



**“There is no ‘Parliament’, in a collective sense, at all.”
Navigating Decentred Leadership in Westminster**

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Public Leadership</i>
Manuscript ID	IJPL-06-2020-0058.R1
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Leadership, Legislative Leadership, Governance, elite interviews, Political leadership

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 **“There is no ‘Parliament’, in a collective sense, at all.”**
8 **Navigating Decentred Leadership in Westminster**
9

10 **International Journal of Public Leadership**
11 **Special Issue: Decentred Leadership**
12 **Manuscript: ID IJPL-06-2020-0058**
13
14
15
16
17
18

19 **Structured Abstract**
20
21

22 **Purpose**

23 The Westminster Parliament is multifaceted, lacks cohesion and collective direction,
24 appearing at times to challenge the very notion of a structured public institution
25 itself. Within an environment with little collective sense, understanding who leads in
26 the UK Parliament is challenging; there are multiple, contestable sites of leadership
27 and governance. This article explores the little understudied concept of legislative
28 leadership, to better understand what goes on inside the legislature. I present a
29 decentred and nuanced disaggregation of ‘leadership as practice’ in parliament,
30 examining 3 faces of legislative leadership..
31
32

33 **Methodology**

34 Interpretive approaches to studying legislatures have presented new impetus to
35 research in this area and I utilise such anti-foundationalism. The article draws on
36 ethnographic research into ‘everyday practices’, conducted during an academic
37 fellowship in the UK Parliament from 2016 to 2019, which involved privileged access
38 to the parliamentary estate. The data used includes observations, shadowing, and
39 elite interviews collected during the fellowship.
40
41

42 **Findings**

43 By looking at the legislature from the inside we can better understand elite
44 behaviour. This helps to explain motives, daily pressures and performative skills
45 deployed in displays of atomised and autonomous, decentred leadership. The
46 legislative leadership I observed was atomised and could be stretched to
47 accommodate the incumbent office holder. There were multiple relationships both
48 formally constituted and informally constructed, but little collaborative or consensus
49 leadership.
50
51

52 **Originality**

53 This article fulfils an identified need to study leadership in legislatures - and in
54 particular key elites - from the inside.
55
56

57 **Keywords**

58 *leadership, legislatures, parliament, decentred, interpretive, Speaker*
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

“There is no ‘voice of Parliament’ that can be collectively orchestrated. [...] those accounts which say that Parliament should do this or that to make itself more effective fail to understand that there is no ‘Parliament’, in a collective sense, at all.” (Tony Wright 2004)

1. Introduction: A relational ethnography of legislative leadership

Legislatures are not like other public organisations in terms of leadership. Legislatures are sites of contestation and places of symbolic and ritualised behaviour. They are complex and multi-faceted. They lack identity and cohesion. There are multiple leadership positions and a plethora of networks and relationships. Political and administrative-bureaucratic leadership co-exists within the executive-parliamentary nexus. In this regard, unpacking leadership within (and of) the legislature presents a particular challenge.

With leadership studies at a critical juncture (Collinson 2018; Hartley and Bennington 2011; Hartley 2018), legislative leadership has been a strangely neglected scholarly subject. Crosby and Bryson (2018: 1266) called for public management scholars to continue to develop the view of public leadership as:

a collective, multilevel, cross-sector endeavour imbued with public values that provides a compelling bulwark against the highly individualised, autocratic solutions promulgated by populists and thinly masked demagogues.

Bryson et al. (2017: 649) highlighted the role that politicians, political leadership and politics can play in ‘public value production in a democratic society and the need to explore how politicians seek and gain authorisation from citizens’. As such, leadership in (and of) public institutions matters in generating public value in democratic societies. Legislatures however present a challenge for leadership scholars (of all disciplines). The literature examining leadership in (and of) legislatures has tended to focus predominantly on party leadership (see for instance Patterson 1963; Peters and Williams 2002 on the US legislature), although there has been a welcome recent focus on legislative administration and management (Niemi 2010; Yong 2019; Meakin and Geddes 2020). However, legislative leadership in general has been a neglected area of public leadership research. It sits outside organisational or institutional analyses and also outside the political leadership discourse (Helms 2014).

1
2
3
4
5 This article takes a decentred approach to studying legislative leadership at
6 Westminster. Decentred theory emphasizes the diversity of governing practices and
7 the importance of historical explanations (Bevir 2013: 1). Here I argue that legislative
8 leadership can be understood and examined as a diverse and decentred activity,
9 contingent on actors beliefs, circumstance and traditions. In so doing I draw together
10 leadership and governance approaches in examining elite behaviour in the legislature
11 from an ethnographic perspective. Thus, we can open up new avenues to understand
12 everyday practices. I first examine the relevance and application of decentred theory
13 to legislative study. I then examine notions of legislative leadership before presenting
14 two case studies based on ethnographic work conducted in the House of Commons
15 and House of Lords, during which I observed the Speaker of the Commons and the
16 Lords at work. I conclude by integrating this examination of everyday practices into a
17 re-imaging of legislative leadership.
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

29 Observing the formal (public) and (informal) bargaining and negotiating in
30 parliament at close quarters, I concur with Rhodes (2011) that the actors I viewed
31 had 'immediate priorities and pressing problems.' Actions were not necessarily path
32 dependent, but rather based on the incumbent's perception of the roles, whether
33 Speaker in the Commons or Lords, or as elite parliamentarians. They have multiple
34 pressures and demands and carve out routes through the daily political joust, via a
35 mixture of personal skill, public performance and autonomous management. Yet, the
36 responses were contingent on the individual agent. For instance, the Commons
37 Speaker irritated the executive with his granting of Urgent Questions, extension of
38 Prime Minister's Questions and liberal interpretation of procedure relating to
39 attempts to delay Brexit. Much is driven by an ideational approach (wary of officials,
40 challenge to executive, voice for backbenchers). The Lord Speaker's preferred the less
41 confrontational tea room chat to any external activity on behalf of the Lords chamber
42 (navigating the leadership dilemma by soft relational activity).
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53

54 **2. Decentred theory and legislatures**

55 Decentred theory, with its emphasis on contingency and contestability, offers a
56 distinct perspective on the new politics of networks as alternatives to hierarchic
57 bureaucracy. Decentred theory emphasizes the diversity of governing practices and
58
59
60

1
2
3 the importance of historical explanations (Bevir 2013: I). Bevir's use of decentred
4 theory interprets how state actors respond to significant change. It gives credence to
5 agency, ideas and beliefs and emphasises the evolution and adaptation of traditions,
6 practices and behaviours. Decentring means privileging an analytical focus on 'the
7 social construction of a practice through the ability of individuals to create and act on
8 meanings' (Bevir and Rhodes 2010: 73). In relation to leadership, a decentred
9 approach 'promotes narratives of the contingent relationships in core executives' and
10 its stress on the beliefs and practices of individuals 'promotes a political
11 anthropology of the executive's court politics' (Bevir 2013: 165-166). Unpacking
12 meanings, emphasising diversity of practices, and promoting contingency can free
13 researchers up to explore new less structured approaches. Recent applied examples
14 include, for instance, Beech (2020) on Brexit and the decentred state and Geddes on
15 parliamentary performance (2019).

16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27 Legislative study in the UK is heavily rooted in the legal-formal tradition (Geddes
28 and Rhodes 2019: 90). The strength of this approach has been the emphasis on
29 reform and a normative drive to improve the effectiveness of the institution in
30 holding the executive to account (see Hindmoor et al 2009; Thompson 2016; Russell
31 and Cowley 2016). Such empirical research has revised analysis of parliamentary
32 institutional and behavioural power (see Russell and Gover 2017), highlighting the
33 impact the legislature can and does have on the executive in shaping policy and
34 decision making. Geddes and Rhodes (2019: 92) argue that legislative research
35 amounts to a 'shared interest in the efficacy of parliamentary processes.'
36
37 Furthermore, they argue that this has led to a narrow research agenda, trapped in an
38 empirical-descriptive model, honing in on rules, procedures, and formal
39 organisations of government and state.

40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49 This article agrees that we should seek to move beyond such a narrow research focus,
50 to one that decentres the new politics, recognising diversity and contingency in
51 legislatures. According to Bevir (2013: 6), this involves moving from formal
52 explanations towards narratives and genealogies (Bevir 2013: 6; Bevir 2008). This is
53 a post foundationalist approach – with emphasis on the contingency of social life and
54 historical narrative, whereby a genealogy is 'a historical narrative that explains an
55 aspect of human life by showing how it came into being' (Bevir 2008: 263). People in
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 any given situation can interpret that situation in all sorts of ways, and no institution
4 can necessarily fix the way its participants will act. The decentred state approach to
5 governance may stress networks and non-hierarchical approaches, but it ignores
6 legislatures. Here, we see the historical narrative approach applied to leadership as
7 the aspect of human life.
8
9
10
11
12

13 Such questioning of the positivist approach prevalent in legislative study, draws
14 together not only political scientists, but social anthropologists and sociologists
15 (Crewe and Sarra 2019). In exploring relational and ideational impact within spaces
16 that may be structured, not by organisational hierarchies and arrangements, but by
17 norms, rituals and beliefs, new avenues of inquiry can be opened up.¹ As Crewe and
18 Sarra (2019: 2) explain: 'We share in common, certain epistemological positions: a
19 view of objectivity as a process of inquiry rather than a position; an interest in both
20 people's social and individual experiences; and agreement that the trickiest
21 intellectual task is to explain how and why individuals depart from norms or beliefs.'
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29

30 Interpretive approaches, open up new possibilities in the understanding and study of
31 leadership in a parliamentary setting. Such approaches appreciate the 'significance of
32 individuals' interpretations to make sense of their everyday lives' (Geddes and
33 Rhodes 2019: 94; Meakin and Geddes 2020). Similar to Rhodes (2011) in peering
34 'behind the veneer', I seek to understand what some of the key leadership elites in
35 parliament think they do (Bolden et al 2016; Cronin and Genovese 2012; Laing and
36 Walter 2016). Additionally, performative analysis, brings the 'self' into the frame:
37 'Performers need to interpret the social norms, values, etiquette, expectations and
38 accepted modes of behaviour associated with that situation, which consequently
39 requires practical judgements as well as taken-for-granted or tacit knowledge'
40 (Geddes 2019b: 30). Rhodes (2011: 287) observed that Ministers wear multiple
41 'masks' relating to the multiple roles they perform and Lees-Marshment et al (2018)
42 argued that ministers have to do more with less, adopting flexible identities in
43 relation to the 'self' in leadership. This channels Goffman's classic text (1990: 9) in
44 which masks are 'arrested expressions and admirable echoes of feelings at once,
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57

58 ¹ See in particular Crewe (2005, 2015) and Geddes (2019b) who have demonstrated that the political
59 anthropology approach presented by Rhodes' (2011) observational book on government elites can be
60 transferred to parliament.

1
2
3 faithful, discrete and superlative'. In parliamentary terms, Goffman's performative
4 approach is even more relevant whereby the 'self', the 'performer' and the 'character'
5 are enmeshed if not equated.²
6
7
8
9

10 Political actors amend their beliefs, and therefore their actions, practices and wider
11 webs of belief, in response to problems or questions that actors face (Meakin and
12 Geddes 2020; Geddes 2019a). Meakin and Geddes (2020) furthermore demonstrate
13 how 'a clash of beliefs between situated actors' played out through power relations
14 and practices in the 2014 furore over the appointment of a new Commons clerk,
15 subsequently informing political outcomes. The row exposed challenges of
16 introducing any stronger corporate elements into a historically determined and fluid
17 administration.
18
19
20
21
22
23
24

25 **3. Looking for legislative leadership**

26 Legislative roles, political traditions and cultures, organizational histories, structures
27 and cultural norms shape what is seen as possible and how far and how quickly a
28 political leader is able to negotiate support for policies and practices (Hartley and
29 Bennington 2011). Legislatures are clearly one of those 'arenas' within which
30 leadership is authorised, however *legislative leadership* is a slippery concept.
31 Leadership in legislatures is understudied, 'not least because legislatures as a
32 particular species of institution are relatively neglected within political science'
33 (Norton 2012: 71). For Norton, legislative leadership is contingent and is in effect
34 party leadership, dependent on the autonomy of the legislature in relation to the
35 executive. But Norton also highlighted the leadership vacuum in governance terms
36 when asking: Who speaks for, manages and exercises leadership in the legislature?
37 (Norton 2017). More specifically in relation to the UK, 'it is not always clear who the
38 legitimate representative of 'the House' is, and administrative staff have no leader,
39 unlike their counterparts in government departments' (Yong 2019: 91).
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51

52 The disparate nature of roles and responsibilities and the interaction between
53 political and administrative functions mitigates against any collective institutional
54 dynamic (Svara 2001; Getha-Taylor et al 2011). There is an emerging strand on the
55
56
57
58

59 ² See Geddes' (2019b) application of notions of performative teams, audiences and stages (front and
60 back) to the parliamentary arena and specifically select committees.

