# The First Leadership? <br> Shared Leadership in Indigenous Hunter-Gatherer Bands 

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#### Abstract

This study draws upon Australian Aboriginal traditional knowledge and anthropological studies on contemporary African Bushmen bands to trace the history of leadership back to its indigenous roots. Leadership in prehistoric and contemporary bands represent a 'pure' horizontal leadershipfollowership paradigm 'untainted' by the vertical paradigm, which has dominated the rest of humanity for thousands of years. At a general level therefore, the study encourages further exploration of indigenous leadership as a horizontal paradigm; it may progress the IL discourse towards recognising the value of a horizontal paradigm. Perhaps even more importantly, a horizontal leadership paradigm is one of the unique contributions that IL can make to the mainstream leadership discourse. The paper also identifies a generic framework for shared leadership derived from a traditional Aboriginal law story.


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## Introduction and Purpose

In a thorough study of leadership theories House \& Aditya (1997) found that $98 \%$ of theories and empirical evidence at that time were distinctly American in character, such as individualistic rather than collectivistic, stressing follower responsibilities rather than rights, assuming hedonism rather than commitment to duty or altruistic motivation and assuming centrality of work, and emphasizing assumptions of rationality rather than asceticism or religion. Existing leadership models are perhaps better described as supervisory leadership models (Seers, et al 2003) produced under one paradigm cemented by 'thousands of years of cultural conditioning’ (O’Toole et al 2003): the (mostly) implicit theory that vertical hierarchical leadership under the single command of a top-chief is required to 'prevent organizational chaos and anarchy' (Locke 2007).

This article is an attempt, to question this paradigm, by examining indigenous leadership represented by hunter-gatherer bands. They have no leaders at all, not even top chiefs. Band organisations go back to Palaeolithic times, i.e. before the advent of agriculture some 11000 years ago, a time never visited by leadership scholars, not even writers contributing to management history (eg. Pindur et. al. 1995) or describing leadership paradigms (eg. Avery 2004). "The ever more rigorous application of the scientific method to all subjects and disciplines has destroyed even the last remnants of ancient wisdom". Schumacher (1977, p14).

The paper is a contribution to the discourse on indigenous leadership (IL) and the argument is that far from being a recent phenomenon, shared leadership was once humanity's dominant leadership paradigm, maybe even the first. This paper argues that the IL discourse needs to recognise that the roots of Indigenous Leadership come from a horizontal paradigm not a vertical one. This is why the study of leadership in prehistoric and contemporary bands is of value for both the IL discourse and the general leadership discourse; bands represent what can be called a 'pure' horizontal leadershipfollowership paradigm.

The paper draws on empirical data from ten Aboriginal law stories, preserved through oral tradition by the Nhunggabarra people that once lived in North-western New South Wales in Australia, as told and interpreted by their last custodian Tex Skuthorpe. Secondary data from social anthropology studies of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies are used to broaden the perspective to band organisations in general. A general framework for shared leadership is derived from the story 'The Black Swans`, arguably one of the oldest surviving records of a code of conduct for leaders, and its implications for the discourse on shared and distributed leadership is discussed.

## The Band Organisation

Band is in social science a term used primarily in social anthropology. Although scholars in the field argue about the definition and how to classify different cases (Lee 1979, Service 1979, Berndt \& Berndt 1999), the term generally refers to a society of lowest known complexity. The band has no formal institutions, such as formal laws, police and treaties; it has no leaders with positional powers and no other regular economic specialisation except by age and sex. It has no permanent single base of residence, but moves regularly around a territory with defined borders and its members live primarily from hunting and gathering. Social anthropologists regard hunter-gatherers in bands as the oldest of all organisations going as far back as humanity, several hundred thousand years; 15000 years ago all humans still lived in band organisations (Sanderson, Alderson 2005). This means that the dynamics; how humans in prehistory developed their version of shared leadership is cloudy. Data are available however, to study highly evolved 'end states', represented by Aboriginal traditional law and anthropological studies of contemporary bands. This is the aim of this paper.

## Australian Aborigines - The Nhunggabarra People

The current generally accepted archaeological theory is that the first people arrived in Northern Australia some time between 40,000 and 60,000 years ago (Flood 1999). The band organisation and nomadic life of the central desert-living Aborigines was, (with some exceptions see below), similar to African bushmen bands. However, very little is known, besides traditional tales, about how the Aborigines in the relatively fertile Australian southeast lived before the Europeans disrupted their societies.

It seems that people living along the rivers - like the Nhunggabarra people - were probably living a more sedentary life. Their camps resembled villages according to the early explorer Thomas Mitchell (1839/1847). The Nhunggabarra and their 25 neighbouring peoples were loosely united in a federative structure; they may once have had a population exceeding 15,000, i.e. 500-1000 people per community on an area approximately the size of Belgium (Sveiby \& Skuthorpe 2006). When the white settlers arrived in this area, outbreaks of diseases, unwittingly introduced by the British colonialists, had already severely depopulated it. Atrocities and massacres committed by the early white settlers completed the tragedy, (Reynolds 1981, Broome 2005). Today the original Nhunggabarra people have disappeared almost entirely from their home country - their language is not spoken, and not even the name of their country remains in official records.

Australian Aborigines differ from contemporary African hunter-gatherers in that they had developed more institutionalised codes of behaviour. In addition to the most elaborate kinship rules found among hunter-gatherers (Barnard 1999) and the most complex cosmology Dunbar (1999), Australian Aborigines also have a totem system, which a.o. regulates land custodianship, and marriages (Berndt \& Berndt 1999). Unlike the African Bushmen the Australian Aborigines also have a specialist function, the wiringin (shaman), the custodian of sacred law. Aboriginal law stories contain spiritual knowledge, cosmology, sustainable land management, diplomatic codes and how to behave in times of birth and death (Berndt \& Berndt 1999, Sveiby \& Skuthorpe 2006). Some law stories regulate leadership practice and this paper features one of them - the Black Swans story below.

