DRAFT: Cite published article

Sveiby, K. E. (2011). Collective leadership with power symmetry: Lessons from Aboriginal prehistory. Leadership, 7(4), 385-414.

Collective leadership with power symmetry: Lessons from Aboriginal prehistory

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Abstract

This article draws upon Australian Aboriginal knowledge in traditional law stories and anthropological studies of contemporary African bands. It applies the DAC ontology (Drath et al., 2008) to analyse two collective leadership models developed by forager peoples: one egalitarian 'upside-down hierarchy' and one power-symmetric model. Their existence has several implications for leadership research. Firstly, it encourages shared/distributed leadership scholars to shift their current reactive stage toward building theory of collective leadership on its own terms. This may require exploration of alternatives outside the mainstream both in terms of ontology and cases, and this article attempts to show the value in doing so. Secondly, it highlights the importance of power; the concept needs to be considered more explicitly in collective leadership theory. Finally, it shows that collective leadership is not a recent phenomenon confined to modern organizations – but rather a form for achieving conjoint action in human groups, developed by the first peoples on Earth, and still practised.

Keywords

Direction; alignment; commitment; power; power-symmetry; distributed leadership; shared leadership; story-telling, followership; collective control; indigenous leadership; respect; authenticity

Introduction and purpose

The inspiration for this article comes from a mystery, an 'empirical "finding'', [which] can't easily be accounted for by available theory' (Alvesson, 2007): that of leadership in Australian forager (hunter-gatherer) bands. The first mystified person to go on record was the British captain of the marines, Watkin Tench, who, on February 1 1789, came across a group of Aboriginal men walking on the beach when the First Fleet had arrived in what was to become Sydney Harbour. Tench (1996: 57) made this entry in his diary:

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> 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 entry resonates with condescension and disbelief – attitudes that were to dominate the British colonial governments in the years to come. They could not cope with a people who neither recognized chiefs with positional power nor political leaders, and they concluded that they had encountered a people who were so 'primitive' that they did not even have leaders. During the, 1800s the British colonial power, therefore, instituted a system of appointed chiefs; the well-known hierarchical form of leadership, defined as *a projection of influence from a focal leader to followers* (Cox et al., 2003: 51). *Power* is here understood as 'a potential to influence' (Bass and Bass, 2008: 265), which in hierarchical leadership is *asymmetric*, top-down. The forced introduction of hierarchical leadership by a foreign power on people practising a leadership culture here described as *collective* had disastrous social effects, which still prevail in Aboriginal society today.

Band organizations originated in the Palaeolithic (Stone Age) era, a time never visited by leadership scholars, not even writers contributing to management history (for instance Pindur et al., 1995) or describing leadership paradigms (for instance Avery, 2004). In a thorough study of leadership theories House and Aditya (1997) found that 98% of theories and empirical evidence at that time were distinctly American in character, such as individualistic rather than collectivist, 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.

By introducing band organizations into the leadership discourse this article attempts a theoretical contribution to the emerging field referenced under terms such as shared leadership (Pearce and Conger, 2003), co-leadership (O'Toole et al., 2003), distributed leadership (Brown and Hosking, 1986; Klenke, 1997), dispersed leadership (Currie, 2007) or peer leadership (House and Aditya, 1997). In this article the phenomenon is referred to as *collective leadership* and the research field as the *SL/DL discourse*. The article draws on qualitative data: 10 Aboriginal law stories, preserved through oral tradition by the Nhunggabarra people in Australia, as told and interpreted by their last custodian, Tex Skuthorpe (2006). The 10 stories have been previously published in Sveiby and Skuthorpe (2006). A general *power-symmetric model* for collective leadership is derived from the story 'The Black Swans', arguably the oldest surviving leadership code of conduct found so far, and its implications for the SL/DL discourse is discussed. Secondary data from social anthropology studies of contemporary forager societies and their egalitarian power-asymmetric *upside-down hierarchy* model (Boehm, 1999) are used for comparison. Applying Drath et al.'s (2008) ontology the questions explored are: What does the Black Swans' story tell us about the Nhunggabarra people's leadership beliefs and what types of leadership practices could they have led to?

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, when low sea levels made the trip from present-day Indonesia across to Australia possible (Flood, 1999).

Aboriginal foragers had for tens of thousands of years before the agricultural revolution developed economies that may have been poor in a material sense, but which allowed people to live a fairly easy and pleasant life (Butlin, 1993). Food procurement was not a struggle – taking 3–5 hrs a day – and life was not physically demanding (Sahlins, 1974). Unlike many other forager societies, such as the African San people, the Australian Aborigines were active manipulators of their environment (Sveiby, 2009), and scientists today are largely in agreement that their methods had achieved ecological balance on the Australian continent as a whole (Flannery, 1994).

Very little is known, besides traditional stories, about how the Aborigines in the relatively fertile Australian south-east lived before the Europeans disrupted their societies. It seems that people living along the rivers – like the Nhunggabarra people – were probably living a semi-sedentary life with camps resembling villages according to the early explorer Thomas Mitchell (1839, 1847). The Nhunggabarra and their 25 neighbouring peoples were loosely coupled in a heterarchical[1] arrangement, which may once have had a population exceeding 15,000–25,000 in an area approximately the size of Belgium, equating to 500–1000 people per community (estimates by Sveiby and Skuthorpe, 2006). When the white settlers arrived in their countries in the 1840s, however, outbreaks of diseases unwittingly introduced by the British colonialists had already severely depopulated it; up to 90% of the Aborigines in some of areas of the south-east succumbed to the diseases (Butlin, 1983), the Nhunggabarra probably among the hardest hit. Atrocities and massacres committed by the early white settlers completed the tragedy (Broome, 2005; Reynolds, 1981). Today the original Nhunggabarra people have disappeared almost entirely from their home country.