1
2
3 internal governance and management of legislatures, asking why there are no clear
4 lines of authority and responsibility (Meakin and Geddes 2020; Yong 2019). It is a
5 core component in establishing legitimate legislatures in new democracies (CPA
6 2008; IPU 2017). The challenge of administrative and management coherence
7 aligned to political governance has been acknowledged by the House of Commons
8 itself. The 2014 House of Commons Governance Committee report (HC692 2014),
9 precipitated by the furore over the recruitment of a new Clerk of the House (as noted
10 above), set out the unique organisational character:

11
12
13
14
15
16
17 'constrained only by its own legislation which it may reverse.' and 'run by its
18 650 [MPs] which places it in a different position not only from PLCs in the
19 private sector, but from every other public institution' (HC692 2014: 9).
20
21

22 The House of Lords, with its self-regulating ethos and weak governance structures, is
23 even less coherent and more opaque in terms of legislative leadership (Yong 2019).
24
25

26
27 This is a fundamental tension in terms of how legislatures govern themselves – are
28 legislatures simply products of the elected representatives or collective entities?
29 Judge and Leston-Bandeira (2018) point out the collective and corporate nature of
30 the institution has been neglected by the elected representatives. Parliament,
31 according to Kelso (2007) 'struggles with its identity as a holistic institution,'
32 whereby MPs priorities do not include sustained strengthening of the institution.
33 Kelso (2016) study of legislative leaders – in this case select committee chairs –
34 exposed how many did not even see themselves as exercising legislative leadership.
35 Such are the multiple anomalies evident in the dichotomy between permanence of
36 officials and temporal politicians, representation and stewardship of the estate,
37 individualism and collective decision making (Winetrobe 2003; Loewenberg 2007).
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46

47 A legislative leadership puzzle presents itself. The executive may seek to guide or
48 dominate, but not lead. So where do we find leadership in the legislature? It is often
49 said that the legislature is a 'they' and not an 'it': that is, the legislature is an arena of
50 shifting coalitions of representatives with no collective identity (Yong 2019). But this
51 is incorrect. All legislatures have administrative services which support members in
52 their work as legislators, and ultimately, the legislature and legislators as a collective
53 entity. These services are now governed and managed by commissions and presiding
54 officers who act for the legislature in its institutional capacities. Moreover, presiding
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 officers often act ‘for’ the legislature as an institution, in representing the legislature
4 to the public and the outside world. However, commissions and presiding officers
5 often struggle to ‘govern’ the legislature, as the legislative environment is intensely
6 political—and they must represent the institution’s interest, and not any partisan
7 interest. There are key individuals with agency in the legislature, but leadership is an
8 interactive and collaborative process (eg Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011; Ospina 2016;
9 Sorenson and Torfing 2019; Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012). Indeed leaders and
10 leadership in general has a significant role in shaping and developing institutions
11 (Boin and Christensen 2008). Yet, as Collinson et al (2018) argue, we should keep a
12 critical perspective on the romanticism of leadership.
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21

22 I concentrate on two research settings, conducted during a parliamentary academic
23 fellowship (2016-2019). The fellowship gave me access to the Westminster estate and
24 a privileged position from which to observe (see Cunliffe 2016 on access and field
25 work).³ These settings represent points of leadership within the Westminster
26 Parliament, they are observations of everyday practice, but also of power relations.
27 The first setting was the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Commons Speaker
28 has a strong claim to speak for the House as he has a threefold role as procedural
29 lead, chair of the Commons Commission and as external face for the Commons
30 (Armitage 2010; Seaward 2010). Commons Speaker John Bercow (2009-2019)
31 challenged convention and altered perceptions, demonstrating how critical actors
32 can drive or block change (Whale 2020; Geddes 2019c). The second setting was the
33 Lord Speaker, a relatively new post – crafted to reflect the self-regulating nature of
34 the House of Lords - though assuming the responsibilities previously held by the
35 Lord Chancellor who had acted as Speaker until 2006. Lord Fowler, was only the
36 third occupant of the post. Each actor, I observed negotiates multiple dilemmas, but
37 here I present a snapshot of everyday interaction.
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51 To conduct such decentred research, I deployed the narrative constructivist-
52 interpretivist model of how to research leadership, utilising ‘inquiry from the inside’
53
54
55

56
57 ³ I was awarded a parliamentary research fellowship in the Commons (2016-19) to research the prime
58 minister’s appearances before the Liaison Committee. This facilitated access to parliament for the
59 duration of the fellowship. See ████████ et al. (2016) and ████████ and Kelly (2020). During the
60 fellowship, I also shadowed and interviewed the Commons Speaker and the Lord Speaker, in addition
to attending the Commons and Lords Commission.

(Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012). Leadership studies generally, and the work on public leadership in particular, would, according to Kellerman (2001) benefit from an anthropological approach. As the large literature on the US presidency suggests, too much attention is paid to leaders at the top, and to leaders in positions of authority. Conversely, too little work is done in the field, so to speak, where the leadership action really is (Kellerman 2001: 510). This seeks to ascribe meaning to action and presents the value of seeing, observing and asking (Orr and Bennett 2017). Here, I undertook ethnographic research, observing and interviewing the key actors and also support staff. The intricacies of the day, the nuances, the body language, and the variety of tasks were observed and noted in real time, and then often reflected on in interview with the subject (Boswell et al 2019). The interaction with other actors in a pressurised environment, was silently noted, as 'being there' from a privileged position in the corner of the room (Crewe 2016; Fenno 1978; Nader 1972; Niemi 2010; Rhodes 2011, 2015). This method can be fruitful, but challenging, particularly as we need to 'relax the taboo' on telling our own stories (Anteby 2013) and be more reflexive about the politics of knowledge production seeing our own practice as a means of sharing valuable learning experiences. It requires the researcher to be sensitive to what is 'going on around us' (Cunliffe 2016: 536).

I shadowed the Commons Speaker for two sitting days (on Wednesday 25 April 2018 and Tuesday 15 May 2018), sat in the Commons Chamber, sometimes in the lower gallery, and attended the Commons Commission (on Monday 14 May 2018). I shadowed the Lords' Speaker on 11 September 2018 and attended the Lords Commission on the same day.⁴ For both, I was given access to the official diary for the day, able to sit in on meetings (where both parties had agreed in advance to my presence) and sometimes discuss the contents of each meeting. Occasionally I was drawn into conversations and asked my own opinion. The following draws on notes taken at the time, informal discussions, and observations. There is an important level of positionality in where I was placed and how actors interacted with me.⁵ The

⁴ See Commons Commission agenda 14 May 2018 <https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/house-of-commons-commission/news-parliament-2017/decisions-14-may-2018051411111111/> and Lords Commission minutes 11 September 2018 <https://old.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/house-of-lords-commission/2017-19/180911-Commission-record-of-discussion-12th-Meeting-PUBLIC.pdf>

⁵ The confidential nature of the exchanges means I refer only to matters of interaction, process and function, rather than the content of such meetings.

1
2
3 impact of agency and the relationship with traditions is also most evident when
4 observing the everyday practices of the Speaker. Rather than focus on the individual
5 in the position, I seek out the interactions and narratives to feature in a typical day
6 both frontstage and backstage. Here I focus on three key aspects (or faces) of
7 Speaker's everyday leadership practices: the procedural, the governance and the
8 place based external face.
9
10
11
12
13
14

15 **4. The Commons Speaker**

16 The Commons Speaker is often only analysed within the context of parliamentary
17 rituals (Armitage 2010; Crewe and Evans 2018: 45-46) or personalised office holding
18 (see Laban 2013, Laundry 1967; add Kandiah 2005; Seaward 2010; Boothroyd 2001;
19 Bercow 2019; Whale 2020). The lack of systematic analysis of the role of the Speaker,
20 as opposed to (auto-) biographical accounts of the occupants is puzzling. Crewe and
21 Evans (2018: 46) highlight the importance of the role, even if the occupant may be
22 unpopular: 'MPs recognise the need to venerate the office of the Speaker however
23 they may loathe the individual who holds it, because that position is a lynchpin on
24 which business of the House hangs.'
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33

34 The Governance Committee (HC692: 16) summarised the Speaker's position:

35 The Speaker is elected by the House to preside over its proceedings and to be
36 its representative both formally (for example on state occasions) and
37 informally (for example through his or her involvement in public engagement
38 activities: an area of much-increased activity in recent years). But as the
39 statutory chair of the House of Commons Commission and as 'householder'
40 for the Commons areas of the Palace, s/he also has important administrative
41 responsibilities.
42
43
44

45 However the Committee report pointed out that 'The extent of the Speaker's non-
46 procedural responsibilities is not well understood. There is no published list of them.
47 Sometimes the Speaker may be asked to act because there seems to be no one else
48 who appropriately could do so' (HC692: 16). Such fluidity means that the Speaker
49 often steps into the void, developing a significant leadership role in the Commons
50 which can be divided into: managing business in the Chamber; as administrative
51 head; being the external face for the Commons.⁶ In each role the Speaker has to
52
53
54
55
56
57

58 ⁶ The Speaker has a fourth role, which is not considered here though I am grateful to a senior clerk for
59 drawing my attention to this role. He remains a constituency MP and has casework responsibilities for
60

1
2
3 navigate conflicting beliefs over practices. The election of the more reform minded
4 John Bercow MP in 2009 owed much to the fallout from the expenses scandal which
5 had involved the resignation of his predecessor as Speaker, Michael Martin MP.
6
7
8
9

10 *Leadership as procedure*

11 The Commons Speaker is one of the oldest public offices in the UK and resides in the
12 Speaker's House within the Palace of Westminster. The position has a rich and
13 powerful history, conferring a level of authority and status on the occupant (Laban
14 2013). Ceremonial duties are the outward expression of this authority and status,
15 indeed 'there is little ceremony in the House of Commons *not* attached to or centred
16 upon the Speaker' (Armitage 2010: 326).
17
18
19
20
21
22

23 On my days with the Commons Speaker, his movements were cloaked in ritual and
24 symbolism from the start to the finish of the day. These rituals are formalised
25 historical constructs that often structure relationships with other actors (Crewe and
26 Evans 2018). The Speaker is serviced by a small staff, but has a very large and
27 imposing room in the Speaker's House, in which meetings are conducted. One of the
28 most important of these meetings is the Daily Conference (at 1030 each sitting day)
29 which is chaired by the Speaker and acts as a vital clearing meeting for the day's
30 parliamentary business. Relational deference and theatre were evident from the
31 beginning of the meeting, as officials stood for the Speaker when he entered the
32 room. The meeting was attended by the Clerk of the House, who led on procedural
33 issues, Principal and Assistant Table Clerks, Deputy Speakers, and the Sergeant at
34 Arms. The Speaker was not a passive recipient of the business from officials, but was
35 actively engaged and sought to shape many of the decisions. The meeting was over
36 within 30 minutes, as decisions impacted on the parliamentary business of the day.
37 It dealt first with urgent questions, ran through the timings and order of business on
38 the order paper (the parliamentary agenda for the day) adding any changes,
39 considers possible Government statements⁷. The decision on which Urgent Question
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52

53
54 his constituency. Speaker John Bercow represented the Buckingham constituency. Convention has
55 dictated that the main parties do not field candidates against the Speaker allowing him a free run in
56 2010, 2015 and 2017. He sits as an independent, does not vote, but his office conducts casework on
57 behalf of constituents. Here though I am only concerned with parliamentary leadership and
58 governance roles, rather than representational.

59 ⁷ MPs may request that the Speaker considers their application for an Urgent Question on topics of
60 particular importance each day. Applications for urgent questions must be submitted to the Speaker
to receive an oral answer on the same day.

1
2
3 to accept was communicated immediately during the meeting by the Speaker's
4 Assistant Private Secretary, so that the sponsoring MP and the Government were
5 notified as soon as possible. There is a convention that an Urgent Question is
6 withdrawn if the Government makes a statement on the issue. The Speaker was keen
7 to explain to me that he thought this convention (based on the advice of officials)
8 should be ignored. The list of MPs to be called to speak in debates was considered,
9 and adjournment topics were selected (there was some jocular speculation on which
10 minister would respond to the day's adjournment debate).⁸ Other issues of the day
11 that may impact on the wider estate were also raised. The meeting was swift,
12 informative and to the point.
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21

22 The Daily Conference is the regularised, backstage activity of legislative leadership.
23 The detail of each day that impacts on schedules, government, opposition,
24 backbenchers and the parliamentary estate. Key relational leadership was in
25 evidence during the exchanges with senior officials, but the Speaker was keenly
26 aware of external contingency (how decisions would be viewed outside the House).
27 Decisions require teamwork and efficient coordination between his own staff,
28 Commons officials, government and parliamentarians. There was much redefining of
29 the role as speaking for the House in championing backbench voices and MPs critical
30 of the government (from all parties). The Speaker can be drawn into making an
31 authoritative statement on behalf of the House, for instance to clarify the GDPR
32 requirements for MPs.⁹
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41

42 *Leadership as governance*

43 The Commission is the highest political body in the Commons (although many
44 decisions are delegated to the Management Board) and meetings take place once a
45 month, as with the Daily Conference, in the Speaker's study. The location gives the
46 Speaker a level of ownership of the governance process, more so as he is chair,
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56

57 ⁸ An adjournment debate is a way in the Commons of enabling a debate to take place but without a
58 question which the House must then decide

59 ⁹ An issue which highlighted the confusion around responsibility and ownership of the issue between
60 political parties and the Commons.

