am so very conceptual and cognitive*." (Vicar, Parish H)

Two priests described themselves as shy and said they did not feel secure acting as authority figures. One of them stated: "*I am certainly, like lots of priests, an introvert who struggles to be social as much as possible*." (Vicar, Parish J)

The energetic personality of another cleric, however, combined with his desperate attempt to achieve specific objectives, led to endless new projects and occasionally generated serious tension within the congregation: "*perhaps sometimes it is because of his personality, that he has alienated people…I think there's a degree of lethargy in the congregation. I think possibly he's annoyed a lot of people over the years…and they've become disengaged*." (MoC A, Parish M)

As a result, that particular priest was perceived as running out of energy. This led him to feel that he was failing as an ideal leader, someone called to serve.

We further found that the personality of clergy heavily influenced perceptions of actual behavior. For example, the cleric who saw himself as shy described his leadership style as: "*participative with elements of laissez-faire but in this role, I sometimes need to be a bit more authoritarian. But that is not my natural role*." (Vicar, Parish J) Interestingly, however, several lay members of this congregation saw this person as quite directive. As Epitropaki et al. (2017) predicted, personality characteristics such as introversion/extraversion play a significant role in leadership relationships. Our findings show that the introverted nature of some clergy sits uncomfortably sometimes with congregations who tended to expect a more directive style.

When asked about the personal characteristics members of congregation valued in the clergy, attributes such as being sensitive, trustworthy and humorous were highlighted by both sets of followers. The attribute of charisma was not much evident in the actual behavior of clergy and thus they did not meet the expectations of some followers.

Next to personality, we found that clergy objectives and expectations significantly influenced outcomes. For example, one priest seemed particularly concerned about his career development, whereas clergy in two other parishes were focused on building an open and welcoming church community. One other cleric prioritized 'making disciples' (= evangelism). The current sociological context of the Church of England perhaps provides a contextual explanation for some of these objectives, given the increasing marginalization of the church and the growth of a consumer culture noted by Davie (2015), as these pressures combine and are expressed in the 'Church Growth Movement'. At least four incumbents felt under pressure from the diocese to be 'successful' in terms of growing church membership, as one said:

"*Because church, over the years, has been declining, there is quite a pressure to grow churches again. We've been given like twelve mission goals of growth. There can be pressure to feel I'm not reaching my targets*." (Vicar F, Parish F)

All clergy placed an emphasis on being available and approachable to all members of congregation. In three parishes, however, we detected a distance between the priest and congregation, and this was perceived negatively by lay leaders in particular. This could be linked, perhaps, to a perceived deficit in people-skills, compounded by individual personality factors, specific structural settings and multi-parish or part-time appointments.

All clergy saw themselves – rightly or wrongly! - as collaborative. They confirmed that they had built leadership teams and tried to work with people in a collaborative manner, mainly in order to cope with the great variety of tasks and expectations, but also to encourage others to contribute their skills and ability. Two priests, however, seemed to struggle with this more collaborative style for a variety of reasons: partly because of personality factors and the fact that they did not want to 'give away' their priestly authority, partly because they felt they had failed to find the skills needed amongst the laity, partly because they accepted that church members were simply not used to being involved in decision-making and because clergy themselves were inexperienced in building and leading teams. One incumbent suggested:

> "*It's gonna take a while before people are confident to contribute ideas and be upfront and then do it really well. People find it really difficult to take initiative and I don't think this is just because I am the boss.*" (Vicar, Parish H)

Nevertheless, all the clergy are required formally to share power with at least the PCC and had also established additional leadership structures around Ministry Teams made up of clergy and laity. Even so, several clergy suggested that many in the congregation continued to operate with a "Father

knows best" model, with an implied hierarchy in which the priest is seen as the final source of authority. Given that, as Hovorun (2017) argues, the church is called to be an egalitarian community where all are equally accountable to God, this raises some interesting theological questions. The note of shared ministerial leadership set out in the *Common Worship* Ordinal is less evident in practice than might be expected. There remains a clear hierarchical understanding shared by leaders and followers alike as one lay leader described: "*he delegates the tasks, but not the authority*." (LL S, Parish F)

A misfit was identified in those three parishes where both groups of followers had clear expectations about team-leadership but also expected the leader to know everything and to be the source of authority. Thus, ambiguity around collaborative ministry remained. These findings point to an interesting insight into how structural elements of an organization lead to interpersonal and operational incongruence between the parties involved.

Collaboration in teams is linked directly to the key attribute of strength**.** Many of the clergy recognized that conflict seems to be part of the territory, but at least five priests felt uncomfortable with this. Again, personality factors and the priests' understanding of leadership seemed to play a part in this, but theological outlook was also a factor – a concern not to 'lord it over' the congregation.