The 'law': code of behaviour

Nhunggabarra 'law' was a code of moral and social behaviour contained in stories. Aboriginal law stories contain spiritual knowledge, cosmology, sustainable land management, general behaviour rules, how to behave in times of birth and death – even guidance for relations with foreign countries. Its authority was unquestionable in being considered to have been given to the Nhunggabarra at the time of creation by their first law maker, an early ancestor. Hence, both Aboriginal people today and anthropologists use the term 'law' because it provided a moral authority outside both the individual and the group. Offences were recognized and carried both social sanctions and penalties. 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 modern legal systems. The law stories tell the norm, but 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 the 'correct' behaviour. From a leadership perspective the law is equivalent of the formalized routines, check lists, processes and contracts that exist in organizations.

Respect and its opposite disrespect are a recurring concept 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. This is how you show respect to others (Skuthorpe, 2006).

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 automatically gave all knowledgeable individuals an influential position. Their influence, however, was balanced by respect the opposite way: knowledgeable people were supposed to respect the integrity of others (see Table 1).

The Black Swans: leadership law

The following law story was told and interpreted by the custodian Tex Skuthorpe (2006) and previously published in Sveiby and Skuthorpe (2006). 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

Table 1. The Black Swans story: Leadership beliefs and practices.

Black Swans Story (#x refers to paragraph)	Derived leadership belief about individual behaviours which hinder DAC	Derived Nhunggabarra leadership beliefs (dispositions to behave)	Derived leadership belief about practices which enhance DAC
Wurunna was punished:			
#1. For using his people to achieve a personal desire.	Do not use other people for personal gain. Do not seek individual status or position.	To achieve direction, alignment and commitment is a collective responsibility.	All in the collective participate in achieving direction, alignment and commitment.
#1. For forcing his will on other people.	Do not force your will on other people.	Respect the views and integrity of other people.	Behave non-assertively.
	Do not use fear to make people submit to you.	An individual action must benefit the collective.	The collective determines the benefit of the direction as a whole.
#2. For not respecting customs and knowledge of other countries' people.	Do not be arrogant.	Foreign people's customs and knowledge have value for us.	Learn foreign knowledge.
#3. For exploiting superior knowledge for ego reason.	Do not use knowledge for personal gain.	Knowledge is a collective good.	Share knowledge in the collective.
#4. For not respecting the weak and the innocent.	Do not manipulate the weak and the innocent.	The collective includes the weak and the innocent.	Include everybody in the collective.
#5. For concealing his actions' true purpose.	Do not conceal the true purpose.	Openness and honesty are expected.	Be open and honest in all communication.
#6. For ignoring the risks when introducing change.	Do not ignore the risks when inducing change.	Change is risky.	The collective needs to consider consequences before change.
#8. For not taking responsibility of his actions.	Do not avoid responsibility for your actions.	Individuals must accept responsibility for the impact of their actions on the collective.	Those in charge of the specific law determine if transgression has occurred and/or any compensation.
#8. For forgetting his brothers. #9. For being blind to consequences of his actions.	Do not act without considering the consequences for other people.		Reflect, discuss and learn from mistakes.

Table 1. Continued

Black Swans Story

(#x refers to paragraph)	Derived leadership belief about individual behaviours which hinder DAC	Derived Nhunggabarra leadership beliefs (dispositions to behave)	Derived leadership belief about practices which enhance DAC
#10. For invoking punishment on his brothers.	Do not make others break the law.	Only a collective can decide to punish.	Those in charge of the specific law decides punishment.
#6. For behaving dishonestly.	Do not steal.	Possessions of other people must be respected.	Possessions of other people must be respected.
#11. For not showing regret.	Do not avoid the issues.	An individual must accept responsibility for his or her wrongdoings.	The collective treats a remorseful individual with respect.
Others were punished:			
#6. The brothers for ignoring the risks.	Do not ignore the risks when inducing change.	Change is risky and the collective bears a joint responsibility for actions of all its members.	Individual actions are for benefit of the collective.
#6. The brothers for behaving dishonestly.	Do not steal.		The collective acts to prevent individuals from breaking the law.
#10. The brothers and the eaglehawks for breaking the law.	Do not break the law.	The law is above both individual and collective.	Do not follow someone who breaks the law.
#10. The brothers for following a corrupt and disrespectful expert.	Do not follow a disrespectful expert.		The collective acts to prevent individuals from breaking the law.
#10. The eaglehawks for punishing the brothers.	Do not punish foreign people.	We can punish only our own people.	We punish only our own people.
#7. The women for hurting the innocent animals.	Do not bully the innocent and vulnerable.	Look to ourselves for errors.	The collective treats the innocent and vulnerable with respect.
#7. The women for turning against each other.	Do not break into rival factions.	The collective is strong when keeping together.	All must contribute to keep the collective together.
#11. The brothers, women and eaglehawks for breaking the law as collectives.	Do not avoid the issues.	Look to ourselves for errors.	Look to ourselves as a collective for errors.

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. The Black Swans story adheres to the common style in Aboriginal law stories; in showing the antithetic behaviours and the punishment incurred the listeners are expected to infer the opposite as the ideal to strive for. The interpretations paragraphs 1–12 are contributed by Tex Skuthorpe (2006).

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.

Using 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 not, however, prevent him from using the little he knew to instil fear into his own people – the fear of that which is different – so they would go along with him and his plans.

Using 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.

Manipulating the ignorant and the vulnerable. 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. Also the people were wrong to follow him blindly; it was against all they had been taught.

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

Ignoring 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.