1
2
3 though the Secretariat support comes from outside his immediate office staff. The
4 Commission contains lay members and officials.¹⁰
5
6
7

8 There was palpable political tension in the meeting, even though the agenda
9 contained predominantly administrative matters. This can be partly explained by the
10 rather public breakdown in relations between the Speaker and the Leader of the
11 House. Seated in the corner of the room, I observed that though the meeting had a
12 formalised structure there was an interplay common in many elite meetings. Brown
13 et al (2017: 14) found: ‘meetings are spaces for the alignment and negotiation of
14 distinct perspectives, and are constituted through the contextual interplay of
15 similarity and difference.’ Abram (2017: 29) encapsulates this as: ‘ritual
16 performances in which rules are enacted, ritual correctness is met with manipulative
17 political game-playing, and formal transparency is intertwined with relational and
18 informational secrecy.’
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27

28 The body is uncertain if it is acting in the interests of the Commons as a whole,
29 Commission members, MPs, political parties or indeed Parliament. The Speaker
30 therefore does have an important role in directing discussion and summing up
31 debate on the issues. The meeting takes formal papers and is structured as you may
32 expect a company or trustee board meeting to be conducted. Officials, and some
33 other external actors, present papers and navigate through questions from the
34 Commission members, on for instance the Restoration and Renewal programme
35 which took up most of the time. Often they entered, presented and left the meeting.
36 Though the highest administrative body, which other House committees report to,
37 decisions and progress on matters were still dependent on the government making
38 time in the parliamentary agenda; multiple relational aspects were on display.
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48

49 In this respect governance for the Commons Speaker is negotiated, utilising the
50 ritual and authority of office and the dynamics of political space (Norton 2019). As
51 Commission Chair, the Speaker engages in ‘consequential talk’ that seeks to make the
52
53
54
55

56 ¹⁰ For current House of Commons Commission membership see
57 <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/348/house-of-commons-commission/membership/>
58 for a record of decisions made at the 14 May 2018 meeting see
59 [https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/house-of-](https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/house-of-commons-commission/news-parliament-2017/decisions-14-may-201805141111111/)
60 [commons-commission/news-parliament-2017/decisions-14-may-201805141111111/](https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/house-of-commons-commission/news-parliament-2017/decisions-14-may-201805141111111/)

1
2
3 orator a concrete embodiment of a corporate entity (Abram 2017). The formal
4 governance trappings enabled him to assert authority from the Chair, whether
5 procedural or administrative.
6
7

8 9 10 *Leadership as autonomous action*

11 The Speaker spent a great deal of time in his schedule involved in external
12 engagement and the promotion of the institution of the Commons. The Speaker can
13 act as an autonomous agent in engaging with schools, universities, voluntary sector
14 organisations and other bodies. He utilised the State Rooms for 'in reach', for
15 instance making time to speak to a group of journalist students, during my
16 shadowing period. Indeed much time during the morning staff meeting was taken up
17 discussing requests by MPs and outside organisations to use the State Rooms. There
18 were three events hosted in the two days I was in the Speaker's Office.
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

26
27 The Speaker in particular actively supported the parliamentary outreach agenda,
28 which included support for University Parliamentary Studies programmes. His
29 outreach included a commitment to visit all universities that delivered partnership
30 programmes. By touring the country visiting universities and schools, the Speaker
31 established an external platform to deliver his particular message.
32
33
34
35

36
37 He also sought to drive an internal reform agenda (eg Digital Democracy and
38 Reference Group on Representation). This is more *informal rhetorical power*. For
39 instance, the Speaker moves from the private (backstage) offices to the public
40 (frontstage) realm each time he leads. He was keen to stress internal reforms that he
41 claimed responsibility, for such as the education centre and nursery. He instigated
42 Skype calls to schools each Monday morning to reach schools he could not visit or
43 could not get to Westminster. The outreach, in reach work and attempts to drive
44 internal reform were defended by the Speaker. To his audiences he mocked critics
45 who he said had described the activity as 'below stairs work.'
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53

54 Identity is challenged through place and authorising arena. The Commons Speaker's
55 study and offices in general are large compared to the cramped nature of the Palace
56 of Westminster. The rooms are imposing and the symbolic power relationship with
57 any visitors can be asserted using space. Whoever the guest is, they have to wait
58
59
60

1
2
3 outside the study for the Speaker, including Ministers. The Speaker utilises this
4 ritualistic and symbolic authority to impose on political and administrative players,
5 even if they have more decision-making power. The resource exchange, strengthened
6 by tradition, gives him a limited predominance. The informal exchanges in the
7 Speaker's Office are as important in agenda setting. Here the personal impacts on the
8 relational, both inside the Palace and outside in his extensive outreach activity. Such
9 activity, I observed, focused more on Speaker identity than institutional identity
10 (more 'I' than 'we').
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18

19 **5. The Lord Speaker**

20 There are multiple contestable sites and claim-making individuals in Parliament,
21 several embrace a leadership role, others play this down. The House of Lords
22 deliberately plays down individualised leadership, drawing on its tradition as a self-
23 regulating arena. Reform to the governance arrangements has tended to follow
24 behind the Commons with a succession of reviews (see Yong 2019). The position of
25 Lord Speaker in its current form is a relatively new one. Lord Fowler, was only the
26 third occupant of the post, prior to 2006 the Lord Chancellor was also Lord
27 Speaker.¹¹ The role of the Lord Speaker is not as extensive or established as the
28 Commons Speaker, leadership in the Lords is a shared endeavour, primarily with the
29 Leader of the House, the Senior Deputy Speaker, (previous to 2016 the post was
30 titled the Chair of Committees). This provides a triumvirate of leadership positions in
31 the Lords. To the extent that there is leadership in the Lords, it is exercised
32 unevenly, mediated through several veto players (Crewe 2005; Yong 2019: 96).
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43

44 *Leadership as procedure*

45 The decentred nature of procedural activity is best demonstrated by the Companion
46 to Standing Orders, which states 'the Lord Speaker has no power to rule on matters
47 of order' and instead 'the preservation of order and the maintenance of the rules of
48 debate are the responsibility of the House itself' (House of Lords 2017). Furthermore
49 the Lord Speaker has no role in the selection of amendments; these and other roles
50 rest with the Chief Whip and Leader of the House. Following the Constitutional
51
52
53
54
55
56

57 ¹¹ Lord Fowler is a former Conservative minister, he succeeded Baroness D'Souza in 2016 who had
58 previously been convenor of the crossbench peers. The first elected Lord Speaker was Baroness
59 Hayman, a former Labour MP. Each Lord Speaker serves for 5 years and can only serve a maximum of
60 two terms in office.

1
2
3 Reform Act 2005 which ended the tradition of the Lord Chancellor acting as the
4 presiding officer and created the position of Lord Speaker, peers concluded that
5 changing the role would be the 'slippery slope' to the loss of self-regulation (see
6 Russell 2013: 85-86). The Lord Speaker also has no role in selecting peers to speak
7 (there is a speaking list in the Lords), though he does choose Urgent Questions.
8 Therefore the Lord Speaker has not been empowered as a presiding officer, but is
9 essentially and rather counterintuitively the 'defender of self-regulation', a phrase
10 used by the Lord Speaker himself.
11
12
13
14
15
16
17

18 Ceremonies and ritual may be prevalent in the House of Lords, but the Lord Speaker
19 is not always the central player (Crewe 2005). The Lord Speaker's procession is a less
20 formalised and less public event than the Commons procession. This is partly as the
21 Lord Speaker's procession evolved from the Lord Chancellors, with the Train and
22 Purse Bearers, previously associated with the Lord Chancellor's office, not now being
23 required. In following the Lord Speaker from his office down to the chamber, I saw
24 the less formalised aspects of ritualised opening of the session. Indeed, the Lord
25 Speaker forget his folder with his speaking notes and order paper which the Private
26 Secretary had to swiftly retrieve. Unlike the Commons, there is no official present
27 next to the Speaker in the Chamber to assist.
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

37 I observed the Lord Speaker walk a tightrope of non-leadership, which had
38 seemingly evolved out of circumstance and painstakingly slow reform (Russell 2013;
39 Yong 2019). The Lord Speaker's office is not centrally located in the House of Lords.
40 It is tucked away in the corner of the Lords estate. The office takes some finding and
41 is small in comparison to the Commons. It is a good distance from the Leader of the
42 Lords' office, which is much larger and more located centrally. There is a sense of
43 physical downplaying of the role to ensure it is not regarded as *head* of the Lords or
44 comparable to the Commons Speaker. The Lord Speaker's staff consists of a Private
45 Secretary, an overseas administrator, a press officer, two deputy private secretaries
46 and an apprentice. There is also much less ceremony and ritual associated with the
47 position. The figure is less public and less authoritative, deliberately so. He is
48 reluctant to speak for the House of Lords and has limited authority in the chamber or
49 in other areas – peers do not need to lobby him for speaking rights.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 I observed a reluctant and minimal leadership role, reflecting the rather inward
4 looking approach in the House of Lords. The Lord Speaker does not speak on the
5 floor of the House as the House self-regulates speaking. Leadership is more
6 relational than directional as the Speaker engages via the tea rooms to gauge peers
7 views on matters. I also observed little direct lobbying of the Lord Speaker, the office
8 was not a hub of activity. There are multiple players who have procedural and
9 administrative responsibility and the Lord Speaker has less imperative to strengthen
10 relationships (lest he be accused of power building). He does not really *preside* over
11 proceedings, nor is an *officer* of the chamber, responsible for its running.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19

20 *Leadership as Governance*

21 The leadership aspects associated with the role are fairly ill defined and deliberately
22 minimal. In fact the Lord Speaker was at pains, in interview, to downplay his
23 leadership role in the Lords in general and also in administrative-bureaucratic terms.
24 Many governance aspects were shared with the Senior Deputy and Leader of the
25 House, on an issue by issue basis. The Clerk of Parliaments, as the most senior
26 parliamentary official in the Lords, had a clear managerial role (the Clerk of the
27 House in the Commons also doubled up on procedural and managerial
28 responsibility). The corporate aspect is less fragmented than in the Commons,
29 however the most senior administrator, the Clerk of Parliaments, does not answer to
30 the Lord Speaker, rather he advises and consults. Therefore, the Lord Speaker's
31 ability to direct is limited. The Lord Speaker does Chair the Lord's Commission, but
32 largely a facilitating chair than a directional one. The Lord Speaker described his role
33 to me as 'Chairman of the Board' to 'get business through.' Much business shadowed
34 topics already 'live' in the Commons, though only a single individual sits on both
35 Commons and Lords Management Boards. The Lord Speaker showed little desire to
36 be involved personally in administrative matters, apart from matters of security,
37 functions were primarily delegated (Yong 2019).
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51

52 Seated on the edge of the room next to several officials, it was difficult to gauge in
53 whose interests the Commission was working; peers, the Lords, Parliament as a
54 whole? The House of Lords Commission session contained ten peers and two
55 external or lay members. The Clerk of Parliaments attended, though is not a formal
56 member. The meeting largely focused on the Restoration and Renewal programme
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 and financial support for peers, the later taking up a surprising amount of time.¹² The
4 meeting received many papers and had, as you may expect from the Lords less
5 political discussion, and much more delegation. The role of the Lord Speaker, was
6 much more understated and facilitative.
7
8
9

10 11 *Leadership as autonomous action*

12 The Lord Speaker represents the chamber in various formal settings, including
13 jointly with the Commons at state and ceremonial occasions and representing the
14 Lords to overseas parliaments. He also, according to the Lord Speaker's website,
15 coordinates an outreach programme to engage the public in the work and role of the
16 Lords. Although I observed little educational outreach activity, in contrast to his
17 predecessor who spent much time engaging with universities, schools and so on, his
18 office coordinates the peer to schools visits programme. Lord Fowler himself rarely
19 visited schools and engaged in little public outreach work. In terms of in-reach, the
20 Lord Speaker had discretion over the use of the River Room for events other than
21 functions on behalf of UK-registered charities and cross-party parliamentary events.
22 The Lord Speaker for instance himself hosted an end of term reception, a memorial
23 reception and a peers in school event in July 2018.
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 The Lord Speaker treads carefully when expanding his remit (though the remit is not
36 defined formally). He described himself as an ambassador for the House (a phrase
37 the Commons Speaker also used). I evidenced creeping authority over conduct issues
38 relating to peers (and in response to media queries) and external affairs. In a nod to
39 the outreach and identity role of the Lord Speaker, the Private Secretary was keen to
40 draw my attention to the Lord Speaker's new twitter account. Such external activity
41 suggests a gentle negotiation of the leadership dilemma, edging the Lord Speaker to
42 speak on behalf of the Lords, whilst wary of his predecessor's approach in extending
43 the external face too far. The Lord Speaker did however use his own positional
44 authority to drive forward the Burns Report via the campaign for an effective second
45 chamber.¹³ This has an element of self-preservation for the Chamber, but is also
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56
57 ¹² The Lord Commission public minutes available online, contrast with the list of decisions that
58 resulted from the equivalent Commons Commission I sat in on.