## The 'Law'

Nhunggabarra 'law' was a code of moral and social behaviour contained in stories. The law regulated life in the community and between communities. Its authority was unquestionable and considered to have been given to the Nhunggabarra at the time of creation by the first law maker, an early ancestor. Although the code was not a law in the Western sense its power over individuals' minds and behaviours was probably higher than the behavioural rules in our societies today. Hence, both Aboriginal people today and anthropologists use the term 'law' because the behavioural code provided a moral authority outside the individual. Offences were recognised and carried both social sanctions and, in severe cases, penalties, which were enforced by the wiringin. (Berndt, Berndt 1999 p.336ff).

The law stories tell the ideal behaviours and they do not show how the Nhunggabarra actually behaved before the white people arrived. It is not possible to know how common offences were in the pre-European Aboriginal societies, but what matters for the purpose of this article is what was considered to be 'normal' behaviour.

## The Black Swans - a Story about Leadership

The following law story was told and interpreted by the custodian Tex Skuthorpe. The paragraphs are numbered for ease of interpretation.

1. When Wurunna returned to his people he brought with him some hunting tools never seen by men. These, he said, were made in a country where there were only women and they had given them to him in exchange for his possum skin rug. They had told him that
they would trade more hunting tools for more possum rugs. The people agreed to trade and to go to the women's country.
2. Wurunna warned his people that there were unknown dangers on the plain because he was sure the women were spirits - they had told him there was neither death in their country nor any night. However, Wurunna said there was an evil smell on the plain which seemed to have death in it.
3. Wurunna planned to smoke all the men so that no evil would be carried back to their people. Wurunna also arranged a plan for warning the men to leave if they stayed too long on the plain. He would take his two brothers with him and would turn them into two large swans. As there were no birds or animals on the plain they would be noticed quickly.
4. As soon as everyone was ready Wurunna would send these swans to swim on the lake opposite the women's camp. Seeing them, the women would be frightened and forget the men, who could then go onto the plain and get what they wanted. He told every man to take an animal with him and if the women tried to interfere, they should let the animals go and, again, the women would be distracted and the men could make their escape with the tools.
5. They set out - Wurunna and his brothers went to the far side of the plain and Wurunna lit a fire to smoke his people. From inside himself he brought out a large crystal and with its power he turned his brothers into two swans. 'Bibil, bibil,' they said. When the women saw the smoke they ran towards it crying, 'Wi-balu, Wi-balu,' but then they saw the two large white birds swimming on their lake and ran towards them.
6. The men seized the opportunity and took all the tools they wanted from the women's deserted camp but the women saw them and came angrily towards them. Then each man let go of the animal he had brought - far and wide on the plain went possums, bandicoots and others. While the women chased the animals, the men dropped the possum rugs and, taking the tools, rushed towards Wurunna's fire.
7. The women, seeing the men leaving with all their tools, ran after them but the men passed into the darkness and smoke and the women were afraid to follow - there was no
dark or fire in their country. The women were so angry they began to fight among themselves and their blood flowed fast so that it stained the whole of the western sky where their country is. Now, whenever the people see a red sunset they say the Wi-balus must be fighting again.
8. Wurunna now travelled on his journey to the sacred place where Baayami lived. He forgot about his two brothers even though they flew above him crying, 'Bibil, bibil', so that he would change them back into men. By the time Wurunna reached the sacred place, the swans were very tired and rested on a small lagoon.
9. The eaglehawks, messengers of the spirits, who were flying to deliver a message, saw the two swans on their own lagoon. In their rage they swooped down, drove their claws and beaks into the poor white swans, and then carried them far away from the sacred place. As they flew, they plucked out the feathers of the swans, which fluttered down the sides of hills and lodged in between the rocks with blood dripping beside them - these formed flowers which are now known as paper daisies.
10. The eaglehawks flew on until they came to a large lagoon near the big salt water. At one end of the lagoon were rocks on which they dropped the swans. The eaglehawks then remembered the message they had to deliver and left the swans almost featherless, bleeding and cold. The swans thought they were going to die far away from their country and their people.
11. Suddenly, they felt a soft shower of feathers falling on them, warming their bodies. High on the trees above they saw hundreds of crows similar to those they had sometimes seen on the plain but had believed to be a warning of evil. The black feathers covered the swans except on their wings, where a few white ones had been left. Also the down under the black feathers was white. The red blood on their beaks stayed there forever.
12. The swans flew back to their country and their people. Wurunna heard their cry, 'Bibil, bibil', and knew it was his brothers, although when he looked he saw not white birds, but black birds with red bills. Sad as he was to hear their cry, Wurunna could not change them back into men. His power as a wiringin had been taken from him for daring to go, before his time, to the sacred place.

## Interpretation of the Story

The Black Swans story describes the dire consequences of a seemingly innocent action - the trading of possum skin for tools. As is so often the case in Aboriginal stories, the story teaches by showing us the consequences of abuse - in this case abuse of the personal power that superior knowledge can give. What follows is the interpretation by Tex Skuthorpe.

## 1 - Power as Ego-trip

Wurunna, who started the chain of events, did so because personal curiosity and ego drove him, not the needs of his people. He desired the tools because the new technology represented something new and different and it would have value as a new form of power. However, he did not understand the technology he was taking, not the women nor the customs of their land. He did not know the concept of trade - his only concept was to steal what he wanted.

## 2 - Use Fear to gain power

Wurunna did not respect the people he had just met and did not care to learn. He did not even realize that the death he could smell on the plain was the smell of the possum skin rug, which he carried himself. His ignorance did however, not prevent him from using the little he knew to instil fear into his own people - the fear for that which is different - so they would go along with him and his plans.