Blaming others when things go awry. 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 realized the consequences of what they had done and tried to blame each other – but their realization came too late to change it. They made decisions without considering the consequences and then turned on each other when it went wrong.

Not taking 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.

. . .and leaving 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.

Imposing dire consequences on the followers. The pain of his brothers, Wurruna's team mates, was severe. Not only were the brothers suffering and would die; even worse was that if they died outside their country they would not be buried properly, an eternal curse. This was their punishment for not following the law. Wurunna had no right to inflict such consequences, yet another crime of his. The eaglehawks [the wedge-tailed eagle] were also wrong; they took power into their own hands and made two decisions they were not allowed to make: to punish and to decide what the punishment would be. They were punished to forever stay close to the mountain.

Not learning 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.

Avoiding the issues for too long. Even Wurunna at last understood the consequences of what he had 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.

Nhunggabarra leadership beliefs and practices

To 'make sense' of the interpretation from a leadership perspective I apply the functionalist ontology suggested by Drath et al. (2008), which sees leadership as an outcome with three components: *Direction*, widespread agreement in a collective on overall goals, aims, and mission; *Alignment,* the organization and coordination of knowledge and work in a collective; and *Commitment*, the willingness of members of a collective to subsume their own interests and benefit within the collective interest and benefit. The outcome, summarized as DAC, is a product of four key elements: *leadership beliefs*, 'a disposition to behave, including a disposition to make certain statements'; *leadership practices*, 'the playing out of the leadership belief...a pattern in the behaviour of a collective aimed at producing DAC'; *leadership context*, the larger regional and ethnic web of beliefs; *leadership culture*, 'a more or less stable pattern in a collective's approach to the production of DAC'. The framework also contains two *feedback loops*, one from DAC directly to practices, representing single-loop learning, and one from DAC to the beliefs behind the practices, representing double-loop learning.

There are two advantages with the DAC ontology for this article. One is methodological: the close link between beliefs and practices – 'observable practices can be assumed to be the instantiation of some belief or beliefs' (Drath et al., 2008). The primary data are traditional Aboriginal law stories, which contain the antithesis: the 'incorrect' illegal behaviours. From them some of the thesis, the 'correct' leadership beliefs and leadership behaviours, can be deduced. The other advantage is ontological: the DAC ontology liberates the analysis from the prevailing leader-follower perspective. The DAC ontology is particularly relevant since the Nhunggabarra people's language had no concept of either leader or follower in pre-contact time (before 1789). The nearest, most commonly[2] used word today for leader is *dhuurranmay*, which means 'being on top of a specific field of knowledge', in other words *expert*.

The leadership context of the Black Swans story is the country of the Nhunggabarra and one of its neighbouring countries during ancient times. Wurunna, the anti-hero of the story, is a very powerful *wiringin* (shaman). The Nhunggabarra refer to wiringins as 'clever men', individuals of high intelligence and knowledge. They had received special education to become 'men of high degree' (Elkin, 1994). Wurunna comes across as a psychopath with leadership traits reminding modern readers of Machiavelli's *Prince* (1992). The Nhunggabarra would, however, not have seen Wurunna as a leader, but as one of their experts exploiting his expertise and unique position for personal gain, thereby exceeding his mandate and breaking the law. Because he is punished for his behaviours we can infer that the Nhunggabarra leadership belief was the opposite: individual expertise was to be used only on behalf of all the people, the collective. With Wurunna as the villain the story then progresses through quite a list of illegal leadership practices (see Table 1, columns 1+2). The list is surprisingly current; we easily recognize it as bad leadership also in today's world.

Even more interesting is that also followers, victims and even the messengers are punished for their behaviours: Wurunna's brothers were punished for following their brother and for going along with and actively contributing to his scheme; the women were punished for their infighting and for hurting the innocent and vulnerable animals. The correct behaviours would have been for the brothers to refuse and the women to keep together. The implied meaning is that if the brothers had refused to follow Wurunna his scheme would never have got off the ground in the first place. If the women had stood united against the raiding party they would have been able to put up quite a resistance and the raid might have failed. We see

here the important role of the collective in the leadership belief. The power of the collective is restricted, however: the innocent and the vulnerable must not be bullied. The eaglehawks were punished for retaliating and for unlawful punishing; no individuals were allowed to take the law in their own hands and you were allowed only to punish your own people. This rule outlaws blood revenge (vendetta), the scourge of human societies on all continents, and keeps revenge from spiralling into full-blown war. In positioning the wiringin as a villain and his nearest kin as followers, the story also specifies that nothing and no one can be allowed to break the leadership beliefs contained in the law; neither family ties nor the most admired men of highest conceivable knowledge. There are also two mnemonics: Red sunsets functioned as an everyday reminder of the importance for the collective to stick together and the eaglehawks soaring around the sacred mountain reminded all about the law against vendetta and unlawful punishing.

Forager bands in anthropological literature

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 (Berndt and Berndt, 1999; Lee, 1979; Service, 1979), the term generally refers to a society of lowest known complexity. Social anthropologists regard foragers in bands as the oldest of all organizations, going as far back as humanity, hundreds of thousands of years; 15,000 years ago all humans were organized as bands (Sanderson and Alderson, 2005). Consequently the origins – how humans in prehistory organized themselves and how they achieved collective action – are cloudy at best. Australian Aborigines had and still have a totem system, which in prehistory regulated land custodianship and marriage partners (Berndt and Berndt, 1999). Even the task expert role of a Nhunggabarra individual was determined at birth by the totems of the parents (Skuthorpe, 2006). They also had the most elaborate kinship rules found among foragers (Barnard, 1999) and a highly developed, complex cosmology (Dunbar et al., 1999). Unlike the contemporary African forager bands, the Australian Aborigines also had a specialist function, the wiringin: custodian of sacred law and also enforcer of penalties against the law in general (Berndt and Berndt, 1999: 336ff).