All our findings need to be placed within an over-arching framework which sees God as the primary leader and thus effectively relativizes the leadership of local priests as one lay leader described:

> *"People wouldn't want to think that they're following a man, because we've all seen where that's gone wrong in the church. We follow a man and you take our eyes off what is the important thing.*" (LL P, Parish M)

In the same context, one lay leader pointed out that the elderly, in particular, place a higher priority on the Church generally than on an individual Minister, specifically on the grounds that incumbents come and go. Many clergy shared a similar view, and in these cases, all three groups recognized and set leadership benchmarks beyond the immediate local leader. We found that this common understanding about higher-order relationships positively influenced the interaction between leaders and followers even in cases of incongruence. This challenges the general assumption that a limited congruence in expectations between the ideal and the actual leader reduces the engagement and commitment of followers and the quality of the relationship (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; van Gils et al., 2010).

As already noted, the attribute of servanthood did not feature as highly as we expected, although the actual behavior of the clergy reported was congruent with the expectations of followers in the few cases this was mentioned. Only in one parish was the cleric seen as 'serving' the congregation.

Elements of the attribute of servanthood, such as empowerment, encouragement, empathy, caring and considerate behaviors, however, seemed highly relevant to followers. Thus, implicitly, respondents expected leaders to demonstrate servant-like behavior. All the clergy discussed their responsibility to empower and encourage church members to grow in faith. This emphasis on helping others to flourish also appears prominently – explicitly or implicitly - in the data from the two groups of followers, suggesting congruence between followers' expectations and actual leadership behavior. It is less prominent in the data relating to ideal behavior perceived by clergy.

The relevance of this attribute needs to be seen within the voluntary context in which this research took place: the fact that church members contribute resources such as time and skills without payment (van Brackle, 2011) might suggest that intangible benefits such as appreciation, encouragement and personal growth take on greater psychological and motivational significance

(Harris, 1998b). Thus, more than altruism seems to be involved in that followers had clear views about the support and development they expected from leaders. In recognition of this, we did not merge this attribute with, for example, servant leadership (see Table 1).

The attribute 'busyness' was found only in descriptions of actual behavior. In at least four parishes, followers perceived the clergy as busy either working for the bishop, or through an extended role in the local cluster of parishes or in setting up outreach initiatives. Yet, our findings revealed a level of ambiguity around this attribute in that it had the positive connotation of projecting the leader as active, engaged and driven but the negative association of leaving followers feeling that clergy were effectively unavailable to most of the congregation most of the time. The misfit between the ideal and the actual was clearly evident as clergy thought the expectation to be present at every parish occasion was simply unrealistic, given the other demands on their time. At the same time, clergy did not see themselves as over-active; in contrast to the perception held by many lay leaders and 'ordinary' members. Further analysis of contextual factors at organizational level helped to explain this limited congruence. Declining numbers of full-time parish clergy mean that they increasingly have to combine two or more posts, work in clusters and look after more than one church building - factors which clearly have an impact on the time available for individual parishioners. This links to the growing sense of a need for clergy to develop better managerial skills in four parishes. In line with Chaves (1998) we found that clergy and followers had different goal orientations (with clergy focusing on faith commitment, pastoral care and outreach to the community), which led to incongruence in the expectations of leaders' availability.

Several respondents explained how expectations could change over time. One incumbent, for example, argued:

"*I often think to myself that presumably it was good for [the parish], that [the parish] and I were a good fit for this point in its history but now they need somebody different. There may be other sorts of gifts that are needed to move further in the connection with the community."* (Vicar, Parish H)

Similarly, a church member from a different parish recognized that the previous vicar

"was the man for that season. I don't think he would… enthuse us now, because that is the society we are in now, we are not in an 80s society." (MoC M, Parish M)

These findings seem to contradict Epitropaki and Martin's (2004) evidence of ILTs stability over time, as we see the ILT perceptions of lay leaders changing in response to wider change. Our research revealed the fluid nature of some of the attributes which defies easy categorization and thus supports Rush and Russell's (1998) early findings on the malleability of ILTs.

Conclusions

Using implicit leadership theories, this research set out to identify the congruence at interpersonal (leader-follower) and intra-personal (implicit-explicit ILTs) levels (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005) at three hierarchical stages. We attempted to capture the fine contours between ideal and actual behavior by adopting a multidimensional approach to investigate leaders' and followers' leadership perceptions in one study. The identified differences in expectation on certain leadership attributes support our decision to separate lay leaders and 'ordinary' members into two distinct types of followers. The analysis of ILTs enabled us to identify fifteen key leadership attributes and qualities (see table 1).

Given the specific religious setting, we paid particular attention to ethical leadership and identified attributes which have been overlooked in previous ILT research: helping others to

flourish and spiritual mindedness. We found 'spiritual mindedness' to convey an important cluster of attributes not only for ideal but also actual leaders across all three groups of participants. Our findings related to the attribute of helping others to flourish are interesting for two reasons. First, in contrast to lay leaders, clergy did not emphasize this quality as a key attribute. This seems to challenge Peel's (1991) assertion that Christian leadership is about encouraging, inspiring and enabling others to achieve common goals. Second, existing literature relates these values to actual leadership styles, where they form part of ethical, transformational and servant leadership, but not of existing ILT schema. Thus, our novel approach focusing on ethical ILTs proved valuable and we encourage future research to follow this new pathway to investigate the implications of ILTs for business ethics.