59 ¹³ The Lords Speaker's committee on the size of the House, which was chaired by Lord Burns (the
60 Burns Committee), was established in December 2016 and the Report of the Lord Speaker's
Committee on Size of the House (the Burns Report) was published on 31 October 2017.

1
2
3 recognition that the Office of Lord Speaker is the most obvious body to drive forward
4 such internal reform. This approach was evident in the campaign meeting I attended
5 on the Burns Report.
6
7
8
9

10 Yet, there are ceremonial roles such as state visits in which the Lords Speaker clearly
11 projects a leadership role. On these occasions the Lord Speaker may double up with
12 the Commons Speaker in public, but there was little other informal contact at
13 Speaker level (it occurred at Private Secretary level). Letters from one office to
14 another appeared on the Lord Commission agenda (for instance the setting up of the
15 sponsor board for the Restoration and Renewal project).
16
17
18
19
20
21

22 **6. Reflections: collaboration and conflict leadership**

23 The puzzles of legislative leadership are presented here as 3 faces of leadership, the
24 procedural (running the legislature), governance (managing the legislature) and
25 autonomous or external (selling the legislature). Within each I observed 2 key
26 leadership roles in the two constituent parts of the Westminster Parliament.
27
28

29 Westminster with its centuries of traditions and eccentricities may be trapped in a
30 historicism that limits reform. However this article is more firmly focused on the
31 nature of legislative leadership, than on the normative aspects of constraints to
32 reform. By utilising a decentred approach we can observe and unpack leadership in a
33 variety of legislative fields. I argue that legislative leadership can be understood and
34 examined as a diverse and decentred activity, contingent on actors beliefs,
35 circumstance and traditions. If we examine the three faces of legislative leadership
36 evident to the observer, we see such contingency in the everyday practices.
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45

46 On the *procedural* face, sitting, observing the ceremonial aspects of the roles, the
47 formal refereeing in the Chamber and the less formal interaction with key players, I
48 could get close to the exercise of parliamentary leadership and governance. I could
49 also similarly observe a nascent form of (non-hierarchical) leadership in the Lords,
50 as Lord Fowler navigated through the collaborative, consensual and often conflicting
51 relationships in the Lords. These are the public fields of authority, contingent on
52 individuals in positions of authority negotiating political and administrative agendas.
53
54
55
56 In the Commons, the Speaker has control over the agenda, who speaks, and for how
57 long. He exercised it with a great theatrical flourish, more so of course when centre of
58
59
60

1
2
3 attention during Prime Ministers Questions, less so when in the Chair for the
4 adjournment debate at the end of the day. As a referee, he can not only uphold the
5 rules, but interpret them too. The way he interpreted them (for instance granting of
6 Urgent Questions and allowing Prime Ministers Questions run beyond thirty minutes
7 proved to be highly personalised). In the Lords this procedural leadership is hidden,
8 a subtle form of authority. Being there, is enough without the outward expression of
9 command.
10
11
12
13
14
15
16

17 On the *governance* face, activity is concentrated in the back stage operation. The
18 field or space is the office, the corridors and the informal spaces in and around the
19 Westminster estate (Norton 2019; Loewenberg 2007). Informality and private
20 exchanges are crucial. Public navigation, such as exchanges on the floor of the
21 House, speeches, formal evidence sessions happen alongside informal and private
22 bargaining. Private meetings are not minuted, exchanges in offices do not have
23 observers or note-takers present, and pre-hearing sessions decide questions and
24 collaboration. I sat in on one to one meetings then observed that when gaming is
25 used to anticipate questioning in advance, the backstage impacts on the frontstage
26 (Goffman 1990; Geddes 2019b).
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 The *external* role of legislative leadership or outward face of the legislature is often
36 embodied by the Speaker. Leadership has classically involved speaking for - and on
37 behalf of - organisations, institutions, businesses. This rhetorical projection involves
38 articulation or projection of a vision (Helms 2014; Laing and Walter 2016; Rhodes
39 and 't Hart 2014). This is very much the transference of the 'I' into the 'we,' whereby
40 we think of interdependent relations and functions, rather than single, isolated
41 functions (Elias 1991). In political work, protagonists react both as emotional
42 individual actors, but also within social webs of interdependency (Crewe and Sarra
43 2019). These actors may appear autonomous, but the 'I' becomes 'we' when situated
44 within the context, and responding to everyday dilemmas. Relationships with
45 government, political parties, backbencher, administrative staff, external actors (and
46 occasionally academic researchers) come in and out of daily working life. Therefore
47 the Commons Speaker impressed on me his institutional achievements and also
48 those that had been stymied by political foes. He also stressed his external
49 contribution, the Speakers Conference, engagement with universities and so on. The
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Lord Speaker was less expansive. His focus lay more in furthering the Burns
4 recommendations to limit the size of the House of Lords. This of course in its own
5 way was a legacy and a preservation issue.
6
7
8
9

10 In each case the 'I' did not necessarily become 'we' and the decentred approach of
11 ideational influence on the whole was evident. The personal becomes institutional,
12 even though neither spoke *for* the institution. They had a historicism that confers
13 symbolic presence and authority. The Commons more so than the Lords (as the
14 Speaker is in the Chair, while in the Lords he sits on the woolsack). John Bercow, a
15 divisive Speaker who himself very much became the focus of attention, reflected the
16 public perception of the Commons (one which saw division and conflict, see Whale
17 2020). Lord Fowler, a more consensual player, was seeking to preserve the
18 institution and avoid conflict or expose the Chamber to charges of disrepute. Each
19 was a product of cyclical contingency, post expenses – a reaction to the previous
20 incumbent.¹⁴
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29

30 In such a contestable arena with multiple actors attempting to assert political and
31 bureaucratic influence, leaders require political astuteness (awareness, nous,
32 political 'savvy'). Political astuteness – here particularly relevant for parliamentary
33 staff managing the bureaucracy - has been identified as the key leadership skill in
34 public managers, when faced with such 'disagreeing tribes' (Hartley et al 2013;
35 Hartley et al. 2019; Hartley 2017, 2018). On procedure, should the Speaker ignore
36 clerkly advice? On governance, how far should the Commons Speaker get involved in
37 administrative management or indeed as the Brexit saga demonstrated, set his
38 judgements against the government of the day? Should the Lord Speaker break with
39 the self-regulating nature of the Chamber to push further reform of the composition
40 of the House of Lords, so perhaps safeguarding its future?
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51 **7. Conclusion**

52 Legislative leadership in the Westminster parliament remains elusive to the external
53 eye. Collectively, parties are structurally advantaged (in procedural terms) in
54 determining topics, amendments and the policy narrative. The executive maintains
55
56
57
58
59
60

¹⁴ See BBC 2015 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-35162083> on Baroness De Souza.

1
2
3 control of the agenda, time, and can even attempt to manipulate the uncodified
4 constitution for their own political advantage. However, parties and governments
5 may be *from* parliament, but they are not *of* parliament. Within the structure of the
6 parliamentary ‘village’, leadership – in the form of an authoritative voice to speak
7 for, lead, manage and defend the institution - is absent (Winetrobe 2003; Norton
8 2016). There are claim makers, some with mandates (Speakers and Committee
9 Chairs), but few obvious followers and few clear goals and targets. Also absent in this
10 highly competitive political space are orchestrators and facilitators, encouraging and
11 embedding democratic governance (Laing and Walter 2016). Autonomous agents
12 roam - often unfettered - navigating through the multiple conundrums, and
13 unfolding dilemmas.
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22

23
24 This article has presented a decentred approach to uncovering legislative leadership,
25 the agency, beliefs and practices of those I observed mattered to how meetings,
26 interactions and decisions were structured. The nexus of public management,
27 political leadership and parliamentary scholarship allows greater understanding of
28 legislative leadership, allowing different approaches to talk to each other. This
29 revealed a range of faces, procedural, governance and external. Assuming identities
30 is a common theme, ‘So political leaders feel the identity pressures of holding a
31 number of flexible identities in tension’ (Lees-Marshment et al 2018: 461; Lees-
32 Marshment 2016). The players performed in each, underplaying and overplaying
33 roles on the front and back stage. The projection of ‘self’ was evident even in the
34 small detail (such as the final word at the door at the end of a meeting). By observing
35 the small detail, we can understand the way elites operate within a democratic
36 assembly, opening new research possibilities in an under researched area.
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46

47
48 Politicians (who are of course temporary occupants) maintain a veto on *governance*
49 arrangements impacting on (permanent) administrative staff. There has been
50 evidence of Westminster strengthening of administrative *identity*, while actively
51 avoiding *political* identity. The contingency of social (and political) life were on
52 display to the privileged observer, decentred and often atomistic (Bevir 2013). The
53 value of being there is that the observer as researcher can appreciate the giving of
54 ‘greater weight to the situated practices, social relations, and ethical complexities
55 that are integral to the work of organizations’ (Brown et al. 2017). Elites confront
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 daily dilemmas and act as actors would, sometimes in public, often in private (or
4 'front stage' and 'back stage') (Goffman 1990; Geddes 2019b). They construct
5 relationships and deal with multiple pressures and demands from internal and
6 external sources.
7
8
9

10
11 The legislative leadership I observed was atomised and could be stretched, to
12 accommodate the incumbent office holder. There were multiple relationships both
13 formally constituted and informally constructed, but little collaborative or consensus
14 leadership, even in the House of Lords. Leadership was constrained by externalities
15 (parties, ritual, bureaucracy, executive). There was even less *interactive* leadership,
16 whereby political leadership undertakes meaningful engagement with citizens,
17 potentially to create public value.
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

References

Abram, S. (2017). Contradiction in contemporary political life: meeting bureaucracy in Norwegian municipal government. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 23(S1), 27-44.

Anteby, M. (2013). Perspective -Relaxing the taboo on telling our own stories: Upholding professional distance and personal involvement. *Organization Science*, 24(4), 1277-1290.

Armitage F. (2010) The Speaker, Parliamentary Ceremonies and Power *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol.16, No.3, September 2010, pp.325–337.

BBC (2018) 'GDPR has MPs in a bind', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-44128539>

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Bevir, M. (2008). What is genealogy?. *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 2(3), 263-275.

Bevir, M. (2013). *A Theory of Governance*, University of California Press.

Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R. A. W (2015) 'Interpretive Political Science: Mapping the Field', in M. Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes Eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Interpretive Political Science*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge: 3-27

Boin, A., & Christensen, T. (2008). The development of public institutions: Reconsidering the role of leadership. *Administration & Society*, 40(3), 271-297.

Bolden R, Witzel, M., Linacre N., (eds) (2016) *Leadership Paradoxes: Rethinking Leadership for an Uncertain World*, Routledge.

Boswell et al (2019) State of the field: What can political ethnography tell us about anti-politics and democratic disaffection? *European Journal of Political Research* 58: 56–71, 2019.

1
2
3 Brown, H., Reed, A., & Yarrow, T. (2017). Introduction: towards an ethnography of
4 meeting. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 23(S1), 10-26.

5
6
7 Bryson, J., Sancino, A., Benington, J. and Sørensen, E., 2017. Towards a multi-actor
8 theory of public value co-creation. *Public Management Review*, 19(5), pp.640-654.

9
10 Collinson, D., Smolović Jones, O., & Grint, K. (2018). 'No more heroes': Critical
11 perspectives on leadership romanticism. *Organization Studies*, 39(11), 1625-1647.

12
13 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). (2008). Recommended
14 benchmarks for democratic legislatures. *Commonwealth Parliamentary*
15 *Association*.

16
17
18 Crewe, E. (2005). *Lords of Parliament*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

19
20 Crewe, E. (2015). *The House of Commons*. London: Bloomsbury.

21
22 Crewe, E. (2016) *Ethnography of Parliament: Finding Culture and Politics Entangled*
23 *in the Commons and the Lords, Parliamentary Affairs*

24
25
26 Crewe, E and Evans P (2018) 'The significance of rituals in parliament' in Leston-
27 *Bandeira, C. and Thompson L (eds) Exploring Parliament*, Oxford University Press.

28
29
30 Crewe, E. and Sarra, N., (2019). 'Chairing UK select committees: walking between
31 friends and foes'. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 72(4), pp.841-859.

32
33 Cronin, T and Genovese, M. (2012) *Leadership Matters: Unleashing the Power of*
34 *Paradox*, Routledge.

35
36 Crosby, B. and Bryson, J. (2018), "Why leadership of public leadership research
37 matters: and what to do about it", *Public Management Review*, Vol. 20 No. 9, pp.
38 1265-1286.)

39
40
41 Cunliffe, A. L., & Eriksen, M. (2011). Relational leadership. *Human relations*, 64(11),
42 1425-1449.

43
44 Cunliffe, A. L., & Alcadipani, R. (2016). The politics of access in fieldwork:
45 Immersion, backstage dramas, and deception. *Organizational Research Methods*,
46 19(4), 535-561.