The 'egalitarian' model

The egalitarian lifestyle of the few remaining nomadic bands of the African San people (Barnard, 1992; Lee, 1979; Silberbauer, 1981) has become an iconic stereotype in Western society and to some degree also in leadership literature, (for instance Berreby, 1999; Tuck and Earle, 1996). Briefly summarized, African San bands consist of family units, each comprising two to eight people. The bands are rarely larger than 50 people and regularly disperse into family units in winter, when food is less abundant. Social groups are flexible and constantly changing in composition. Relations between individuals stress sharing and mutuality, but do not involve long-term binding commitments and dependencies. No tightly defined group monopolizes resources. Band members assert a strong egalitarian ethos, which is repeatedly acted out and publicly demonstrated. The value of sharing is emphasized and reinforced by peer pressure on a daily basis. Formalized codes of behaviour guide behaviours. Similar principles have been found among contemporary forager people on all continents (Barnard, 1992, 1999; Boehm, 1999; Gluckman, 2006; Sanderson and Alderson, 2005; Service, 1971, 1979; Woodburn,!). Anthropologists generally concur with

Boehm's (1999: 68) view that, '[contemporary] nomadic foragers are universally – and all but obsessively – concerned with being free from the authority of others'.

The 'hierarchical' model

Because habits in forager bands seem to change slowly many anthropologists have argued that one can infer at least some behaviours of prehistoric forager bands from contemporary bands (for instance Woodburn, 1980). However, the egalitarian model is not accepted by all. Kelly (1995) points out that diversity rather than commonality seems to be the principle in contemporary forager bands. There are no differences in material wealth, but there exist highly authoritarian forager bands, and one band even keeps slaves, (Boehm, 1999: 143). Also, some band members are more influential than others. Knowledge and experience of the matter in question (expert power) and personality (referent power) have been observed in all contemporary bands. Generally, older people are more influential than young and men have a more visible role than women in decision making. Families, also among the San, are generally dominated by the man in the household. Boehm (1999) concludes that equality in contemporary forager bands applies primarily to the heads of households, on band level and among those who compete for status. Among the usual suspects are shamans, proficient hunters and men of superior physical strength. To not fall prey to their ambitions, individuals 'who otherwise would be subordinated, form a large and united political coalition, and they do so for the express purpose of keeping the strong from dominating the weak' (Boehm, 1999: 3). There is thus a hierarchy in perceived egalitarian bands too, only it is turned 'upside down' with the collective 'dominating the alpha-male types' (Boehm, 1999: 66). The difference between men and women is, however, not necessarily tied to gender; it may have to do with who is doing the status generating activities. For instance, one Indonesian forager society has swapped the gender roles: the women hunt and dominate socially. Most contemporary forager bands have been observed to cooperate rather than to compete to avoid hostility rather than to fight. However, the homicide rate in one band was found to be higher than in modern societies in one of the very few studies which attempted to measure long-term violence (Lee, 1979: 371ff). Inter-band violence exists in two main forms. Violence between single men who fight over women is most common. 'Organized robbery' is also fairly frequent: a group of men attacks a neighbouring camp in a surprise raid to steal resources and then quickly withdraws (Knauft, 1991). Both types of violence were outlawed by the Nhunggabarra; by the Mirrai-Mirrai story (see Appendix) and the Black Swans story respectively.

The ambivalent hypothesis

The *'ambivalent' hypothesis* takes the diversity of present-day forager bands as the starting point. 'We simply do not know to what extent egalitarianism characterized early human societies and we must not assume its presence' (Finlayson and Warren, 2010: 88). The egalitarian lifestyle of present day bands could be a response to survival stress caused by being pushed into the most remote areas on earth, such as the arctic and the deserts. Also from an evolutionary perspective, the perceived egalitarianism in contemporary bands is a mystery, given that humans have an innate tendency to hierarchy (Van Vugt, 2008). Boehm (1999) theorizes that hierarchy in human societies has always been present, but that it has been flipping continuously between domination by strongmen and domination by the collective.

The ambivalent hypothesis shows the closest similarity to the context depicted by the Black Swans story. The story conveys an overall leadership belief that some (male) experts will always be seeking status and more influence and that in particular the wiringin is to be watched. The collective, therefore, needs to carry the ultimate responsibility for the survival of the group as a whole and this requires pre-emptive and collective action against such individuals, or else they will prevail until disaster strikes. The story's complexity and the large number of power issues covered show that the Nhunggabarra were politically quite astute. It seems likely that the Nhunggabarra had considerable experience of hierarchical leadership, how else could the Black Swans story be so specific? We will never know the answer, but the story conveys a collective leadership culture, which probably had had a very long time to develop, before time stopped for their society in the 1840s.
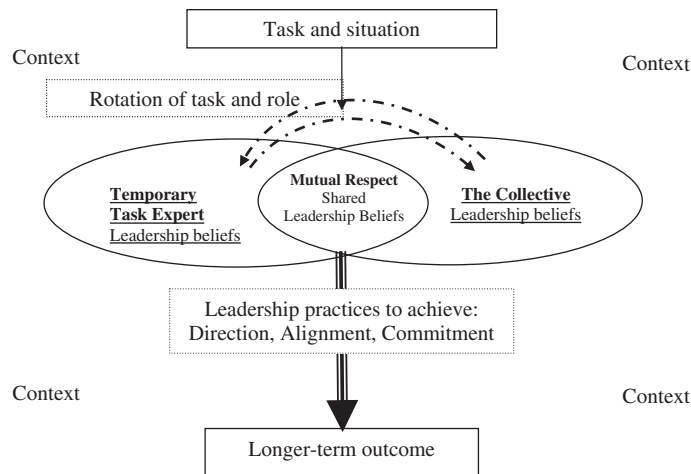
A power-symmetric collective leadership model

