

## Leading through challenging times: can the sector respond to the wider crisis of political and civil society leadership?

### Voluntary Sector Studies Network Day Conference

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017, Open University, Milton Keynes.

#### Programme

---

**9.45-10.30** Registration and coffee

**10.30** Introduction to the day and brief history of Milton Keynes – James Rees

#### Morning session

Leading in different contexts: Exploring positionality, power and participation

**10.50-11.25** Presentation 1:  
**Expansive opportunity makers but selective opportunity takers? Positional agility and tactical social skill in English third sector social service**  
*Alison Body, Canterbury Christ Church University & Jeremy Kendall, University of Kent*

**11.25-12.00** Presentation 2:  
**Challenging positionality and power relations in participatory and action research**  
*Stephanie Denning, School of Geographical Sciences ESRC-funded PhD, University of Bristol*

**12-12.45** VSSN AGM and sharing news about research and events

**12.45-2.00** Lunch

#### Afternoon session

Challenging traditional leadership discourse: new directions in research

**2.00-2.35** Presentation 3:  
**The trouble with charismatic leadership: Voluntary sector leaders' reflections on the collapse of Kids Company**  
*Jon Dean, Senior Lecturer in Politics and Sociology, Sheffield Hallam University*

**2.35-3.10** Presentation 4:  
**How failure to lead second order change causes organisational paralysis**  
*Candy Perry, Managing Director, Concinnity Consultancy and Research Ltd*

- 3.10-3.45** Presentation 5:  
**Leading Voluntary Organisations: an investigation of patterns, narratives and the value of authenticity**  
*Epaminondas Koronis and Katalin Illes, University of Westminster, Westminster Business School*
- 3.45-4.00** Coffee break
- 4.00-4.30** Plenary and panel discussion
- 4.30** Close

## Abstracts and information on authors

---

### **Presentation 1:**

#### **Expansive opportunity makers but selective opportunity takers? Positional agility and tactical social skill in English third sector social service**

*Alison Body, Canterbury Christ Church University and Jeremy Kendall, University of Kent*

In a challenging climate of austerity policies, relationships between Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) and the State are often contentious, with great sophistication required to secure a reasonable degree of stability and continuity in services and relationships. This paper draws on new empirical evidence from a local case study context of TSOs delivering children's preventative services, to explicate and exemplify the skills embodied in TSOs which seem to allow them to navigate these complex situations relatively successfully. In particular, we draw on the concept of 'social skill' as developed in strategic action fields theory to frame an analysis of original interview data from 23 leaders of TSOs. We consider how TSOs have collectively helped shape the political and economic conditions under which they operate, pinpointing a range of skilful tactics we associate with the concept of 'positional agility' which differentiate these organisations as especially accomplished.

***Alison Body** is a Senior Lecturer for the School of Childhood and Education Sciences, in the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. As former Commissioner of children's early intervention services, she has held senior management positions across the voluntary sector, including fundraising, business management and strategic development roles. Her research interests focus on the relationship between social policy, the voluntary sector and impacts on the lives of children, young people and their families.*

[ali.body@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:ali.body@canterbury.ac.uk)

***Jeremy Kendall** is Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent. He has published widely on the voluntary/third sector in the UK and the EU more broadly, with a particular emphasis on social policy analysis and on*

*comparative perspectives. His teaching ranges over socio-economic and political aspects of civil society and social policy, and he currently directs Masters Programmes in Civil Society, NGO and non-profit studies, and in International Social Policy.*

[j.kendall@kent.ac.uk](mailto:j.kendall@kent.ac.uk)