## 3 - Use superior Knowledge to gain power

Wurunna then abused his status position as a person of superior knowledge to persuade people to change without telling them why. He ruthlessly induced his own people to invade another country to get what he wanted. He even used his own brothers to protect himself and to achieve his own ends. He showed disrespect to his people by exploiting the power he had been given for his own benefit.

## 4 - Manipulate the Ignorant

Wurunna showed disrespect to the innocent animals to achieve his ends. The animals were taken into a foreign country and had no choice but to follow him. The people followed blindly even though it was going against all they had been taught.

## 5 - Conceal the True Purpose

Wurunna then again abused his knowledge \& his power to generate 'smoke and mirrors'. He showed disrespect to the women when he confused and concealed the true purpose of his actions.

## 6 - Ignore the Risks

In their ignorance the people brought change that would last forever, without understanding the consequences of their actions. They brought anger to the women's country and because they were blinded by their anger, the women became blind to the innocence of the animals - all they wanted to do was hurt them. By stealing the tools, the people brought dishonesty and disrespect into their lives.

## 7 - When Things go Awry: Blame Others

The women turned on each other as soon as something went wrong. By their actions, they brought chaos, dishonesty, distrust of each other, disloyalty and disrespect into their world. They realised the consequences of what they had done and tried to blame each other - but their realisation came too late to change it. They made decisions without considering the consequences and then turned on each other when it went wrong.

## 8 - Do not take responsibility...

Wurunna finally walked away from the disaster of his creation. He made a final show of disrespect by forgetting his brothers. All he wanted was even more knowledge - he went to a place that could give him more knowledge and power. He did not want to see what was happening around him or have any knowledge or responsibility for the actions he had taken.

## $9-\ldots$ and leave the followers to save themselves

The brothers now got in real trouble, but Wurunna ignored his team and everything that happened to them. He was focused solely on himself and what he wanted to achieve so he did not see - or did not want do see what he had done. Chaos and death followed him and he still did not see it.

## 10 - Impose dire consequences on the followers

The pain of his brothers, Wurruna's team mates, was severe. Not only were they suffering and would die; even worse was that if they died outside their country they would not be buried properly, an eternal curse.

## 11 - Do not learn from the mistakes

Because they now understood their mistakes and what had happened, what the brothers had thought was evil actually offered them help! One of the morals of the story is that out of all the 'bad' comes a great deal of learning if we take notice of what is happening and if we take responsibility for what we do wrong. By facing our mistakes we learn.

## 12 - Avoid the issues for too long

Even Wurunna at last understood the consequences of what he has done, but it was now too late to change it. He had to live with remorse, shame, distrust, guilt, disrespect, loss of his powers - he had sacrificed all that we need to live a happy and fulfilled life.

## Summary of the Interpretation

The Black Swans story follows the common style in Aboriginal law stories; in showing us the antithesis and the punishment incurred the story expects the listeners to infer the opposite as the ideal to strive for.

According to the Nhunggabarra ideal leaders should be characterised, not by their ego-driven quest for personal power, but by a genuine motivation to serve their people. They were expected to respect all people; in particular the less knowledgeable and the less fortunate. They must consider the consequences of actions and ask for advice before they acted; reasons for their decisions were supposed to be transparent and they were expected to review the results of their actions. If things went wrong, the leaders had to own up to their mistakes, take personal responsibility for any negative effects and try to compensate any followers who suffered. They should act with wisdom and broadmindedness in their relations with the communities outside their country. They had to honour and respect their differences and encourage their people to learn from different ways of being and the different perspectives of other countries.

## Respect

Respect is a recurring theme in the Nhunggabarra law stories. When Aborigines use the word 'respect', it does not carry the conventional meanings of today - that is, to convey a feeling of admiration of someone or obedience towards a higher authority. 'Respect' in the Aboriginal sense is an action a verb. It means that you allow people to see you in 'your true form'; authentic, as you are. You show your authentic self only to people you respect, people you think worth the effort, and who you consider as having the capacity to understand what you mean and who you are. Showing your authentic self to another person is, as such, a sign of respect. Tex Skuthorpe sometimes thanks a group of listeners for "the respect". He is not thanking them, as most of them probably believe, for listening to him, but he is thanking them for allowing him to see them as they truly are.

Respect permeated one's understanding of what it was to be a Nhunggabarra person. At the core was a general respect for knowledge itself. The respect for knowledge gave all knowledgeable individuals automatically an influential position. Their influence, however, was balanced by respect
the opposite way: knowledgeable people were supposed respected the integrity of others and had to lead without imposing themselves on others and without giving outright orders. The followers would, in turn, respect the leader and not try to usurp the leader role.

## Horizontal Leadership in Theory Today

In mainstream leadership theory the discourse on shared and distributed leadership, (SL/DL), comes nearest to a horizontal leadership paradigm. The term shared leadership (SL) can be traced to education management (Reid 1967, Peters, Scoville 1984), but has risen to prominence only in the last few years as an umbrella term covering a broad range of alternatives to the dominant vertical leadership paradigm (Pearce, Conger 2003a) . The term distributed leadership (DL) was discussed in 1986 (Brown, Hosking) in conjunction with management in social movements, but it was not considered as a concept worthy of scholarly attention until it emerged as an alternative to single chain of command in a program funded by US Department of Education in 1996 (House \& Aditya 1997).

The SL/DL discourse can be understood as being an early pre-paradigm era; a reaction against the dominant vertical leadership paradigm. Pre-paradigm eras are often random (Kuhn 1970) as the SL/DL field indeed appears to be. Research is in an embryonic stage, exploring new metaphors like 'transmission' (Buchanan et al. 2007) and characterised by a wide range of definitions. Contributions are predominantly theoretical and often uncritical (eg. Manz 2005, Gronn 2002). One can treat SL and DL as synonyms; other terms that have been used are dispersed leadership (eg. Currie 2007) and peer leadership (House, Aditya 1997).