Eight of the 10 law stories selected by Tex Skuthorpe contain rules of conduct relevant for leadership. A total of 29 leadership beliefs have been identified, thereof 16 directed specifically to task experts; six are aimed specifically at the collective; while between eight and 17 beliefs can be considered directed to both (see Appendix). The Black Swans story identifies 21 illegal behaviours (Table 1, col. 1) suggestive of some 18 leadership beliefs (col. 3). The rules aimed at individuals emphasize respect towards the collective, while the rules directed to the collective prescribe the need to respect the knowledgeable (the law, elders, expert leaders) and the vulnerable (women, the innocent), but also to challenge them if they were disrespectful. The common rules emphasize collective beliefs and values, such as the responsibility that comes with expertise; to behave with responsibility towards one's own people and other communities; to care for the vulnerable and not to abuse women; not to seek status through material wealth, etc. There is also law prescribing leadership processes for community building, and law emphasizing the importance of following the law.

A generic framework in Figure 1 based on the story and the DAC ontology shows leadership as the outcome of direction, alignment and commitment. The role as temporary task expert rotates depending on task, situation and context, in the model. The totality of the leadership beliefs points toward a finely tuned power balance neither authoritarian, nor egalitarian. There are expert leaders, but their authority is short-term and restricted to tasks; the collective is powerful, but focused long-term on maintaining the law and the group as a whole. The power relationship between them, symbolized by horizontal positioning in the figure, is therefore symmetric rather than asymmetric either way. A key component for maintaining the symmetry is mutual respect; it mediates both individual power and collective control. Some of the leadership beliefs gradually become institutionalized in the form of explicit codes of conduct. The longer term outcome depends on the goal of the organization, in the Nhunggabarra case it was long-term survival for the people as a whole.

Alignment and commitment with power symmetry

The general leadership issue is how to encourage, develop and motivate resourceful experts to commit their drive and skills to the group as a whole and how to align them toward a common goal. The Black Swans story frames these issues as a balance between short-term task requirements led by individual task experts, and maintenance of the band for long-term survival, led by the collective. No one is in a permanent leader position.

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │  Task and situation │
                        └─────────────────────┘
   Context                                                Context