47
48
49 Elias, N. (1991) *The Society of Individuals*, Oxford, Blackwell.

50
51 Fenno, R.F. (1978). *Home style: House members in their districts*. Boston, MA:
52 Little, Brown.

53
54
55 Geddes, M., (2019a). The Explanatory Potential of 'Dilemmas': Bridging Practices
56 and Power to Understand Political Change in Interpretive Political Science. *Political*
57 *Studies Review*, 17(3), pp.239-254.

58
59
60 Geddes M. (2019b) *Dramas at Westminster: Select committees and the quest for*
accountability, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

1
2
3
4 Geddes M. and Rhodes R. A.W. (2019) 'Towards an Interpretive Parliamentary
5 Studies', chapter J. Brichzin, D. Krichewsky, L. Ringel and J. Schank (eds.) *The*
6 *Sociology of Parliaments*, (pp87-107) Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

8
9 Getha-Taylor, H. Husar Holmes, M., Jacobson, W., Morse, R. and J. Sowa, (2011)
10 'Focusing the Public Leadership Lens: Research Propositions and Questions in the
11 Minnowbrook Tradition', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*,
12 21, 1, January 2011, pp i83–i97.

14
15 Goffman, E. (1990). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New edition).
16 London: Penguin.

18
19 HC 692 (2014) House of Commons Governance Committee, 'House of Commons
20 Governance', HC HC692 2014.

21
22 House of Lords (2017), Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the
23 Proceedings of the House of Lords
24 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldcomp/composo2017/composo03.htm#a16>

25
26 Hartley, J. (2017). 'Politics and political astuteness in leadership'. In J. Storey, J.
27 Hartley, J.-L. Denis, P. 't Hart, & D. Ulrich (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to*
28 *leadership* (pp.197-208). New York: Routledge.

30
31 Hartley, J. (2018). Ten propositions about public leadership. *International Journal*
32 *of Public Leadership*, 14 (4), 202-217.

33
34 Hartley, J. and Benington, J. (2011) 'Political leadership', in A. Bryman, D. Collinson,
35 K. Grint, B. Jackson and M. Uhl-Bien (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership*,
36 London: Sage, pp. 203–14.

37
38 Hartley, J., Alford, J., Hughes, O., & Yates, S. (2013). *Leading with political*
39 *astuteness: A study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United*
40 *Kingdom. Australia and New Zealand School of Government and the Chartered*
41 *Management Institute*, UK.

42
43
44 Hartley, J., Sancino, A., Bennister, M., Resodihardjo, S.L. (2019) 'Leadership for
45 Public Value – Political Astuteness as a Conceptual Link', *Public Administration*.

46
47 Helms, L. (2014) in *Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*

48
49 Hindmoor, A., Larkin, P., and Kennon, A. (2009). Assessing the Influence of Select
50 Committees in the UK: The Education and Skills Committee, 1997–2005. *The*
51 *Journal of Legislative Studies*,
52 15(1), 71–89.

53
54
55 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 2017, 'Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP)
56 Comparative Research Paper on Parliamentary Administration', IPU, Geneva.

57
58
59 Judge, D., & Leston-Bandeira, C. (2018). 'The institutional representation of
60 Parliament'. *Political Studies*, 66(1), 154-172.

1
2
3
4 Kellerman, B. and Webster, S. (2001) The recent literature on public leadership:
5 Reviewed and considered, *The Leadership Quarterly* 12 (2001) 485–514.

6
7
8 Kelso, A. (2009). *Parliamentary Reform at Westminster*. Manchester: Manchester
9 University Press.

10
11 Kelso, A. (2016). 'Political Leadership in Parliament: The Role of Select Committee
12 Chairs in the UK House of Commons'. *Politics and Governance*, 4(2), 115–126.

13
14 Laing, M and Walter, J (2016) 'Great expectations and great limitations' in *The*
15 *Routledge Companion to Leadership* edited by John Storey, Jean Hartley, Jean-
16 Louis Denis, Paul 't Hart, David Ulrich.

17
18
19 Lees-Marshment, J. (2016). Deliberative political leaders: The role of policy input in
20 political leadership. *Politics and Governance*, 4(2), 25-35.

21
22
23 Lees-Marshment, Jennifer and Smolovic Jones, Owain (2018). Being more with less:
24 Exploring the flexible political leadership identities of government ministers.
25 *Leadership*, 14(4) pp. 460–482.

26
27 Loewenberg, Gerhard (2007) 'Paradoxes of legislatures' *Daedalus*; Summer; 136, 3;
28 ProQuest pg. 56.

29
30 Meakin, A. (2019) 'Westminster Restoration and Renewal', *Hansard Society* blog see
31 [https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blog/westminster-restoration-and-renewal-a-](https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blog/westminster-restoration-and-renewal-a-year-on-from-the-commons-vote-to)
32 [year-on-from-the-commons-vote-to](https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blog/westminster-restoration-and-renewal-a-year-on-from-the-commons-vote-to)

33
34
35 Meakin, A., & Geddes, M. (2020). Explaining Change in Legislatures: Dilemmas of
36 Managerial Reform in the UK House of Commons. *Political Studies*,
37 0032321720955127.

38
39
40 Nader, L. (1972). 'Up the anthropologist: Perspectives gained from studying up'. In
41 D. Hymes (ed.), *Reinventing anthropology*. New York: Random House.

42
43 Niemi, H (2010) 'Managing in the Golden Cage, an ethnographic study of work,
44 management and gender in parliamentary administration', PhD Thesis, Helsinki.

45
46
47 Norton P. (2012) 'Patterns and dynamics of legislative leadership' in Helms, L. (ed)
48 *Comparative Political Leadership* Palgrave.

49
50
51 Norton. P.(2017) 'Speaking for Parliament' *Parliamentary Affairs* (2017) 70, 191–
52 206.

53
54
55 Norton P, (2019) Power behind the Scenes: The Importance of Informal Space in
56 Legislatures, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Volume 72, Issue 2, April 2019, Pages 245–266,

57
58
59 Orr, K., and Bennett, M. (2017). 'Relational leadership, storytelling, and narratives:
60 Practices of local government chief executives.' *Public Administration Review* 77, 4
(2017): 515-527.

- Ospina, S. M. (2016), "Collective leadership and context in public administration: Bridging public leadership research and leadership studies," *Public Administration Review*, Vol. No. 2, pp. 275–287.
- Patterson, S. C. (1963). Legislative leadership and political ideology. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 27(3), 399-410.
- Peters Jr, R. M., & Williams, C. A. (2002). The demise of Newt Gingrich as a transformational leader: Does organizational leadership theory apply to legislative leaders. *Organizational Dynamics*, 30(3), 257-257.
- Rhodes, R.A.W. (2011). *Everyday life in British government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rhodes, R.A.W. (2018) What is decentred analysis? In, Rhodes, R.A.W. (ed.) *Narrative Policy Analysis: Cases in decentred policy. (Understanding Governance)* London. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-21.
- Rhodes, R. A.W & 't Hart, P. (2014) *Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, OUP
- Russell, M (2013) *Contemporary House of Lords*, Oxford
- Russell, M. and Cowley, P., (2016). 'The policy power of the Westminster parliament: The "parliamentary state" and the empirical evidence'. *Governance*, 29(1), pp.121-137.
- Russell, M., & Gover, D. (2017). *Legislation at Westminster: Parliamentary actors and influence in the making of British law*. Oxford University Press.
- Seaward, P (2010) (ed.) *Speakers and Speakership: Presiding Officers and the Management of Business from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, the Parliamentary History Yearbook Trust.
- Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2019). Designing institutional platforms and arenas for interactive political leadership. *Public Management Review*, 21(10), 1443-1463.
- Svara, J. H. (2001). The myth of the dichotomy: Complementarity of politics and administration in the past and future of public administration. *Public Administration Review*, 61(2), 176-183.
- Thompson, L., (2016). 'Debunking the myths of bill committees in the British House of Commons'. *Politics*, 36(1), pp.36-48.
- Uhl-Bien, M., & Ospina, S. M. (Eds.). (2012). *Advancing relational leadership research: A dialogue among perspectives*. IAP.
- Whale, S (2020) *John Bercow: Call to Order*, Biteback.
- Winetrobe Barry K. (2003) Political but not partisan: Marketing parliaments and their members, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 9:1, 1-13.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Yong, B. (2019). 'The Governance of Parliament'. In A. Horne, & G. Drewry (Eds.), *Parliament and the Law*, 75-102. (2nd). Oxford: Hart Publishing.

International Journal of Public Leadership

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22

**“There is no ‘Parliament’, in a collective sense, at all.”
Navigating the Dilemmas of Decentred Leadership in
Westminster**

23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43

**International Journal of Public Leadership
Special Issue: Decentred Leadership**

44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Structured Abstract

Purpose

The Westminster Parliament is multifaceted, lacks cohesion and collective direction, appearing at times to challenge the very notion of a structured public institution itself. Within an environment with little collective sense, understanding who leads in the UK parliament is challenging; there are multiple, contestable sites of leadership and governance. This article presents 3 dilemmas of legislative leadership, to better understand what goes on inside the legislature: governance, leadership and identity. I present a decentred and nuanced diagnosis of the pathologies that pervade the behaviour of parliamentary elites and disaggregate ‘leadership as practice’ in parliament.

Methodology

New interpretive approaches to studying legislatures have opened up and this research utilises such anti-foundationalism. The article draws on ethnographic research into ‘everyday practices’, conducted during an academic fellowship in the UK Parliament from 2016 to 2019, which involved privileged access to the parliamentary estate. The data used includes observations, shadowing, and elite interviews collected during the fellowship.

Findings

The article demonstrates how (and why) actors navigate through and negotiate these key dilemmas. This can help to explain motives, daily pressures and performative skills deployed in displays of atomised and autonomous decentred leadership. Much parliamentary activity is conducted under a mysterious cloak of ritual, procedure and symbolism; lines of accountability are fluid and administrative and political actors operate in a complex, mutually dependent and contingent environment.

Originality

This article fulfils an identified need to study how legislatures work - and in particular key elites - from the inside.

Keywords

leadership, legislatures, dilemmas, parliament, decentred, interpretive

1
2
3
4
5 *“I’ve been very clear that I don’t think parliament is a building, I think it’s a*
6 *collection of elected representatives, and it isn’t appropriate to suspend*
7 *parliament.”*

8 *(Rory Stewart MP, August 2019).*

9
10
11 *“There is no ‘voice of Parliament’ that can be collectively orchestrated. [...] those*
12 *accounts which say that Parliament should do this or that to make itself more*
13 *effective fail to understand that there is no ‘Parliament’, in a collective sense, at*
14 *all.” (Tony Wright 2004)*

19 **1. A relational ethnography of legislative leadership**

20 Legislatures have been ripe for institutionalised analyses. Multiple outputs,
21 formalised rules and procedures and identifiable structures of organisation
22 characterise the scholarly terrain. However, legislatures are sites of contestation,
23 symbolic and ritualised behaviour and relational interaction. As the two quotes above
24 illustrate, parliaments do not necessarily require a fixed building or may not even
25 have a singular collective identity or a voice to speak for it.¹ Normative,
26 institutionalised and heavily descriptive accounts provide useful explorations, but
27 alternative approaches may tell us much more about what goes on inside legislatures.
28
29

30
31
32
33
34
35
36 The Westminster Parliament is multifaceted, lacks cohesion and collective direction,
37 appearing at times to challenge the very notion of a structured public institution.
38 Much parliamentary activity is conducted under a mysterious cloak of ritual,
39 procedure and symbolism; lines of accountability are fluid and administrative and
40 political actors operate in a complex, mutually dependent and contingent
41 environment. To understand the complexity, traditional approaches have
42 emphasised legislative paradoxes. For instance, Gerhard Loewenberg (2007)
43 identified four: the paradox of hierarchy, the paradox of majority rule the paradox of
44 transparency, and the paradox of cross-national comparison. These incongruencies
45 are rooted in the historical development of parliamentary democracy, but also in
46 social dilemmas of shifting from individual preference to collective decision-making
47 (Loewenberg 2007: 65). For Loewenberg such paradoxes need to be understood,
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56

57
58
59 ¹ The shift to hybrid parliaments in April 2020 during the COVID19 pandemic reinforced this view of
60 parliaments not necessarily requiring a traditional physical space to function. Also change need not
always be constrained by tradition and institutional norms.