Pearce \& Conger (2003) trace efforts to find alternatives to the dominant individual-focused vertical paradigm theories back to 1924 with Follett's notion the law of the situation, i.e. the person with the most knowledge and experience in any given situation should be appointed leader, regardless of rank or hierarchical position (Follett 1951). They argue that leadership seen as a process or as an activity is a more useful perspective and they define shared leadership: "a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group organizational goals or both".

To see leadership as a process means that organisation is both the outcome of action and a vehicle for it (Gronn 2002), and that leadership is but one of a number of inputs to the process influenced by environmental factors, which can substitute leadership (Kerr \& Jermier 1978). Gronn provides
an indicative taxonomy of three stages of concertive action which lead to conjoint agency. The taxonomy, however, lacks reference to its conceptual origin, concertive control, originally developed theoretically by Tompkins and Cheney (1985) to describe a group of people acting 'in concert'. Concertive control in teams develops through the values and norms of team members and becomes manifest in the interaction processes of the team members themselves by peers within the team, who enforce the concertive control system on each other (Wright, Barker 2000). Team members are expected to conform to the team norms and rules, with violation resulting in various forms of sanctioning by the team. It is a form of community policing that can be 'more powerful, less apparent, and more difficult to resist than that of the bureaucracy' (Barker 1993 p. 408).

SL/DL literature generally presupposes an environment where SL/DL is emerging or implemented within an organisation, public or private, characterised by the vertical leadership paradigm (eg. Mayo et al. 2003, Gardner et al. 2005, Hooker, Csikszentmihalyi 2003), which may be more or less benevolent toward SL/DL or even actively driving it (eg. Jackson 2000), for instance, as a SuperLeader (Houghton, et al 2003). Contributions discuss ways to empower or encourage SL (eg. Manz and Sims 1987, Pearce et al. 2008), emancipate (eg. Auwal 1996, Jaros 2006) or facilitate (Houghton et al 2003) the rise or emergence of SL.

The issue is the dearth of organisations built under a horizontal paradigm. Today's mainstream organisations are built and governed under the vertical paradigm and they function in societies with vertical paradigm institutions. Hence the paradoxical situation (Fletcher and Käufer 2003) is that SL/DL can exist only if an existing vertical leadership structure introduces it. But even in those cases members will have an implicit leadership theory (Seers et. al 2003) coloured by the vertical paradigm. As the eighteen historical bases of shared leadership SL/DL listed by Pearce and Conger (2003b) bear witness of: It is virtually impossible to find a 'pure' state of shared leadership 'untainted’ by the vertical leadership paradigm in today's organisations. SL is portrayed as being dependent on a vertical power, which can change its attitude overnight. Disappointment with the progress of the discourse is evident (eg. O’Tool 2003); Gronn (2008) considers 'hybrid’ leadership a more accurate description of the current SL/DL practice.

## Contemporary Hunter-Gatherer Bands - Common Traits

Comparative studies (Gluckman 2006, Barnard 1992, 1999, Service 1971, 1979, Woodburn 1982, Sanderson, Alderson 2005) on the organisation of hunter-gatherer bands find similarities across all
continents. The following summary is taken from empirical studies on African Bushmen bands. Australian Aborigines are different in some respects, as discussed above.

African Bushmen bands consist of family units, each comprising some 2-8 people. The bands are rarely larger than 50 people and regularly disperse into family units for the winter season, when food is less abundant. Social groups are flexible and constantly changing in composition. There are no strict rules regarding group affiliation. Movement of all types, in bands, between bands and geographical areas are seen as healthy and desirable in themselves. Adults are free to join and leave the band at will and they frequently do. Some, particularly men, even choose lives as eremites.

Adults are not dependent on specific other people for access to basic requirements. Relations between people stress sharing and mutuality, but do not involve long-term binding commitments and dependencies. No tightly defined group monopolises resources.

Contemporary hunter-gatherer bands assert strong egalitarian values; equality is repeatedly acted out and publicly demonstrated. The value of sharing is emphasised and reinforced by peer pressure on a daily basis. Sharing of more valuable resources, such as meat, are regulated by strict rules, which ensure wide distribution.

## Leadership without Leaders

One might believe that hunter-gatherer societies, which tend to be characterised by fluid organisation and 'chaotic social arrangements’ (Lee 1979 p.54) and absence of formal governmental and legal systems, would require 'strong men' to act as judges and policemen. However, there are (and were) no leaders at all in hunter-gatherer bands. Instead, there are several codes of behaviour, among them the kinship system. Guided by these rules adults have and feel a responsibility for the functionality of the band and they initiate and apply 'management practices' to influence the functionality.

## Personal Influence

There are no differences in material wealth and no formal leaders in hunter-gatherer bands. But there is not equality in status; some band members are more influential than others. Anthropologists measure influence as the extent to which opinions attract public support during decision processes. Under that criterion knowledge and experience of the matter in question and personality are characteristics that carry most weight.

However, a person, who has expertise in one matter, will not necessarily, be influential in another; for instance (Silberbauer 1981, 138-190) observed little or no "overflow" of prestige in the G/wi band he studied. Leadership shifted quite unpredictably among acknowledged experts with an occasional "dark horse". Discussions tended to be emotionally calm with a lack of competitiveness. Barnard (1992), in searching for personality qualities that make persons more influential in a !Kung band, concludes that an absence of certain traits is the most common attribute. The most influential people are the 'opposite of arrogant, boastful, overbearing or aloof'. These traits absolutely disqualify a person as leader, (ibid, p.345). Modesty in all respects is the hallmark of an influential !Kung band member.

Generally, older people are more influential than young in bands, (Service, 1979, Silberbauer 1981, Barnard 1992, Berndt \& Berndt 1999). Also, in some h-g societies, particularly among Australian Aborigines, men have a more visible role than women in decision making. But the main common criterion for leadership, irrespective of continent, seems to be generally acknowledged expertise in the matter under deliberation (Berndt \& Berndt 1999, Silberbauer 1981) and the situation (Tonkinson 1988).