      Rotation of task and role
```

Temporary
Task Expert
Leadership beliefs

Mutual Respect
Shared
Leadership Beliefs

The Collective
Leadership beliefs

Leadership practices to achieve:
Direction, Alignment, Commitment

   Context   Context

Longer-term outcome

Figure 1. A generic power-symmetric framework for collective leadership derived from the Black Swans story: Long-term outcome as the result of Direction, Alignment and Commitment. The roles as temporary task expert rotate depending on task, situation and context.

The DAC ontology is for the discussion complemented with the five classic sources of power (Hinkin and Schriesheim, 1989).

Expert power is the ability to administer to another person information, knowledge, or expertise. It has been identified as the most important in today's organizations (Podsakoff and Schriesheim, 1985) and task expertise is one of two types of behaviours predictive of leader emergence in groups, the other being maintenance of human relationships (Hollander, 1961; Kogler Hill, 2004; Lord, 1977). Learning and acquisition of individual expertise were cornerstones in the Nhunggabarra culture (see education below), which meant that there were probably plenty of emergent leader candidates.

Referent power is the ability to administer to another person feelings of personal acceptance or approval. Status seeking men are highlighted in many law stories; the Black Swans story warns explicitly against blindly following an admired person. The observation by Tench in 1789 that older people seemed more influential than the young can be understood in this light: older people were revered for both their task expertise and relational competence acquired through age.

Reward power is the ability to administer to another person things he or she desires or to remove or decrease things he or she does not desire, for instance distribution of big game meat in forager bands. Among the Nhunggabarra this source of power was largely neutralized by the totem and kinship systems and the law.

Coercive power is the ability to administer to another person things he or she does not desire or to remove or decrease things he or she does desire. In Skuthorpe's (2006) selection (Table 1 and Appendix) of law stories especially blood revenge and violence against foreign people and women are outlawed. Enforcement of transgressions was restricted to the wiringin and he was only allowed to punish his own people (Table 1). Wiringins were the only persons granted coercive powers. That they feature as villains in several stories shows a concern about their ambitions.

Legitimate power is the ability to administer to another person feelings of obligation or responsibility. The wiringin was the only individual to have legitimate power among the Nhunggabarra, but it was restricted to sacred law and to enforcing collectively agreed punishment. Women, collectively, possessed the legitimacy of being the conduit for inheriting land.

Development of individual task experts was central among the Nhunggabarra (Skuthorpe, 2006). Apart from the obvious value in having a competent person as the leader, the appointment of task leaders has motivational benefits. To be recognized as expert has been found to increase one's intrinsic motivation to contribute to the group (Ryan and Deci, (2000), to increase the efforts an individual puts into a task, (Libby et al., 1987; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990) and to share knowledge in the group (Ipe, 2003). The Nhunggabarra had gone even further by 'splitting' the tasks. This leadership practice is prescribed in a Nhunggabarra law story, the Crane and the Crow, (cited in Sveiby and Skuthorpe, 2006, Appendix 1). The tasks connected with hunting (tracking, spearing, collecting and cooking), fishing, story-telling, and several other activities were distributed among four individuals. All hunters held the knowledge about an animal and its related ecosystem, and they were able to perform all four tasks, but they were allowed to perform only their own task when they were hunting together. Task splitting may have begun as a response to population growth, but it corresponded with many leadership beliefs; it gave more people roles on behalf of the whole community and it reduced the risk of individual knowledge monopolies (commitment); it lessened competition (alignment) and it did it all without compromising direction. Task splitting created more interdependency, which has been found to increase team effectiveness (Gronn, 2002). That the task expert role was determined at birth, however, seems alien to us; how could they know which newborn boy would become the best expert in, say, tracking? On the other hand, knowing one's role from a young age allows training to begin very early, increasing the chances of reaching mastery (Eriksson et al., 1992; Gladwell, 2008). Also, since they were prepared since childhood in what situation(s) and for what task(s) they were supposed to play the task expert role, coordination was probably implicit rather than explicit (Gronn, 2002), something that has been found to increase team efficiency (Seers et al., 2003). An eyewitness describes such a case: a group of Aborigines who were felling and positioning trees as a barrier in a river, probably in the 1870s: 'Every man was alert; no man got in another's way; and each was captain in his own place' Gilmore (1986: 106).

The Nhunggabarra had developed a large number of leadership practices to balance power relationships. Here will be discussed education, the power of women, collective control, substitutes of leadership, followership, rotation of task experts, respect and consensus.

Education

All were trained from a young age in the tasks and educated in their role, particularly the men, who would all have a task expert role as adults. The Black Swans story and other Nhunggabarra law stories portray their male ancestors as reckless and aggressive and responsible for most mistakes. Hence the men needed extra schooling and experience to mature and become responsible citizens in society; to learn commitment. A very complex leadership practice (Skuthorpe, 2006) dealt with this. At the age of about 12 every young Nhunggabarra boy became a journeyman; he travelled to all the neighbouring countries to

learn. He lived with them, learned to communicate with them, hunted with them and learned the knowledge that was essential to them and their country. When he returned after some 18 years (!) he had to go through further ceremonies before he was finally considered adult and could marry. His wife was selected for him from one of the neighbouring countries by the women (see below) and she then moved to his country. Since all neighbouring countries had the same practice it meant that at any given time the majority of the adult population in a country were 'foreigners': all women and some 20–40% of the men – an extraordinary blending of blood lines, personal relationships and knowledge. This practice fed and would have reinforced both leadership beliefs and practices, thereby intertwining alignment and commitment across all contexts and situations developing a relatively stable leadership culture (Drath et al., 2008).

The power of women

The power of Nhunggabarra women was multidimensional (Skuthorpe, 2006). Short-term, they brought in most of the food (up to 80%). Their long-term influence was far-reaching, because the most important resource, land, was inherited via them. Hence, every married woman possessed legitimate power as owner in any matter related to that country. Women also had an important role in the long-term viability of the group, not 'only' as child-bearer. Because of the marriage custom a 'mini-version' of the female knowledge base from all countries was always represented in every country. Her network determined suitable marriage partners and hence the long-term composition of future task experts in all countries. In contemporary forager bands women have been observed to form a 'moral community', which offsets the power of individuals (Boehm, 1999: 8ff). Relationship maintenance is primarily related to the long-term viability of the group as a whole, in other words commitment. The Black Swans story hints a similar role for the Nhunggabarra women. This is the other type of behaviours predictive of emerging leaders in groups (Hollander, 1961; Kogler Hill, 2004; Lord, 1977).

The power of non-leaders

Three streams of leadership research are relevant here: collective control, substitutes of leadership and followership.

Collective control