1
2
3 rather than reconciled.² Winetrobe (2003: 65) identifies further anomalies in that
4 the Westminster parliament is a building (or estate), but also (as per Rory Stewart's
5 quote, above) an 'aggregation of members'. It is a set of formal and informal
6 proceedings, in which overtly political and non-political activities conducted by
7 (temporary) politicians and (permanent) officials in often overlapping communities.
8
9
10
11
12

13 Legislative study in the UK is heavily rooted in the legal-formal tradition (Geddes
14 and Rhodes 2019: 90). The strength of the approach has been the emphasis on
15 reform and a normative drive to improve the effectiveness of the institution in
16 holding the executive to account (see Thompson 2016; Russell and Cowley 2016).
17 Such empirical research has revised analysis of parliamentary institutional and
18 behavioural power (see Gover and Russell 2018), highlighting the impact the
19 legislature can and does have on the executive in shaping policy and decision
20 making. Geddes and Rhodes (2019: 92) argue that legislative research amounts to a
21 'shared interest in the efficacy of parliamentary processes.' Furthermore, they argue
22 that this has led to a narrow research agenda trapped in an empirical-descriptive
23 model, honing in on rules, procedures, and formal organisations of government and
24 state.
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 This article agrees that we should seek to move beyond such a narrow research focus,
36 to one that decentres the new politics, recognising diversity and contingency in
37 legislatures. According to Bevir (2013: 6), this involves moving from formal
38 explanations towards narratives and genealogies (Bevir 2013: 6). This is a post
39 foundationalist approach – with emphasis on the contingency of social life. People in
40 any given situation can interpret that situation in all sorts of ways (2013: 26), and no
41 institution can fix the way its participants will act. Indeed, classic institutional
42 leadership, focused on the promotion and protection of values within and for a
43 particular institution or organisation, appears less relevant to legislatures (Helms
44 2014).
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57

58 ² In common with logical and psychological approaches to antinomy paradoxes (Quine 1966) such
59 apparent contradictions are not puzzles to be solved, they simply *are* (Bolden, Witzel, Linacre 2016:
60 4).

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Such questioning of the positivist approach prevalent in legislative study, draws together not only political scientists, but social anthropologists and sociologists (Crewe and Sarra 2019). In exploring relational and ideational impact within spaces that may be structured, not by organisational hierarchies and arrangements, but by norms, rituals and beliefs, new avenues of inquiry can be opened up.³ As Crewe and Sarra (2019: 2) explain: 'We share in common, certain epistemological positions: a view of objectivity as a process of inquiry rather than a position; an interest in both people's social and individual experiences; and agreement that the trickiest intellectual task is to explain how and why individuals depart from norms or beliefs.'

Interpretive approaches, open up new possibilities in the understanding and study of leadership in a parliamentary setting. Such approaches appreciate the 'significance of individuals' interpretations to make sense of their everyday lives' (Geddes and Rhodes 2019: 94). Agency is always 'situated' in a particular context. Similar to Rhodes (2011) in peering 'behind the veneer', I seek to understand what some of the key elites in parliament think they do (Cronin and Genovese 2012; Laing and Walter 2016). Additionally, performative analysis, brings the 'self' into the frame: 'Performers need to interpret the social norms, values, etiquette, expectations and accepted modes of behaviour associated with that situation, which consequently requires practical judgements as well as taken-for-granted or tacit knowledge' (Geddes 2019b: 30). Rhodes (2011: 287) observed that Ministers wear multiple 'masks' relating to the multiple roles they perform. This is channelling Goffman's classical text (1990: 9) in which masks are 'arrested expressions and admirable echoes of feelings at once, faithful, discrete and superlative'. In parliamentary terms, Goffman's performative approach is even more relevant whereby the 'self', the 'performer' and the 'character' are enmeshed if not equated.⁴

Notions of network governance and decentred theory accentuate the role of agency within governance structures, whereby beliefs are explained by traditions and modified by dilemmas (Bevir and Rhodes 2015; Rhodes 2018). Therefore, within the

³ See in particular Crewe (2005, 2015) and Geddes (2019b) who have demonstrated that the political anthropology approach presented by Rhodes' (2011) observational book on government elites can be transferred to parliament.

⁴ See Geddes' (2019b) application of notions of performative teams, audiences and stages (front and back) to the parliamentary arena and specifically select committees.

1
2
3 framework of an interpretive stance, a decentred approach seeks to unpack the way
4 individual actors navigate the dilemmas they face. Political actors amend their
5 beliefs, and therefore their actions, practices and wider webs of belief, in response to
6 problems or questions that actors face (Geddes 2019a). Geddes (2019a) argues that
7 dilemmas should be central to the Bevir and Rhodes approach, providing a greater
8 linkage with everyday practice and the concept of power.
9
10
11
12
13
14

15 **2. Situated agency in the Westminster Parliament**

16 In relation to legislatures speaking and acting on behalf of the institution, there is a
17 vacuum. It does not help that the House of Commons and the House of Lords are
18 separate entities, separately governed and managed, yet occupying the same Palace
19 of Westminster estate. Structures are not mirrored in each House, but have evolved
20 over time, reflecting cultural and historical change. Parliament has variously been
21 blamed for the Brexit stalemate, obstructing executive decisions (mandated by
22 referendum), organisational dysfunction, low levels of trust (expenses scandal),
23 corruption (expenses scandal), bullying and harassment (particularly of female staff).
24 Confusion over the move from a hybrid parliament under COVID19 restrictions in
25 May 2020, can be added to this list. Often it has been governance and leadership of
26 parliament that has come to the fore in such debates.
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

37 The challenge of administrative and management coherence aligned to political
38 governance has been acknowledged by the Commons itself. The 2014 House of
39 Commons Governance Committee report (HC692 2014), precipitated by the furore
40 over the recruitment of a new Clerk of the House, set out the unique organisational
41 character 'constrained only by its own legislation which it may reverse.' and 'run by
42 its 650 which places it in a different position not only from PLCs in the private
43 sector, but from every other public institution' (HC692 2014: 9).
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51 In the Commons, the contested sites of leadership centre on individual agents in
52 terms of governance including the political such as the Chief Whip, the Leader of the
53 House, and the non-political Clerk of the House, and the Director-General. The
54 Speaker may be an elected member and be from the political side, but is expected to
55 be non-political. In the Lords, four actors are key in a much flatter, self-regulating
56 forum. The Clerk of Parliaments is the senior administrator, the procedural and
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 political dimensions are divided between the Lords Speaker, the Leader of the
4 House, and the Senior Deputy Speaker (Chairman of Committees). The structural
5 sites of leadership and governance that exist are still fairly new (and following the
6 Commons Governance Committee report, now strengthened) and centre on the
7 Commons Commission and Lords Commission. The shift from an old boys network
8 of self-regulation has been slow and punctuated by activity driven by ‘windows of
9 opportunity’ (Yong 2018; Norton in Armitage 2010). Meanwhile the scrutiny
10 function in the Commons via the select committee system has strengthened in the
11 aftermath of the 2010 Wright reforms (Hindmoor et al 2009; ██████████
12 2018). Committees are now better resources, more autonomous, with elected chairs
13 and provide an import check on executive activity (Kelso 2016).
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23

24 **3. Observing dilemmas**

25 I concentrate on 3 settings which I observed during a parliamentary academic
26 fellowship (2016-2019). The fellowship gave me access to the Westminster estate and
27 a level of ‘insider’ status.⁵ These 3 settings represent points of leadership within the
28 Westminster Parliament, they are observations of everyday practice, but also of
29 power relations. In each setting I explore ‘everyday leadership dilemmas’. The first
30 two settings concentrate on individuals in positions of authority in parliament. The
31 first is the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Commons Speaker has a strong
32 claim to speak for the House as he has a threefold role as procedural lead,
33 administrative chair of the Commission and an external face exercised via his office
34 (Armitage 2010, Seaward 2010). The impact of Speaker Bercow on the Commons
35 demonstrates perhaps that a less institutional approach to analysing parliaments is
36 necessary. Speaker Bercow challenged convention and altered perceptions and shows
37 how critical actors can drive or block change (Geddes 2019c). The second setting is
38 the Lords Speaker, a relatively new post – crafted to reflect the self-regulating nature
39 of the House of Lords - occupied by former Minister, Lord Fowler (Russell 2013).
40 The third setting concentrates on the Chair of the House of Commons Liaison
41 Committee, focusing on the Chair of the Committee Sarah Wollaston. The everyday
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56
57 ⁵ I was awarded a parliamentary research fellowship in the Commons (2016-19) to research the prime
58 minister’s appearances before the Liaison Committee. This facilitated access to parliament for the
59 duration of the fellowship. See ██████████ et al. (2016) and ██████████ and Kelly (2020). During the
60 fellowship, I also shadowed and interviewed the Commons Speaker and the Lord Speaker, in addition
to attending the Commons and Lords Commission.

dilemmas I address are key to understanding political choices made by legislative leaders in terms of governing parliament, leading parliament and shaping identity (Geddes 2019b). These are not the institutional paradoxes often found in the legislative literature, but everyday conflicts, narratives and discourses that are navigated and negotiated. Below, I offer vignettes from each case to illustrate negotiation of these dilemmas. Each actor, I observed negotiates multiple dilemmas, but here I present a snapshot of everyday interaction.

In each case I undertook ethnographic research, observing and interviewing key actors. The intricacies of the day, the nuances, the body language, and the variety of tasks can be observed and noted in real time, rather than reflected on in interview with the subject (Boswell et al 2019). The interaction, pressurised environment, can be silently noted, as 'being there' from a privileged position in the corner of the room (Crewe 2016; Fenno 1978; Nader 1972; Niemi 2010; Rhodes 2011, 2015). In the case of the Commons Speaker John Bercow and the Lords Speaker Norman Fowler I spent time shadowing each to observe their work in parliament.⁶ For both I was given access to the diary for the day, able to sit in on meetings (where both parties had agreed in advance to my presence) and sometimes discuss the contents of the meetings. In the case of the Liaison Committee, I observed the evidence sessions with the prime minister on several occasions, each time from the privileged position of the parliamentary clerks table behind the committee. The following draws on notes taken at the time, informal discussions, and observations.⁷

4. The governance dilemma

Parliament contains both political and administrative leadership, with both communities involved in running Parliament but, without a shared institutional purpose. For instance, the Commons and Lords Commissions contain multiple actors with often conflicting agendas; each act as the strategic governance body, but delegate downwards. Partisan, personal, bureaucratic interests are represented on the Commissions. The Commons and Lords Speakers chair the Commissions, but

⁶ I shadowed the Commons Speaker for two sitting days (on Wednesday 25 April 2018 and Tuesday 15 May 2018) sat in the Chamber, sometimes in the lower gallery, and attended the Commons Commission (on Monday 14 May 2018). I shadowed the Lords' Speaker on 11 September 2018 and attended the Lords Commission on the same day.

⁷ The confidential nature of the exchanges means I refer only to matters of interaction, process and function, rather than the content in this article.

1
2
3 others are accountable for decisions.⁸ Moreover, the House Commissions have a
4 weak history of governance and strategy, as decisions of the cross-party
5 Commissions require consensus—which is not easy to achieve. The dilemma is one
6 of who governs the institution, makes decisions and implements them?
7
8
9

10
11 Whilst, the Commons Speaker spends much of his time front stage, his governance
12 role is undertaken back stage. Here I focus on two key governance activities. The
13 Daily Conference (at 1030 each sitting day) is chaired by the Speaker and acts as a
14 vital clearing meeting for the day's parliamentary business. It deals first with Urgent
15 Questions, runs through the timings and order of business on the order paper with
16 any changes, considers possible Government statements. The decision on which
17 Urgent Question to accept is communicated immediately from the meeting so that
18 the sponsoring MP and the Government are notified as soon as possible. The list of
19 speakers is considered, selection of adjournment debate topics and there is some
20 speculation on which minister will respond to the day's adjournment debate. The
21 meeting is attended by the Clerk of the House, who leads on procedural issues,
22 Principal and Assistant Table Clerks, Deputy Speakers, and the Sergeant at Arms.
23 Other issues of the day that may impact on the wider estate are also raised. The
24 meeting is swift, informative and to the point. Officials stand for the Speaker when
25 he enters. He is not a passive recipient of the business from officials, but is actively
26 engaged and can shape some of the decisions. The meeting is over within 30
27 minutes, as decisions will impact on the parliamentary business of the day. The
28 Speaker presides over a series of dilemmas, some procedural, some political, some
29 relating to the days business. He listens to advice, but imposes his will on decision-
30 making.
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47

48 The second key governance instrument is the Commons Commission, which takes
49 place, as with the Daily Conference, in the Speaker's study once a month. The
50 location gives the Speaker a level of ownership of the governance process. The
51 Commission is chaired by the Speaker, though the Secretariat support comes from
52 outside his immediate office staff. Though the Commission contains lay members
53
54
55
56
57

58 ⁸ Such others have seen the strange appearance of opposition minor parties at the despatch box.
59 Liberal Democrat Tom Brake MP answered Commission questions on the floor of the House up to
60 December 2019, followed by Pete Wishart MP from the SNP.