### **Presentation 2:**

#### **Challenging positionality and power relations in participatory and action research**

*Stephanie Denning, School of Geographical Sciences University of Bristol*

The researcher can both challenge, and be challenged by, positionality and power relations in the research process. This paper is based around the experience of establishing and leading a project responding to children's food poverty through a national charity 'MakeLunch'. In doing so I combined action research and participatory geographies, and had multiple identities as a researcher, volunteer, and project leader. With a research focus on the experience of how faith can motivate volunteers, running the project both challenged, and presented challenges, around positionality and power. In researching food poverty a positionality of relative privilege could have been inhibiting to myself as the researcher and project leader through what Brydon-Miller (2004, 3) calls the 'terrifying truth'. The terrifying truth is the choice of acting or not; the inevitability of making mistakes, yet the possibility for positive change. However, positionalities are transient, not fixed, and through action research this presented the opportunity to emphasise research preparation and to enact social change. Relating to positionality, participatory methodologies are also not immune to challenges from power. This was apparent both in relationships between volunteers, and between volunteers and myself as the project leader. Yet action research gives the potential to challenge power relations. Therefore, if positionality and power are actively engaged with and recognised as transient, then rather than being a 'terrifying truth' they can present opportunities as well as challenges in the research process that combines research and voluntary sector leadership.

***Stephanie Denning** is a final year Human Geography PhD student at the University of Bristol. Her work combines philosophy with the geography of religion and participatory geographies by running a faith-based social action project. Stephanie ran the project through the national charity 'MakeLunch' to tackle children's holiday hunger and food poverty in the school holidays. The research focuses upon volunteers' experiences at the Lunch Kitchen, exploring through the concept of affect within non-representational theories how and why people volunteer, and how they persist in volunteering over time. [stephanie.denning@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:stephanie.denning@bristol.ac.uk)*

### **Presentation 3:**

#### **The trouble with charismatic leadership: Voluntary sector leaders' reflections on the collapse of Kids Company**

*Jon Dean, Politics and Sociology, Sheffield Hallam University*

In 2015, Kids Company, a charity for disadvantaged young people ostensibly situated in South London, but with small outposts in Liverpool and Bristol, collapsed. Despite its

relatively small geographic coverage, Kids Company at one time received over one fifth of the Department for Education's grant budget. Over that summer, the UK Government had offered it £3m to continue its work, but with strict expectations of change, particularly in leadership and governance. These conditions were not met, and the charity was forced to close. Much of the charity's reach was determined by the passion and talent of its founder and chair Camilla Batmanghelidjh. Batmanghelidjh was close to politicians from all parties, and highly successful in keeping Kids Company funded. Drawing on data from 23 qualitative interviews with voluntary sector leaders from a range of organisations in Sheffield and London, this paper will explore how charity Chief Executives, Directors of Communication, lead fundraisers, and Senior Policy Officers saw the collapse of Kids Company. They reflect on what they saw as the charity's reliance on its closeness to people at the top of government, symbolic power, and the charismatic authority of its founder. The swift decline of Kids Company indicates how thin the veil of presentation can be. Through interview data this paper will reflect on how a sector of over 180,000 organisations felt about one charity causing so many problematic headlines and the ensuing lessons for voluntary sector leadership.

*Jon Dean is a Senior Lecturer in Politics and Sociology at Sheffield Hallam University. His research focuses on volunteering and the third sector, particularly on inequalities that exist within the sector along social class lines. His work has been published in journals, including Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, Voluntary Sector Review and Sociological Research Online. Jon's first book, 'Doing Reflexivity: An Introduction' is published by Policy Press. [j.dean@shu.ac.uk](mailto:j.dean@shu.ac.uk)*

#### **Presentation 4:**

##### **How failure to lead second order change causes organisational paralysis**

*Candy Perry, Concinnity Consultancy and Research Ltd.*

Leadership paradigms are surely shaped by the leader's route to leadership. If the route to leadership is through successful management, which is the result of control, adherence to rules, and reputation management [being seen to get things right], then a leader's paradigm is based on control, rules and reputation management. Of itself this is not a bad thing: successful leaders must be in control of their organisation. However successful leaders must also accurately adapt their organisations to ensure they continue to deliver sustainable value which enables vision to be achieved. If the skills to do this have not been learned on the journey, then where do leaders learn them? What happens if they don't? And what might be done to improve leadership?