Several theories have been suggested and they are from early on inspired by knowledge worker organizations – 'normative control' (Etzioni, 1964) – and by hunter-gatherers – 'clan control' (Ouchi, 1980). Later Tompkins and Cheney (1985) observed that the trend toward various forms of self-managing teams represented a key shift in the locus of control from management to the workers themselves in industry organizations. They coined the term 'concertive control' to describe the phenomenon. According to their theory workers negotiate a consensus on how to shape their behaviour according to a set of core values, such as the values found in a corporate vision statement (Barker, 1993; Wright and Barker, 2000). Concertive control 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: 408). For managers, socio-ideological control (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004) is hence an efficient

method to achieve alignment, particularly when traditional manager/worker boundaries are blurred, as in consulting firms, (Bergström et al., 2009). Very few studies about collective control have been made in self-managed teams and cooperatives. In the Grameen Bank (Papa et al., 1995) the micro loans are secured by a group – an often-emulated successful business model where the borrowers exercise collective control on each other. However, in a literature review Summers (2004) concludes that 'the freedom granted by collective control itself becomes the mechanism that facilitates and generates confrontational relations, resulting in factionalism rather than the expected unification of values and attitudes'. Sewell (1998) notes that bureaucracies tend to develop at least some formal policies against petty tyranny and bullying against individuals. Not so in self-managing groups with larger degrees of freedom. Much of what has been written about collective control in leadership studies is hence critical and emphasizes its negative, manipulative aspects irrespective of whether a coercive bureaucracy or a collective dominates. The issue might be abuse of asymmetric power relationships, because the Black Swans story outlaws both factionalism and bullying by the collective (Table 1). They had also developed routines to further mediate collective control.

Substitutes of leadership

Kerr and Jermier (1978) observe that routines and processes in organizations mediate effects of leaders' influence; they function as substitutes of leadership. Routines can also mediate collective control. Sewell (1998) describes one well-functioning self-managing work team where an automatic control system imposed by the executive level outside the team had neutralized issues such as quality and production quota control, which had previously caused conflict and petty bullying of low-achievers. Contemporary forager bands have 'routinized' their contentious issues, such as communication in the group and distribution of luxury food, through kinship systems. The Nhunggabarra had those routines and more: their totem system determined marriage partners and task leader selection, while the stories regulated general behaviours. Unless imposed from outside, routines take a very long time to evolve. This suggests that internal relations (communication and marriage partners), wealth distribution and task roles were the most controversial issues and hence the first that human groups tried to neutralize in order to achieve alignment.

Followership

Followership is an under-researched field in leadership theory (Baker, 2007) and what little there is assumes an existing top-down hierarchy. Leader-Member Exchange theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) postulates that performance is generated by creating positive relations between leader and subordinate and an extended LMX model takes into account that followers may play a powerful role in shaping charismatic leader behaviours (Howell and Shamir, 2005: 98). A subordinate position for followers is assumed also in 'two-way influence relationship' (Hollander and Julian, 1969) and in the two-dimensional followership model proposed by Steger et al. (1982). The follower-centric approach suggested by Meindl (1995) also assumes a vertical top-down leader–follower dyad. The Nhunggabarra law required band members to challenge leaders who broke the law, and they must, just as Chaleff's (1995) 'courageous followers', be willing to commit themselves to the whole, but

followers are in Chaleff's theory considered to be in a permanent subordinate position, which would be anathema to both contemporary forager bands and the Nhunggabarra.

Rotation of task experts

Rotation of the full group leader role is common practice to achieve alignment with power symmetry in representative democracy and in political organizations composed of states, such as the EU and the African Union. It is common also in organizations composed by peers, for instance Rotary has made rotation of presidency its trademark. Effects of such rotation has been studied experimentally by Güth et al. (2005), who found no direct impact on effectiveness in public goods situations. Davis and Eisenhardt (2007) on the other hand, found that rotating the decision control among corporate partners increased innovation. Rotation exposes more people to leader roles and this has in experimental settings (Erez et. al, 2002) been found to increase workload sharing and to increase self-efficacy. The result is more suggestions and ideas, increased cooperation, higher team performance and member satisfaction. Two other kinds of rotation have been mentioned in leadership literature. A task-oriented model in a restaurant cooperative with no permanent leaders has been described by Vanderslice (1988): to rotate most tasks among all members, both the most pleasant, such as composing the menu, and the least pleasant, such as washing the dishes. In jazz improvization the soloist role rotates among equals, each an expert on his/her instrument (Hatch, 1999). The Nhunggabarra variety is similar: each member has his own expertise while the role to lead the group rotates, depending on what expertise is needed. For example, the tracker is the first leader of the hunting party and when the prey is found, the spearer takes over the leader role.

Respect

Aboriginal respect resembles the concept of authentic leadership proposed by Avolio et al. (2004), and this quote from Gardner et al. (2004: 361) could come straight from the Black Swans story: 'we expect authentic leaders to demonstrate through their words and deeds the importance of integrity, trust, transparency, openness, respect for others and fairness.' Gardner et al. (2004) also propose a model for authentic followership. However, their concept assumes power asymmetry: authentic followership is seen to develop through positive modelling on authentic leaders. In the power symmetric model in Figure 1 task experts are expected to respect the members of the collective and vice versa in order to achieve DAC and a good outcome. Mutual respect acts as the mediator. Task experts are hence safe in their role – but only as long as they show respect to the collective, including the less knowledgeable (Table 1). Rotation among the task experts continuously reinforces in practice the value of treating each other with respect; all task experts know first-hand what it means to be in the lead and in the collective.

Consensus

Consensus is a gradual process of building both understanding and commitment. People do not have to necessarily agree with the outcome; rather, the aim is to generate everybody's agreement to support the outcome, to make them satisfied with the process by which it was achieved and to confirm that their ideas were considered and discussed. The Nhunggabarra

used consensus in particularly difficult decisions, such as when to move camp and when laws were in conflict. However, consensus is cumbersome on a large scale. The solution of the Nhunggabarra was to delegate the responsibility of the law according to the roles. For example, men were in charge of hunting law and women determined marriage law (Skuthorpe, 2006). Contemporary forager band members also display a high degree of value consensus, a feature found in high-performing IT teams (Klenke, 1997) and regarded as essential for concertive control (Barker, 1993).