## Conflict resolution

While the anthropologist literature consulted for this study agrees that h-g bands generally can be characterised as non-authoritarian, sharing and caring, avoiding hostility rather than fighting and cooperative rather than competitive, intra-band conflicts are not uncommon. The general approach to conflict resolution is to make sure that grievances are addressed at as an early stage as possible, before they become serious enough to cause serious damage in relations. The first and most important conflict resolution is to talk. In fact, the !Kung have been characterised as the most talkative people in the world (Lee 1979, p.372ff). Much of their talking seems aimed at testing the air for any potential grievances.

The potential for conflict is further minimised by the codes of behaviour. Kinship and values provide criteria by which a range of actions can be judged right or wrong. Kinship also regulates how to behave and communicate towards all members in the band in order to resolve a conflict. Other 'management methods' to resolve a budding conflict can be to organise a feast and make sure the people involved are forced to communicate. Exorcising dances (a.k.a trance dances) are
performed to dispel non-specific tensions among bushmen societies. The initiatives to such occasions may come from men and women, old and young, (Service 1979).

If a conflict grows to involve the whole band, consensus is applied. Consensus is not unanimity of opinion or decision - it is a process that ends when most members of the team agree on a clear option and the few who oppose it think they have had an opportunity to influence that choice.

## Discussion

This paper has presented an analysis of shared leadership in hunter-gatherer bands, which once probably was humanity's dominant leadership-followership paradigm. The paradigm has proven to be remarkably resilient in the few contemporary hunter-gatherer bands that still survive the onslaught on their habitats.

Contemporary hunter-gatherer societies and band organisations have given important contributions to social exchange theory (Sahlins 1974), but they are absent from organisation theory and leadership research. This is unfortunate, because studies from a leadership perspective on the vast empirical research accumulated in, for instance, social and evolutionary anthropology represent non-mainstream data, which would be valuable at this stage of the field.

At a general level, therefore, the study encourages further exploration of the horizontal leadership paradigm; it is one unique contribution that the discourse on indigenous leadership can make to the general leadership discourse.

The paper also identifies two specific contributions, developed under a horizontal paradigm, to further understanding of shared leadership in today's organisations. One is a generic framework for shared leadership derived from the Black Swans story. The other is what we may learn from the meetings between horizontal and vertical paradigms in bands.

## A General Framework for Conjoint Agency under a Horizontal Paradigm

Gronn (2002) suggests three successive stages in a process of institutionalisation of concertive action: Spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations and institutionalised practices. The Black Swans story prescribes practices in the third or even a fourth stage: they have become institutionalised in the form of an explicit code of conduct. Wurunna, the archetypical selfenhancing (Michie, Gooty 2005) and corrupt (Pearce 2008) leader, is punished; hence the opposite is the self-transcending behavioural ideal. The story identifies twelve ideal leadership codes and one
ideal followership code of conduct. They are outlined in a 'modern' form by the author in Table 1. Other stories (see Sveiby, Skuthorpe 2006) prescribe further follower behaviours; they are summarised in Table 2.

## Leadership Code of Conduct

1. Do not take the leadership role for ego reasons - you are there on behalf of the followers.
2. Do not use fear to influence (fear of competition, job losses, etc).
3. Do not keep information to yourself - share.
4. Do not exploit ignorance (of customers, of followers, etc).
5. Do not say one thing and do another - walk the talk.
6. Do not ignore risks for others (in the operation, when launching new products, etc).
7. Do not blame others when things go wrong.
8. Do not conceal problems occurring - take responsibility.
9. Do not leave the followers alone to save themselves (in times of downsizing, etc).
10. Do not inflict damage on the innocent bystanders (such as society).
11. Do not repeat mistakes - acknowledge and learn from them.
12. Do not avoid the issues - change direction before it is too late.
13. Do not impose your own view on other people.

Table 1. Code of Conduct for temporary leaders derived from the Black Swans (1-12) and Crane \& Crow story (13). (Source Sveiby, Skuthorpe 2006)

## Followership Code of Conduct

1. Do not follow a leader, who shows disrespect toward followers.
2. Defer to more knowledgeable people.
3. Do not usurp the role of another person.

Table 2. Code of Conduct for temporary followers derived from the Black Swans (1) and other stories (2-3). (Source Sveiby, Skuthorpe 2006)

One Nhunggabarra law story (the Crane and the Crow, cited in Sveiby, Skuthorpe 2006) prescribes 'role-splitting'; a mechanism for division of labour. Roles can be seen as patterns of behaviour (Katz and Kahn 1978), which allow individuals to know both what others expect of them and what to expect from others. The individual Nhunggabarra roles may once have emerged organically, but the process for allocating roles described in the law stories had become highly institutionalised; the roles were pre-planned by the women already at the stage of determining suitable marriage partners and finally allocated at birth.

The roles connected with fishing (net-making, trapping, catching, cooking), hunting (tracking, spearing, collecting and cooking), teaching of stories and many other activities were divided in this way. For example, every story had four custodians; all four would know the whole story, but each was allowed to teach only their own part. Each hunter would hold all the knowledge about an animal and its related ecosystem, and each would be able to perform all four roles (for instance in an emergency), but each was allowed to perform only their own role. Role-splitting reduces the risk
that someone would develop a power monopoly; it increases the number of interfaces between leader and follower roles and it forces leaders and followers to interact, i.e. it increases interdependencies (Gronn 2002) by creating complementary roles.

A multitude of roles created a multitude of role leaders and the law added support and authority to the role owners by also requiring respect for the person fulfilling their role. This meant that a leader was safe in the role - but only as long as they showed respect to the followers. The Nhunggabarra person with a certain role had undisputed leadership and power in that field of knowledge, but at the same time they had to accept the leadership of others and be the follower in other knowledge fields. So every adult had both leader roles and follower roles. Both roles were temporary; who had the leader role and who had the follower role depended on situation, task and context. This is crucial; unless the roles are transient the follower code of conduct may lead to permanent subservience.