1
2
3 and officials, there is palpable political tension in the meetings. The body is uncertain
4 if it is acting in the interests of the Commons as a whole, Commission members,
5 MPs, political parties or indeed Parliament. The Speaker therefore does have an
6 important role in directing discussion and summing up debate on the issues. The
7 meeting takes formal papers and is structured as you may expect a company or
8 trustee board meeting to be conducted. Officials present papers and navigate through
9 questions from the Commission members. Though the highest administrative body,
10 which other Committees report to, decisions and progress on matters is still
11 dependent on the government making time in the parliamentary agenda.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19

20 The Commons Speaker's study and offices in general are large compared to the
21 cramped nature of the Palace of Westminster. The rooms are imposing and the
22 power relationship obvious. Whoever the guest is, they have to wait outside the study
23 for the Speaker. The Speaker utilises this ritualistic and symbolic authority to impose
24 on political and administrative players. The resource exchange, strengthened by
25 tradition, gives him a predominance. The Commission is the key governance forum
26 where political and administrative communities meet, but the informal exchanges in
27 the Speaker's office are as important in agenda setting. Here the personal impacts on
28 the relational. The Speaker plays a pivotal role in shaping the business of the day, the
29 running of the order paper. The acceptance of an Urgent Question can impact on
30 Government schedules and alter the proceedings in the House considerably.
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

40 In this respect the governance dilemma for the Commons Speaker is negotiated,
41 utilising the ritual and authority of office and the dynamics of political space (Norton
42 2019). The formal governance trappings enabled him to assert authority from the
43 Chair whether it is procedural or administrative. He has a small staff to resource
44 him, but can assert his relational power over senior clerks, government and
45 opposition whips and others in informal one to one exchanges (with no notetakers
46 present). Even as Speaker Bercow's influence waned (mainly due to political division
47 over his Brexit interventions and personal behaviour), he believed he was in charge.
48 He negotiated through the dilemma by seeking alliances, and utilising the authority
49 of the office (backstage).
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59

60 **5. The leadership dilemma**

1
2
3 There are multiple contestable sites and claim-making individuals in Parliament,
4 several embrace a leadership role, others play this down. Here I focus on leadership
5 dilemma of the Lord Speaker. By contrast with the Commons Speaker, the Lord
6 Speaker is a relatively new position. Lord Fowler, the current incumbent is only the
7 third occupant of the post. The post was created in 2006 when the roles of the Lord
8 Chancellor were disaggregated. Lord Fowler is a former Conservative minister, he
9 succeeded Baroness D'Souza in 2016 who had previously been convenor of the
10 crossbench peers. The first elected Lord Speaker was Baroness Hayman, a former
11 Labour MP. The House of Lords is a self-regulating chamber and the role of the Lord
12 Speaker is not as extensive or established as the Commons Speaker. Leadership in
13 the Lords is a shared endeavour, primarily with the Leader of the House, the Senior
14 Deputy Speaker, (previous to 2016 the post was titled the Chair of committees). This
15 provides a triumvirate of leaders in the Lords.
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

26
27 According to the Companion to Standing Orders, 'the Lord Speaker has no power to
28 rule on matters of order' and instead 'the preservation of order and the maintenance
29 of the rules of debate are the responsibility of the House itself.' Furthermore the Lord
30 Speaker has no role in the selection of amendments, these and other roles rest with
31 the Chief Whip and Leader of the House. Following the Constitutional Reform Act
32 2005 which ended the tradition of the Lord Chancellor acting as the presiding officer
33 and created the position of Lord Speaker, peers concluded that changing the role
34 would be the 'slippery slope' to the loss of self-regulation (see Russell 2013: 85-86).
35 Therefore the Lord Speaker has not been empowered as a presiding officer, but is
36 essentially and rather counterintuitively the 'defender of self-regulation.'
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45

46 The Lord Speaker's office is not centrally located in the House of Lords. It is tucked
47 away in the corner of the Lords. It is away from the Leader of the Lords' office which
48 is located centrally. There is a sense of downplaying of the role to ensure it is not
49 regarded as *head* of the Lords or comparable to the Commons Speaker. The office
50 takes some finding and is small in comparison to the Commons. The Lord Speaker's
51 staff consists of a Private Secretary (PS), an overseas administrator, a press officer,
52 two deputy private secretaries and an apprentice. The rooms are smaller and he has
53 less resources than his counterpart in the Commons. There is also much less
54 ceremony and ritual associated with the position. The figure is less public and less
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 authoritative, deliberately so. He is reluctant to speak for the House of Lords and has
4 limited authority in the chamber or in other areas – peers do not need to lobby him
5 for speaking rights. There are multiple players who have procedural and
6 administrative responsibility and the Lord Speaker has less imperative to strengthen
7 relationships (lest he be accused of power building). He does not really *preside* over
8 proceedings, nor is an *officer* of the chamber, responsible for its running. However
9 he has a level of autonomy to act on reform on the size of the House, which he has
10 pursued, cajoling peers to accept. The chamber may be self-regulating, but it has
11 coherence around the role or function of the Lord Speaker. As such the Lords
12 provides an example less of collective, consensual legislative leadership, but
13 disparate, autonomous and detached legislative leadership.
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22

23 The leadership aspects that I observed are fairly ill defined and deliberately minimal.
24 In fact the Lord Speaker is at pains to downplay the leadership role. Many aspects
25 are shared with the Senior Deputy and Leader of the House, on an issue by issue
26 basis. The Clerk of Parliaments has a clear managerial role. The corporate aspect is
27 less fragmented than in the Commons. However the Clerk of Parliaments does not
28 answer to the Lord Speaker, rather he advises and consults. Therefore the Lord
29 Speaker's ability to direct is limited. Chairing of the Commission is largely a
30 facilitating function, rather than directional. However, his predecessor/s were keen
31 on expanding the outreach role, Lord Fowler less so. Internally he has been using his
32 own political capital to drive forward the Burns reforms via the campaign for an
33 effective second chamber. This has an element of self-preservation for the Chamber,
34 but is also recognition that the Office of Lord Speaker is the appropriate body to push
35 internal reform. Indeed much activity is inward looking. The Lord Speaker does not
36 speak on the floor of the House as the House self-regulates speaking. Leadership is
37 more relational than directional as the Speaker engages via the teams rooms to gauge
38 peers views on matters. I observed little direct lobbying of the Lord Speaker, the
39 office was not a hub of activity. The Lord Speaker treads carefully when expanding
40 his remit, I evidenced creeping authority over conduct issues relating to peers (and in
41 response to media queries) and external affairs. For instance, the Private Secretary
42 was keen to inform me of the Lord Speaker's new twitter account. Such external
43 activity suggests a gentle negotiation of the leadership dilemma, edging the Lord
44 Speaker to speak on behalf of the Lords, whilst wary of his predecessor's approach.
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

6. The identity dilemma

The collective and corporate nature of the UK Parliament has been neglected by the elected representatives as Judge and Leston-Bandeira (2017: 162) say ‘claim-makers do not primarily stand for, or make positive claims on behalf of, the institution itself.’ Parliament, therefore struggles with its identity as a holistic institution. Meanwhile, the administrative governance of the House Service has been strengthened (as noted earlier, in response to the 2014 clerk appointment crisis). And yet, it has struggled to make the case for restoring the Palace of Westminster and renewing engagement with the public, largely because the political masters have been reluctant to adhere to any collective need and identity (Meakin 2019). This dilemma is one of claim making and cultural collective identity. Politicians may push back against administrative identity strengthening, but then who ‘owns’ the narrative for parliament?

To explore the unfolding dilemma of identity, I turn to the Liaison Committee evidence sessions with the prime minister (Kelly and ██████████ 2020; ██████████, Kelso and Larkin 2017; ██████████ and Larkin 2018; ██████████ Kelso and Larkin 2016).⁹ In particular I focus on Theresa May’s final session as prime minister on 1 May 2019.¹⁰ The key actor in the drama of the Liaison Committee exchanges has to be subservient to an elite group of MPs (for at least 90 minutes) who dictate the terms of engagement (topics, style of questions, tone of exchanges and so on). The arrangement is combative, with 13 (or sometimes a few more) members facing the prime minister as witness. Members remain for the duration of the session (unlike in other evidence sessions) and the session has the performative drama of confrontation and tension. The Committee utilises the strengthened scrutiny function of select committees in empowering such cross-examination. The prime minister obfuscates and attempts to avoid traps. There is a legislative leadership element, each Committee member has an elected mandate from the whole house and authority as a Committee chair. The Chair of the Committee has additional authority,

⁹ I observed all the session with Theresa May from 2016 to 2019, usually sitting on clerks table behind the Committee members. I also interviewed members of the Committee, parliamentary officials and journalists.

¹⁰ The session commences at 1458 and concluded at 1633. The session took place in the Grimond room of Portcullis House in the Westminster estate. The topics announced in advance, covering aspects of Brexit, negotiations, security and trade. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/liaison-committee/news-parliament-2017/prime-minister-brexitevidence-17-19/>

1
2
3 and attempts to lead and direct such an independent group of individually
4 empowered and autonomous parliamentarians.
5
6
7

8 The chair negotiates the dilemma of parliamentary identity in the performative
9 public arena of the sessions. The theatre and drama of a select committee hearing as
10 explored by Geddes (2019b), places in this case the prime minister as the witness and
11 the Committee members as the interrogators. The power dynamics are reversed and
12 the prime minister is isolated. This is perhaps what accountability of the head of the
13 executive looks like (or should do, in comparison to Prime Minister's Questions). The
14 Chair appears to speak on behalf of parliament, is less partisan and as the committee
15 is senior, strengthens the identity of scrutiny. The extent to which the Chair is a claim
16 maker for the Commons is limited but drawing on such a range of cross party
17 Committee chairs and dealing with the most salient issues facing the government,
18 there is sense of collective endeavour.
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27

28 Backstage, the MPs negotiate the approach and group questions. The prime minister
29 enters the room with the Committee already in place, having met in private
30 Committee beforehand. The Committee is clerked by one clerk with an assistant
31 clerk, even so this is a very small team to service a Commons committee. The prime
32 minister is accompanied by a (political) parliamentary private secretary, and (civil
33 servant) Assistant Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. The prime minister sits on
34 her own in the front row, facing the Committee, her advisors sit directly behind her
35 with large folders.
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43

44 The format is now familiar to both the Committee and the prime minister, each
45 member of the Committee has around 7 or 8 minutes to conduct exchanges with the
46 prime minister. The Committee clerk sits to the left of the Chair (Health Select
47 Committee Chair and former GP, Sarah Wollaston MP¹¹) in the horseshoe and keeps
48 time throughout. The atmosphere is slightly tense. The participants include
49 committee chairs with strongly held views on Brexit from remain and leave
50 perspectives. There is little obvious party politics on display. The prime minister does
51
52
53
54
55
56

57 ¹¹ Sarah Wollaston resigned from the Conservative party, having been selected in an open primary
58 originally, joined the short-lived Change UK party and then sat as a Liberal Democrat MP until her
59 defeat in the 2019 general election. Her predecessor Andrew Tyrie MP, another independent minded
60 Conservative, intervened frequently to berate David Cameron when he appeared.

1
2
3 not look particularly comfortable. A smattering of journalists are also in attendance
4 including the BBCs Political Correspondent Laura Kuenesberg (who leaves after only
5 20 minutes).
6
7
8
9

10 The first prime minister to appear, Tony Blair, dominated the sessions, without notes
11 and relaxed with his jacket off. By contrast, Theresa May has a large folder – which
12 she constantly refers to - and appears tense and tetchy. Later it became apparent why
13 she may have been somewhat distracted, when immediately after the session it was
14 made public that she had sacked Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson.¹²
15
16
17
18
19

20 The Chair, in a calm and understated manner introduced the session and sets the
21 scene. The Chair intervenes to move discussion on and often to interrupt the prime
22 minister when she is repeating herself. The exchanges feel like a series of mini verbal
23 jousts, probing and prodding. May's game playing in the sessions, to avoid answering
24 the questions and use up time, is chided by the committee. There are some sharp
25 exchanges, in particular with Yvette Cooper, who shadowed May when she was
26 Home Secretary. May looks straight at Cooper at one point, narrows her eyes and
27 tilts her head. She insists she is compromising on her Brexit plan. However the prime
28 minister is determined not to give anything away, she 'will answer the question the
29 way I choose to answer it.' There is no warmth or conciliatory exchanges from the
30 prime minister, eager not to cede ground to the committee. The chair makes a point
31 of asking where the Green paper on social care is, reflecting wider concerns in the
32 House. With constant restating of a position, often reading out sections from her
33 brief, May avoids reflecting on decisions made, but equally is not interested in
34 speculating on the consequences for the future, for instance on the implications of no
35 deal. This session fits into a pattern of evidence given by May to the Committee. The
36 sessions generally have been organised on Number 10's terms, at the very end of a
37 parliamentary session, sometimes the very last day before recess. Often the prime
38 minister has an engagement to get to, or plane to catch.¹³ It does not feel like a
39 priority for the prime minister and she leaves promptly at the end of this one.
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56 ¹² Coincidentally on 20 December 2017, just after Liaison Committee session with the prime minister,
57 Damien Green resigned from Cabinet. In private conversations a committee member noted to me that
58 the sessions seemed to coincide or be overshadowed by a resignation or sacking.

59 ¹³ Gordon Brown missed a flight and was late for the signing of the Lisbon Treaty due to an
60 overrunning Liaison Committee session in December 2007.