We further showed that a number of qualities, as identified in previous research, are significant factors in shaping perceptions around actual ethical, transformational, authentic and servant behaviors, including relational skills, trustworthiness, open-mindedness, role modeling, being visionary and intellectually stimulating (Bedi et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2005; Treviño et al., 2003).

Our work on ILTs in a church setting also offers a timely contribution to empirical research on the generalizability and malleability of ILTs (Liden and Antonakis, 2009; Junker and van Dick, 2014). As in previous studies (see e.g., Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; Kenney et al., 1996), we found the ILT attributes of charisma, managerial skills, open-mindedness, strength/dynamism, sensitivity and trustworthiness to be also relevant in a church setting. This seems to support the argument that certain leadership attributes appear to be 'context-free'. Yet, in contrast to Epitropaki and Martin's (2004) findings on the similarity of employees' ILTs, our research demonstrates that ILTs vary even within the same parish and across the different hierarchical levels, meaning that broad generalizations must be carefully nuanced. Our findings on the changing level of fit between clergy

and congregation provide further evidence that such congruence is only temporary. Hence, we are able to support recent conceptual research on temporal ILTs (Alipour et al., 2017).

We found that because of a variety of contextual factors at societal, theological, organizational and individual levels (such as clergy turnover, institutional structures and pressures, the characteristics of congregation, and the personality of clergy), lay leaders, congregation members and clergy tended to develop distinct ILTs, as suggested by Brown and Lord (2001). Figure 1 provides an overview of the relevant factors.

Figure 1: Church of England contextual factors at parish level influencing the leadership expectations of leaders and followers and the relevance of leadership attributes

Theological Context	Social & Societal Context	Organisational Context- Institution CoE	Organisational Context- Wider Parish	Organisational Context- Parish	Personal Context
Understanding the role of the parish in the missio dei Understanding of ministry (e.g. evangelical)	Free Market Model Change in expectations of younger generation: Action-oriented Frenetic Limited time	Organizational tradition & structure Dispersed power & hierarchy Objectives: Focus on growth	Relationship to Cathedral, Diocese, Bishop Engagement with community	Intiatives such as Church Plant Cluster of parishes Merger of parishes Resource availability Fluctuation of vicars Characteristics of congregation Working with volunteers	Background/ Experience Personality Objectives and Understanding of clerical job role & congregation

However, given an underlying shared theological understanding, our findings indicate that there was a relatively high congruence across all three groups of participants between ILTs and actual leadership for attributes such as open-mindedness, spiritual mindedness and relational skills. We conclude that it is only possible to make generalizations about ILTs so long as key contextual dynamics are fully recognized but also that a common understanding and vision might support the achievement of congruence.

We contribute to the literature on faith-based organization studies by offering critical insights into recent developments of leadership practice in the Church of England with a focus on leadership

at parish level. The large number of variable contextual factors clearly demonstrate the complexity with which clergy have to deal, leading in many cases to a low level of congruence between leadership expectations but also between ideal and actual leadership behavior. Linking theological ideas to actual ethical practice has proven useful in previous organization studies (e.g., das Neves and Mele, 2013) and enabled us to discuss the relevance of ethical ILTs in the specific Church of England context. On the whole, with our study, we provide a series of interlinked contributions speaking to multiple communities of interest.

The fact that we found limited congruence in five of the six parishes has significant implications for research and practice. The effect of constantly changing relationship dynamics on the perceptions and behavior of leaders is not to be underestimated and we recommend that future research replicates our study in other faith-based organizations to test the generalizability of these findings and their malleability. We do not claim to have considered all relevant contextual factors, but we assume, that given similar theological underpinnings and ethical stances in other denominations similar dynamics would surface.

The present study has important practical implications. Given the critical situation facing the Church of England, church leaders need to have a better understanding of what makes successful and long-standing relationships with congregational members. Since many clergy appear overstretched by the breadth of potential responsibilities, we suggest that awareness is promoted of dual leadership roles, distinguishing between the religious authority of clergy and institutional structures involving lay leaders (Harris, 1998b). Thus, CPD training on delegation and shared leadership should be significantly enhanced, alongside training in basic managerial skills.

Because of the competing expectations between clergy and laity which generated significant levels of incongruence, clergy could also benefit from insights into ILT research as a way of actively forming more effective relationships (Epitropaki et al., 2013).

This study has demonstrated that investigating the level of congruence between ILTs and actual leadership practices across three hierarchical levels in faith-based organizations is essential for understanding church-based leader-follower interactions. Contextual factors clearly have significant explanatory power for understanding complex leadership dynamics (and hence the malleability of ILTs) and for identifying ethical leadership attributes that have been overlooked in previous ILT research.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Funding for this research has been received from the University of Kent and the University of Surrey. All authors declare that they are aware of no conflict of interest. All procedures were carried out in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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