Figure 1. A generic horizontal paradigm framework for shared leadership derived from Aboriginal Law:
Conjoint action as the result of interactive influence moderated by mutual respect and substitutes for leadership.

Figure 1 depicts conjoint action as the outcome of a process of interactive influence between leaders and followers moderated by mutual respect and supplemented by substitutes for leadership. It is a generic framework developed under a horizontal paradigm; it avoids the vertical paradigm, both the predominant top-down leadership dyad and its 'radical’ vertical opposite, to turn the leadership followership dyad upside down and to see leaders as dependent on followers (Meindl 1995). The
framework does not predetermine the number of leaders and followers; examples from contemporary bands suggest that the numbers fluctuate depending on task, situation and context.

The framework allows for at least two possible leadership approaches leading to conjoint action; one is the serial emergence model originally suggested by (Conger, Pearce 2003) with either explicit or implicit coordination (Gronn 2002). Implicit coordination and role differentiation have been found to increase team efficiency (Seers et al. 2003). An example of serial emergence with implicit coordination and/or role differentiation (unclear which) comes from the memoires of the Australian labour activist Mary Gilmore (1986). She describes a team of Aborigines, who were felling and positioning trees as a barrier in a river, probably in the 1870's: ‘Every man was alert; no man got in another's way; and each was captain in his own place.'

The other approach is a process where all members of the organisation feel a responsibility for maintaining harmony and act accordingly. Examples from contemporary Bushmen bands described above can illustrate. One is the constant watch-out for potential causes of disharmony, addressed by constant talking among the !Kung. The other is 'management actions' to keep the cohesion of the group, maintain harmony and avoid internal conflict (Barnard 1992, Lee 1979).

A key component in the framework is respect. Respect - downwards, upwards and sideways prevents leaders' power abuse and follower alienation/obstruction. Respect also counteracts negative effects that may come of concertive control. The concept of respect in the Aboriginal sense is quite similar to the concept of authenticity proposed by Avolio et al (2004) and Gardner et al. 2004). The difference is that their concept of authenticity is developed under the vertical leadership paradigm while respect assumes a horizontal relationship between temporary leaders and temporary followers. Rule \#13 in Table 1, that leaders should lead without imposing their view on the followers, forces leaders to lead by example, an authentic leadership ideal also identified by Avolio et al (2004).

The shared leadership process is supported by substitutes of leadership Kerr \& Jermier (1978). In hunter-gatherer bands they are numerous and combined, they become quite strong. Unlike substitutes identified in modern organisations, the substitutes in bands give clear rules on how to behave also in contentious tasks and on how communicate to reduce conflict and they define criteria against which proposals can be measured when members are faced with difficult decisions. The most important substitutes among hunter-gatherer bands are kinship, high skills levels and abilities
of the adults and closely-knit groups, (Kerr \& Jermier 1978), strong shared values in general (Podsakoff, MacKenzie 1997), shared collective values and team orientation (Day et al. 2004) and, since all adults were potentially self-sustainable, the capability for self-leadership (Manz, Sims 1980).

One might say that in bands the substitutes of leadership function as live 'law books' and 'management counsel' embedded in people; they do not replace formal chiefs and judges, but they empower adult band members to do their jobs. These are positive aspects of strong substitutes, and vertical paradigm organisations lack them to large degree. The negative aspect, however, can be rigidity. There was and is in bands no mechanism to change the kinship rules and the codes of conduct - except by evolution. For organisations of our times this is unthinkable, so the generic framework in Figure 1 needs to include codes of conduct for both leaders and followers about how to change the rules.

Leadership under a horizontal paradigm such as the one above can be summarised under a Golden Rule: Lead others as you wish them to lead you.

## Vertical Meets Horizontal

The first written record of the meeting between the vertical leadership paradigm and the horizontal paradigm of a hunter-gatherer band is from January $29^{\text {th }} 1789$. The author was the captain of the marines, Watkin Tench, who came across a group of Australian Aboriginal men walking on the beach three days after the First Fleet, arrived in what was to become Sydney Harbour. Tench (1996:57) makes this entry in his diary:
It would be trespassing on the reader's indulgence were I to impose on him an account of any civil regulations, or ordinances, which may possibly exist among this people. I declare to him, that I know not of any, and that excepting a little tributary respect which the younger part appear to pay those more advanced in years, I never could observe any degrees of subordination among them. [author's underscore].

His condescending entry resonances with disbelief - both attitudes were to dominate the British colonial governments in the years to come. The British leaders, governed by the vertical paradigm, could not cope with a people, who neither recognised chiefs with positional powers nor political leaders. During 1800s the British, therefore, instituted a system of appointed 'chiefs’, who were given brass plaques as a token of their ‘distinction’. The forced introduction of vertical leadership
on people familiar only with the horizontal paradigm had disastrous social effects, which still prevail in Aboriginal society today. However, they are outside the scope of this paper.

The Black Swans story shows a horizontal paradigm opinion about the vertical leadership paradigm and it is not a pretty picture - almost Machiavellian. It tells the band members that a self-enhancing individual, who exploits hierarchical status, must be stopped early on or else the band's existence is in danger. Also the constant watch-out behaviours of contemporary bands suggest high risk awareness in this respect.

This begs the question about the stability of the horizontal paradigm, a question raised by both Conger, Pearce (2003) and Seers et al. (2003). The resilience and longevity of the horizontal paradigm in bands from prehistory into our days shows that it can be stable over a very long time indeed. However, the data of this study suggest that SL requires constant maintenance if it is to remain stable - maybe even more so today when the implicit leadership theory (Seers et. al 2003) of both leaders and followers is ruled by the vertical paradigm.

How do/did members of bands maintain stability? Studies on contemporary African hunter-gatherer bands indicate that their form of shared leadership requires members, who are willing and capable to take on both leader roles and follower roles, just as the SL/DL discourse postulates (eg. Conger, Pearce 2003).