7. Reflections: collaboration and conflict leadership

These three cases offer ethnographic vignettes which explore the way three legislative dilemmas are navigated, or negotiated, by the parliamentary actors. Sitting, observing the ceremonial aspects of the roles, the formal refereeing in the Chamber and the less formal interaction with key players, I could get close to the exercise of parliamentary leadership and governance. I could also similarly observe a nascent form of (non-hierarchical) leadership in the Lords, as the Lord Fowler navigated through the collaborative, consensual and often conflicting relationships in the Lords. Furthermore, prolonged study of the prime minister's evidence sessions before the Liaison Committee put me close to an accountability mechanism, whereby a group of empowered parliamentarians engage with the key executive actor. The Liaison Committee represents the gradual strengthening of the scrutiny function of parliament, within a committee structure that has claimed the mantle of parliamentary identity (in terms of accountability at least).

Informality and private exchanges are crucial in each cases (Loewenberg 2007). Public navigation e.g. exchanges on the floor of the House, speeches, formal evidence sessions happen alongside informal and private bargaining. Private meetings are not minuted, exchanges in private offices do not have observers or note-takers, pre-hearing sessions decide questions and collaboration. Gaming is used to anticipate questioning in advance, the backstage impacts on the frontstage (Goffman 1990, Geddes 2019b).

Observing the formal (public) and (informal) bargaining and negotiating in parliament at close quarters, I can concur with Rhodes (2011) that the actors I viewed had 'immediate priorities and pressing problems'. Actions were less path dependent and rather based on the individual's understandings of the roles, whether Speaker in the Commons or Lords, or elite parliamentarians. They have multiple pressures and demands and carve out routes through the daily political joust, via a mixture of personal skill, public performance and autonomous management. For instance, the Commons Speaker has irritated the executive with his granting of Urgent Questions, extension of Prime Minister's Questions and liberal interpretation of procedure relating to attempts to delay Brexit. The Lord Speaker activity prefers

1
2
3 the tea room chat to any external activity on behalf of the Lords chamber (navigating
4 the leadership dilemma by soft relational activity). The challenging of the prime
5 minister by committee, albeit infrequently, does endow the chair of the Liaison
6 Committee with a certain level of leadership. This is very much the transference of
7 the 'I' into the 'we,' whereby we think of interdependent relations and functions,
8 rather than single, isolated functions (Elias 1991). In political work, protagonists
9 react both as emotional individual actors, but also within social webs of
10 interdependency (Crewe and Sarra 2019). These actors may appear autonomous, but
11 the 'I' becomes 'we' when situated within the context, and responding to everyday
12 dilemmas. Relationships with government, political parties, backbencher,
13 administrative staff, external actors (and occasionally academic researchers) come in
14 and out of daily working life.

15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25 Political astuteness (awareness, nous, political 'savvy') has been identified as the key
26 leadership skill in public managers, when faced with such 'disagreeing tribes'
27 (Hartley et al 2013; Hartley et al. 2019; Hartley 2017, 2018). Public managers have a
28 shared sense of purpose and outcomes to deliver, here however legislative leadership
29 is confronted by a series of unfolding dilemmas (Who governs? Who leads? Who
30 speaks for?), outlined above. Each serves to challenge the individual in office. On
31 governance, how far should the Commons Speaker get involved in administrative
32 management or indeed as the Brexit sage demonstrated, in setting his judgements
33 against the government of the day (and ignoring advice of the permanent clerks)?
34 Should the Lord Speaker break with the self-regulating nature of the Chamber to
35 push further reform of the composition of the House of Lords, so perhaps
36 safeguarding its future? Can Liaison Committee members make a prime minister
37 more accountable to parliament by asserting their collective legislative leadership
38 and strengthening the scrutiny function and hence collective identity of parliament?
39 And does the chair speak for the scrutineers?

40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53 Parliament lacks *hierarchical* leadership but benefits from multiple points of
54 leadership. Politicians (temporary) maintain a veto on *governance* arrangements
55 impacting on (permanent) staff. It has strengthened administrative *identity* while
56 actively avoiding *political* identity. These dilemmas are navigated on a daily basis,
57 rather than a fixed set of accepted paradoxes. The contingency of social (and
58
59
60

1
2
3 political) life are on display to the privileged observer, decentred and often atomistic
4 (Bevir 2013). Narratives are therefore generated and the dilemmas that unfold are
5 there to be observed. Elites confront daily dilemmas and act as actors would,
6 sometimes in public, often in private (or 'front stage' and 'back stage') (Goffman
7 1990; Geddes 2019). They construct relationships and deal with multiple pressures
8 and demands from internal and external sources. Legislative leadership here is
9 therefore an autonomous action, stretching and bending what is possible ([REDACTED]
10 2007). Leadership is atomised and can be stretched to accommodate the reformist
11 Speaker, or assertive Committee chair. There are multiple relationships both
12 formally constituted and informally constructed, but little collaborative or consensus
13 leadership. There is resource exchange (some actors with more resources than
14 others), veto playing, negotiating and bargaining.

15
16
17 However, legislative leadership in the UK parliament remains elusive to the external
18 eye. Collectively, parties are structurally advantaged (in procedural terms) in
19 determining topics, amendments and the policy narrative. The executive maintains
20 control of the agenda, time, and can even attempt to manipulate the constitution to
21 close a session for their own political advantage. However, parties and governments
22 may be *from* parliament, but they are not *of* parliament. Within the structure of the
23 parliamentary 'village', leadership – in the form of an authoritative voice to speak
24 for, lead, manage and defend the institution - is absent (Winetrobe 2003; Norton
25 2016). There are claim makers, some with mandates (Speakers and Chairs), but few
26 obvious followers and few clear goals and targets. Also absent in this highly
27 competitive political space are orchestrators and facilitators, encouraging and
28 embedding democratic governance (Laing and Walter 2016). Autonomous agents
29 roam - often unfettered - navigating through the multiple conundrums, and
30 unfolding dilemmas.

References

Armitage F. (2010) The Speaker, Parliamentary Ceremonies and Power *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol.16, No.3, September 2010, pp.325–337.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Bevir, M. (2013). *A Theory of Governance*, University of California Press.

Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R. A. W (2015) 'Interpretive Political Science: Mapping the Field', in M. Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes Eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Interpretive Political Science*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge: 3-27

Bolden R, Witzel, M., Linacre N., (eds) (2016) *Leadership Paradoxes: Rethinking Leadership for an Uncertain World*, Routledge.

Boswell et al (2019) State of the field: What can political ethnography tell us about anti-politics and democratic disaffection? *European Journal of Political Research* 58: 56–71, 2019.

Crewe, E. (2005). *Lords of Parliament*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Crewe, E. (2015). *The House of Commons*. London: Bloomsbury.

Crewe, E. (2016) Ethnography of Parliament: Finding Culture and Politics Entangled in the Commons and the Lords, *Parliamentary Affairs*

Crewe, E and Evans P (2018) 'The significance of rituals in parliament' in Leston-Bandeira, C. and Thompson L (eds) *Exploring Parliament*, Oxford University Press.

Crewe, E. and Sarra, N., (2019). 'Chairing UK select committees: walking between friends and foes'. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 72(4), pp.841-859.

Cronin, T and Genovese, M. (2012) *Leadership Matters: Unleashing the Power of Paradox*, Routledge.

Elias, N. (1991) *The Society of Individuals*, Oxford, Blackwell.

1
2
3 Fenno, R.F. (1978). *Home style: House members in their districts*. Boston, MA:
4 Little, Brown.

5
6
7 Geddes, M., (2019a). The Explanatory Potential of ‘Dilemmas’: Bridging Practices
8 and Power to Understand Political Change in Interpretive Political Science. *Political*
9 *Studies Review*, 17(3), pp.239-254.

10
11 Geddes M. (2019b) *Dramas at Westminster: Select committees and the quest for*
12 *accountability*, Manchester University Press.

13
14 Geddes, M. (2019c) ‘The Shadow of John Bercow’, blogpost, *The UK in a Changing EU*,
15 <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-shadow-of-john-bercow/>

16
17
18 Geddes M. and Rhodes R. A .W. (2019) ‘Towards an Interpretive Parliamentary
19 Studies’, chapter J. Brichzin, D. Krichewsky, L. Ringel and J. Schank (eds.) *The*
20 *Sociology of Parliaments*, (pp87-107) Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

21
22 Goffman, E. (1990). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New edition).
23 London: Penguin.

24
25
26 HC692 (2014) House of Commons Governance Committee, ‘House of Commons
27 Governance’, HC HC692 2014

28
29 Hartley, J. (2017). ‘Politics and political astuteness in leadership’. In J. Storey, J.
30 Hartley, J.-L. Denis, P. ’t Hart, & D. Ulrich (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to*
31 *leadership* (pp.197-208). New York: Routledge.

32
33
34 Hartley, J. (2018). Ten propositions about public leadership. *International Journal*
35 *of Public Leadership*, 14 (4), 202-217.

36
37
38 Hartley, J., Alford, J., Hughes, O., & Yates, S. (2013). *Leading with political*
39 *astuteness: A study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United*
40 *Kingdom. Australia and New Zealand School of Government and the Chartered*
41 *Management Institute*, UK.

42
43 Hartley, J., Sancino, A., Bennister, M., Resodihardjo, S.L. (2019) ‘Leadership for
44 Public Value – Political Astuteness as a Conceptual Link’, *Public Administration*.

45
46 Helms, L. (2014) in *Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*

47
48 Hindmoor, A., Larkin, P., and Kennon, A. (2009). Assessing the Influence of Select
49 Committees in the UK: The Education and Skills Committee, 1997–2005. *The*
50 *Journal of Legislative Studies*,
51 15(1), 71–89.

52
53
54 Judge, D., & Leston-Bandeira, C. (2018). ‘The institutional representation of
55 Parliament’. *Political Studies*, 66(1), 154-172.

56
57
58 Kaye, R (2003) *Regulating Parliament: the regulating state within Westminster*,
59 Working Paper LSE 2003

1
2
3 Kelso, A. (2009). *Parliamentary Reform at Westminster*. Manchester: Manchester
4 University Press.

5
6 Kelso, A. (2016). 'Political Leadership in Parliament: The Role of Select Committee
7 Chairs in the UK House of Commons'. *Politics and Governance*, 4(2), 115–126.

8
9
10 Laing, M and Walter, J (2016) 'Great expectations and great limitations' in *The*
11 *Routledge Companion to Leadership* edited by John Storey, Jean Hartley, Jean-
12 Louis Denis, Paul 't Hart, David Ulrich.

13
14
15 Loewenberg, Gerhard (2007) 'Paradoxes of legislatures' *Daedalus*; Summer; 136, 3;
16 ProQuest pg. 56.

17
18 Meakin, A. (2019) 'Westminster Restoration and Renewal', *Hansard Society* blog see
19 [https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blog/westminster-restoration-and-renewal-a-](https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blog/westminster-restoration-and-renewal-a-year-on-from-the-commons-vote-to)
20 [year-on-from-the-commons-vote-to](https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blog/westminster-restoration-and-renewal-a-year-on-from-the-commons-vote-to)

21
22
23 Nader, L. (1972). 'Up the anthropologist: Perspectives gained from studying up'. In
24 D. Hymes (ed.), *Reinventing anthropology*. New York: Random House.

25
26 Niemi, H (2010) 'Managing in the Golden Cage, an ethnographic study of work,
27 management and gender in parliamentary administration', PhD Thesis, Helsinki.

28
29 Norton P. (2012) 'Patterns and dynamics of legislative leadership' in Helms, L. (ed)
30 *Comparative Political Leadership* Palgrave.

31
32
33 Norton. P.(2017) 'Speaking for Parliament' *Parliamentary Affairs* (2017) 70, 191–
34 206.

35
36 Norton P, (2019) Power behind the Scenes: The Importance of Informal Space in
37 Legislatures, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Volume 72, Issue 2, April 2019, Pages 245–266,

38
39 Quine, W. (1966) *The Ways of Paradox*, Harvard University Press

40
41 Rhodes, R.A.W. (2011). *Everyday life in British government*. Oxford: Oxford
42 University Press.

43
44
45 Rhodes, R.A.W. (2018) What is decentred analysis? In, Rhodes, R.A.W. (ed.)
46 *Narrative Policy Analysis: Cases in decentred policy. (Understanding Governance)*
47 London. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-21.

48
49 Rhodes, R. A.W & 't Hart, P. (2014) *Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, OUP

50
51 Russell, M (2013) *Contemporary House of Lords*, Oxford

52
53
54 Russell, M. and Cowley, P., (2016). 'The policy power of the Westminster parliament:
55 The "parliamentary state" and the empirical evidence'. *Governance*, 29(1), pp.121-
56 137.

1
2
3 Seaward, P (2010) (ed.) *Speakers and Speakership: Presiding Officers and the*
4 *Management of Business from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, the
5 Parliamentary History Yearbook Trust.
6

7
8 Thompson, L., (2016). 'Debunking the myths of bill committees in the British House
9 of Commons'. *Politics*, 36(1), pp.36-48.
10

11 Winetrobe Barry K. (2003) Political but not partisan: Marketing parliaments and
12 their members, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 9:1, 1-13.
13

14 Yong, B. (2018). 'The Governance of Parliament'. In A. Horne, & G. Drewry (Eds.),
15 *Parliament and the Law*, 75-102. (2nd). Oxford: Hart Publishing
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60