This paper explores leadership in 5 voluntary sector organisations paralysed by unresolvable conflict in which the author has recently undertaken action research to co-design breakthrough improvement to the satisfaction of stakeholders.

Data analysed using Evaporating Clouds revealed evidence of paradigm lock (Hutchin, 2001) with respect to first order and second order change; exposed difficulties in accurately diagnosing need for and securing consensus for adaptive change; and shed new light on unintended, undesirable impact of consequent errors of omission and commission (Ackoff RL, 2006) resulting in leadership paralysis.

**Candy Perry** is Managing Director of Concinnity Consultancy and Research Ltd, an independent organisation which works in complex service operations to diagnose and deliver transformational change. Candy specialises in using whole system approaches including systems dynamics and theory of change to construct systematic approaches to complex change. She has worked successfully on change interventions at Healthwatch Birmingham, National Childbirth Trust, Glasgow NHS Health Board, Derbyshire Community Hospitals Foundation Trust, Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, the British Fluoridation Society and Education for Health. [candy@catalyticconsultancy.com](mailto:candy@catalyticconsultancy.com)

#### **Presentation 5:**

##### **Leading Voluntary Organisations: an investigation of patterns, narratives and the value of authenticity**

Epaminondas Koronis and Katalin Illes, Westminster Business School, University of Westminster

The voluntary sector and non-profit organisations have always been at a crossroads. Voluntary sector theories and practice may either choose to implement mainstream management theory into a different not for profit context (Beck et al., 2008); or they depend on a relatively small set of knowledge that embraces the particularities of the sector (for example, Classens, 2015; Richards & Hall, 2016). Research on leadership of voluntary organisations has been stratified into an exploration of leadership styles (Bang, 2011; Northouse, 2009) and the development of conceptual considerations based on member-exchange theory. In our paper we reverse the order and argue that mainstream leadership theory would benefit from an investigation of leading processes and realities in non-profit organisations. Leaders in the voluntary sector have to operate in a volatile, resource-constrained context while engaging employees and donors around a specific cause. We draw on Bourdieu's "Distinction" and the notion of Symbolic Capital to conceptualise leaders as symbolic capital mechanisms. An empirical investigation of the three largest NGOs in Greece reveals three key patterns of 'successful' non-profit leaders: the personalisation of the organization; a strong influence of the mass media; and the narrative rationalisation of internal challenges and resources scarcity. On a deeper level, interviews with members of the researched organisations reveal the role of perceived authenticity and 'applied wisdom' in constructing influence and stability within an otherwise volatile organisational setting. Although we are reluctant to specify methods of good leadership, we argue that there are findings and lessons that could inform leadership research which has been examining the concepts of wisdom (see Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2011).

**Epaminondas (Nodas) Koronis** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Leadership and Professional Development at the University of Westminster. He gained his Masters and PhD from the University of Warwick and completed post doctoral research at George Washington University. He has undertaken academic positions at Warwick Business School, Cranfield University, University of Lincoln and has also taught on MBAs in the UK, USA and Cyprus. His research focuses on Resilience, Leadership and Organisational Crises and has been published in the Journal of Applied Business Research, Journal of Marketing Management and European Management Review, among others. [e.koronis@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:e.koronis@westminster.ac.uk)

**Katalin Illes** is a Principal Lecturer and Acting Head of the Leadership and Professional Development Department at the University of Westminster. She is a passionate promoter of transformational change through leadership development, with extensive international experience. Katalin's research interests are ethical leadership, building trusting relationships in organisations and innovative ways of leader development. Her recent publications include 'Spiritual based Entrepreneurship: Hindu and Christian Examples' (2017) in Chatterji, M. and Zsolnai, L., *Ethical Leadership*, Palgrave-Macmillan; and with L. Zsolnai 'The role of spirituality in business education', (2015) in *Society and Business Review*, 10 (1).  
[k.illes@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:k.illes@westminster.ac.uk)