One factor seems to be transactive memory (Seibert et al. 2003) aided by education; skills and knowledge are traded across generations via socialisation, explicit codes of conduct and stories. The Nhunggabarra law stories contain explicit leadership and followership codes of conduct, which were taught and internalised during adolescence (Sveiby, Skuthorpe 2006).

A third factor is the strength of leadership substitutes. In bands they formalise relationships and communications, thereby empowering adult band members to deal also with difficult situations and conflicts of interest, tasks which in modern societies and organisations are considered to be the roles of judges and top chiefs. Although substitutes of leadership have generated much scholarly interest since Kerr's and Jermier's seminal paper in 1978, it has never been suggested that substitutes may replace top management.

A fourth factor is the size of the group, an issue raised also by Conger and Pearce (2003).
Contemporary African hunter-gatherer bands vary between 10 and 100 individuals; thereof perhaps half are adults with capacity to influence. Above that size they tend to disintegrate. When individual band members have a free choice many seem to prefer to opt out (Barnard 1992) rather than to face a polarised situation (Seibert et. al. 2003) head on. On the other hand, contemporary bands form loose co-operative structures; there is also some evidence of federative structures in prehistoric Australia comprising much larger groups and with quite elaborate institutions and processes (See Sveiby, Skuthorpe 2006 for more detail). This suggests that large organisations built under the horizontal paradigm may look quite differently compared to organisations built under the vertical paradigm.

Last but not least, a large number of other practices and factors found in Nhunggabarra law (NL) and in anthropological studies on contemporary bands (AR) facilitate SL and counteract barriers. This suggests that bands have had the group leadership capacity (Day et. al 2004) to respond environmental factors and new situations and develop measures accordingly from prehistory onwards. These factors became interwoven in the context of all other measures, together creating an almost ironclad paradigm, resilient and stable over time.

In Table 3 a list of those factors is compared to the list by Seers, et al (SKW 2003) and other studies.

| Facilitators of Shared Leadership in theory | Nhunggabarra Law (NL) and contemporary <br> bands in anthropology research (AR) |
| :--- | :--- |
| Task requires role differentiation (SKW) | Role splitting (NL). Creates division of labour |
| Multiple exchange relationships (SKW) | Role splitting (NL). Increases interdependencies |
| Group size; larger than 6 , up to a point where <br> coordination requires formalisation (SKW) | Band sizes vary between 10 and 100; bands above 100 <br> tend to disintegrate (AR). |
| Generalised exchange norms (SKW ) | 'Sharing' and generalised exchange characterise h-g <br> bands (NL, AR). |
| Team agrees on shared explicit codes of conduct for <br> concertive control. (Wright, Barker 2000) | Explicit codes of conduct contained in law stories were <br> taught and internalised (NL) |
| Shared collective values (Podsakoff, MacKenzie 1997, <br> Day et al. 2004) | Shared values emphasizing equality, sharing and <br> community characterise h-g bands (NL, AR) |
| Barriers to Shared Leadership in theory | Nhunggabarra Law (NL) and contemporary <br> bands in anthropology research (AR) |
| Skepticism toward the idea of shared leadership among <br> both leaders and followers (SKW) | Bands enforce shared leadership (AR) and outlaw a <br> vertical paradigm (NL, AR). |
| Evolutionary evidence of status differentials among both <br> humans and animals. (SKW) | Wide range or rules (NL) and concertive control (AR) to <br> counteract differentiation. |
| One or two leaders usually emerge in leaderless groups. <br> (SKW) | Wide range of rules (NL) and concertive control (AR) to <br> restrain status seeking individuals. |
| Individual differences in status seeking - non-competitive | Roles allocated to all adults and rules to ensure parity |


| individuals defer (SKW) | leader-follower (NL), community policing (AR) and rules <br> (NL) to suppress competitive behaviours |
| :--- | :--- |
| Implicit leadership theories; group members expect <br> members, who fit cognitive schemas to act in leadership <br> roles (SKW) | Probably the same - except that cognitive schemas in <br> bands generate expectations of leadership and <br> followership under an Horizontal paradigm (AR). |
| Individual lack of receptivity to SL (Conger, Pearce 2003) | Non-receptive band members could be expelled (AR) |

Table 3. Facilitators and barriers of shared leadership - a comparison.

## Limitations and Future research

How did leadership in bands emerge? Why did leadership in those early days of humanity become dominated by a horizontal rather than a vertical paradigm? Were there prehistoric bands where vertical leadership was tried and failed? In what settings did the vertical paradigm later replace the horizontal paradigm? These are among the questions beyond the scope of this paper, partly because of space limitations, partly because it has drawn from comparative studies with the aim to generalise. More specific studies on bands, examining the differences rather than similarities may shed light on those issues.

There is none or little work done on followership in shared leadership settings - only implicitly can a reader sometimes deduce that it can be both emotionally taxing, (eg. Brown, Hosking 1986), and time consuming. Confusion among followers and leaders alike (Manz, Sims 1995) in selforganising teams is therefore sometimes seen as evidence that SL is inadequate and impractical in modern organisations. A more likely reason is a lack of knowledge about how to share leadership among people in modern organisations, as (Conger, Pearce 2003) suggest. There must be a huge difference in skills between today's organisations about how to share leadership effectively compared to those of the members in prehistoric and contemporary bands. What are the skills we have lost?

This paper argues that substitutes of leadership can empower members of an organisation to make decisions independent also of top chiefs; in Aboriginal bands the substitutes had become quite institutionalised. Research on substitutes has been done primarily under the vertical paradigm, so it has focused on amending Kerr's and Jermier's original list or finding empirical evidence that substitutes actually do replace leaders (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie 1997 for an overview). No studies have been made to examine substitutes from a horizontal paradigm and no studies have been made on whether substitutes can replace also top chiefs. The example of bands suggest that substitutes have to be on the one hand powerful enough to give members skills and concrete tools to deal with difficult situations, on the other hand flexible enough to allow change. What are those
substitutes in modern organisations? They may exist under our nose; existing and successful shared leadership practices have a tendency to 'get disappeared' (Fletcher, Käufer 2003) in organisations ruled by the vertical paradigm. Which substitutes are the most effective from followers' perspective? Empirical studies in non-corporate settings might shed light on this issue.

A theoretical contribution would be to explore the concept of respect (in the Aboriginal sense) in modern organisations. A horizontal paradigm version of the authenticity concept by Avolio et al (2004) suitable for empirical testing under the horizontal paradigm could be a starting point.

## Methodological Issues

This article combines empirical data from traditional indigenous stories and secondary sources, such as anthropological research. Traditional indigenous stories are unusual as sources in management and leadership research, except in research fields, such as anthropology, where indigenous people are the object of study. In such studies their stories are used to understand the indigenous society in question, but the knowledge is not considered relevant for drawing conclusions valid for the Western industrialised societies. The issue is what is considered legitimate knowledge. The scientific concept of knowledge has not much in common with the knowledge of indigenous people, which is largely based on personal experiences and uncontrolled, undocumented observations and conveyed in stories via oral tradition. "Modern materialistic scientism leaves all the questions that really matter unanswered", as Schumacher (1977, p14) stated in his critique against the Western scientific reductionism. Hence much of humanity's oldest wisdom is lost.

Traditional indigenous stories are highly unusual as sources in organizational and leadership research. They are vulnerable compared to documents in one respect: oral tradition cannot guarantee word-by-word accuracy. This raises several critical issues. How authentic is the Black Swans story? How can we know that the story is not just a recent invention? How can we know that the interpretation is valid?

There are some aspects that suggest a fair degree of authenticity and validity. One is the message of the story, which displays values consistent with anthropologists’ accounts from contemporary hunter-gatherer societies both in Africa and Australia. Another is that the Australian Aborigines lived without much contact with the world outside Australia until 1789; the Nhunggabarra people probably had no contact before 1828. Since archaeological evidence shows a high level of cultural consistency in Aboriginal Australia as far back as 30000 years (Flood 1999), it matters less how
old the story is in years. Given the conservatism of h-g societies, even a young story would probably reflect very old traditions and values. One might speculate that the complexity of the Black Swans story suggests a gradual evolvement over time. The story in its current form could therefore be fairly young, while the core message could be quite old. A final guarantee is the elaborate system for maintaining consistency and safekeeping the law stories across generations that the Nhunggabarra had devised, (see Sveiby, Skuthorpe 2006). The accuracy of their system has been tested to some degree; seven of the ten stories (not the Black Swans story, however) published by Sveiby and Skuthorpe (2006) had been collected and published 110 years earlier, in 1896 by K. Langloh Parker. A comparison between the versions reveals a remarkable consistency.

The capacity of stories to capture and convey the essence of complex knowledge beyond the text itself has made story telling recognised as an effective communication method (Martin \& Powers 1981, Denning 2007), and stories have been the basis for study in linguistics (Schank, R. C. \& Abelson, R. P. 1995), who claim "that from the point of view of the social functions of knowledge, what people know consists almost exclusively of stories and the cognitive machinery necessary to understand, remember, and tell stories". In organization studies and related disciplines the recognition came in the 1990's, with a "methodological turn to language" (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000) and development of methods for analysing narratives (Czarniawska-Joerges 1995) and discourses (Potter 1997). Lately, stories have also been recognised as an effective knowledge management method (Denning 2000, Snowden 2002).

What we know about band organisation is primarily through observations made among present-day hunter-gatherers made by anthropologists, which raises the question to what degree conclusions about the past can be inferred. The anthropological primary research instrument, participant observation is not effective when the society under study has undergone dramatic changes (Aboriginal Australia) or no longer exists (the Nhunggabarra people).
African bushmen are these days regarded as the most primal of people living today, with genetic compositions that have been traced back more than 100000 years. However, as people their societies have not been isolated from influence by other African peoples or white colonists - on the contrary. Hence, detailed conclusions about past leadership practices cannot be inferred with certainty. One reason why anthropologists maintain that inferrals are possible is the extraordinary resilience of the h -g culture and their vigilant defence of their value system when exposed to other cultures, Woodburn (1988).

## Conclusion

This study has drawn upon Australian Aboriginal traditional knowledge and anthropological studies on contemporary African bands to argue that humanity's first leadership was indigenous: a horizontal leadership-followership paradigm, which is still practiced in contemporary bands. The existence of ain indigenous horizontal leadership paradigm shows that the common tendency to believe that vertical leadership is 'needed' for an organisation or a society to be successful is a paradigmatic belief - no more rational, realistic or logical than any other belief. The IL discourse can see this as an opportunity to make a unique contribution to the leadership discourse. The study encourages further exploration of indigenous leadership as a horizontal paradigm; it may progress the discourse towards recognising the value of a horizontal paradigm. Perhaps even more importantly, a horizontal leadership paradigm is one of the unique contributions that IL can make to the mainstream leadership discourse.

The paper does not suggest that modern organisations should apply the practices and the values of hunter-gatherer bands - on the contrary. But we can learn from the underlying Golden Rule: Lead others as you wish them to lead you. We cannot develop as strong substitutes of leadership in today's organisations as bands did in prehistory - but we can learn from the principle: substitutes of leadership can replace managers and even top-chiefs. We cannot apply all the methods of bands but we can develop our versions of them. This requires a research effort aimed at developing the indigenous horizontal paradigm further on its own terms. Fertile ground for studies can be organisations, which exist as far outside from the vertical paradigm as possible. By deriving a framework for shared leadership from Aboriginal law and anchoring it in the leadership discourse this paper has tried to demonstrate the value and the relevance for the IL discourse in doing so.

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