Both value consensus and shared cognition are known to reduce the need for supervision in high-performing teams (Cannon-Bowers and Salas, 2001; Klenke, 1997). It is fair to assume that, due to socialization since childhood, forager band members in prehistory had, and today have, a high degree of shared cognition, which is suggested as a driver of shared leadership by Burke et al. (2003). Hence direction is not an issue for them, nor was it probably debated among the Nhunggabarra. Tex Skuthorpe (2006) summarizes the goal of his people in a mission statement: To Keep All Alive – a more powerful direction is hard to conceive (see Sveiby, 2009; Sveiby and Skuthorpe, 2006 for more detail).

Method: indigenous stories as source

In organization studies and related disciplines the capacity of stories to capture and convey the essence of complex knowledge beyond the text itself has been recognized since the 1990s, with the 'methodological turn to language' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000) and development of methods for analysing narratives (Czarniawska, 1999) and discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1997). The opinion about Aboriginal stories among Westerners has also undergone a considerable shift. From having been seen as fairy tales for children in the 1800s (Langloh-Parker, 1978), they are now understood for what they were: in pre-colonial Aboriginal Australia stories constituted the primary long-term knowledge repository. The anthropologists Berndt and Berndt (1999) call them 'oral literature' and they are these days used as sources also by archaeologists (Flood, 1999). Still, traditional indigenous stories are highly unusual as sources in leadership research. I have not been able to find a single case.

Stories are vulnerable compared to documents in one respect: oral tradition cannot guarantee word-by-word accuracy. This raises several critical issues. Are the Nhunggabarra law stories authentic? How reliable are they? How valid are they? There are aspects that suggest a fair degree of reliability, authenticity and validity. The Nhunggabarra and their neighbours had developed an elaborate, jointly maintained system for maintaining consistency and safekeeping of their law stories across generations (see Sveiby and Skuthorpe, 2006 for details). The reliability of their system can be tested to some degree. Seven of the 10 stories (not the Black Swans story) appear in a collection of Nhunggabarra stories published as early as 1896 by K. Langloh-Parker. A detailed comparison between the two versions reveals a remarkable consistency over more than 100 years and across three generations. Unique for the Australian Aborigines is that they, unlike the African hunter-gatherers, lived without much contact with the world outside Australia until quite late; the Nhunggabarra probably had no contact with white people before 1828. Since archaeological evidence shows a high level of cultural consistency as far back as 30,000 years (Flood, 1999), it matters less how old the stories are measured in years. Even a recent story probably reflects very old traditions and values quite well. Hence, although never written on paper, the Nhunggabarra Law stories selected for this article are probably quite reliable sources about how their society was meant to function.

Before the white people arrived stories were valuable trading items; they were exchanged among all Aboriginal peoples on the continent and in all their languages. This may to some degree explain the perplexing similarity and diversity in Aboriginal stories. To make a selection of Aboriginal stories is therefore, metaphorically, like pulling at a fishing net spread on the ground. Most of the net will be hauled from the area closest to the pull, but there will be some influence even from the areas furthest away. To check how representative the 10 stories in Skuthorpe's selection are, a comparative study of 16 story collections with 202 stories from all over Australia compiled by A W Reed (1994, 1999) was also made. Slightly different versions of eight of the 10 stories, including a version of the Black Swans story, also appear there. Skuthorpe's (2006) choice for a story about leadership is the Black Swans. About half the leadership beliefs in the Black Swans (15 out of 29) story can be found also in the other stories of his (see Appendix for details). The selection can hence be called a form of representative sampling conducted by an expert. Provenance is available in terms of selection, origins and, crucially, also in terms of interpretation. This is sadly quite rare; not only have Aboriginal law stories often been distorted by ignorant 'editing', initiated and competent story custodians are, literally, a dying breed. The conclusion is that the selection is authentic, valid and representative of Aboriginal South-East Australia with a fairly high degree of certainty and, to a lesser degree, also of other parts of the continent.

The method of this article is qualitative and the outcome is a theoretical construction. Due to the nature of the data – traditional law stories – the generated model is a theoretical ideal; how the society was meant to function. This has one drawback: we will never know to what degree people actually conformed to the ideal of the law. The advantage, however, is that ideals are comparable – with other indigenous societies and even with today's industrialized societies.

Implications and future research

As the 18 historical bases of shared leadership listed by Pearce and Conger (2003) bear witness to, it is virtually impossible to find a 'pure' state of collective leadership untouched by hierarchical leadership today. The paradox is that collective leadership can exist only if an existing benevolent hierarchical leadership structure introduces it, supports it (Fletcher and Käufer, 2003) or acts as catalyst (Houghton et al., 2003; Jackson, 2000). 'Hybrid' leadership seems a more accurate description of current practice (Gronn, 2008). Much of the SL/DL discourse, therefore, centres on how SL/DL emerges, evolves, or is facilitated within hierarchical leadership environments, and shared leadership is generally seen as a new emerging phenomenon (Gardner et al., 2004; Hooker and Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Mayo et al., 2003), albeit with some roots going back to Mary Parker-Follett in the 1920s (Pearce and Conger, 2003), or even the co-leadership practised by some Roman emperors (Day et al., 2004).

The SL/DL discourse has an uncomfortable relationship with power. Literature largely mirrors the situation in large business organizations, where power is portrayed as something that needs to be shared with or distributed to the 'powerless' (Fletcher and Käufer, 2003). When power is mentioned it is in terms of 'empowerment' (Avolio et al., 2004; Bligh et al., 2006; Ensley et al., 2006; Klenke, 1997; Lovelace et al., 2007; Pearce, 2004; Pearce et al., 2007, 2008). There exists very little leadership theory on power relationships in collective forms of leadership and also scant practical knowhow. Teams, groups and cooperatives aspiring to develop collective leadership are hence left to their own devices and have to 'negotiate shared understanding about how to navigate decisions and exercise authority'

(Cox et al., 2003: 53). The issue is that organizational members will have an implicit leadership theory (Seers et al., 2003), formed by 'thousands of years of cultural indoctrination', (O'Toole, 2003: 251), which makes shared leadership counterintuitive and leads to confusion among all members of groups (Manz and Sims, 1995). Lack of research and practical knowhow may, hence, be behind the chequered track record of self-managing groups in large organizations. As this study shows, unless carefully tuned, a vertical hierarchy flipped upside down can become 'tyranny of the collective'. This is where the two highly evolved models with different versions of collective leadership in forager bands can contribute. Both models evolved as reaction against hierarchy, just as today's SL/DL discourse, and the common message is that the issue of power within the group has to be dealt with explicitly.

The main difference between the two models is that the collective dominates individuals in the egalitarian model of contemporary forager bands; hierarchy is retained and turned upside down. In the power-symmetric model of the Nhunggabarra, on the other hand, power relationships are carefully regulated and balanced to avoid hierarchy altogether. This allowed them to motivate individual members and hence utilize their drive and creativity, while simultaneously maintaining the long-term viability of the whole group.

Power-symmetric collective leadership requires many checks and balances to avoid flipping between vertical hierarchies. Task expert rotation and collective control mediate expert power. Education and respect (authenticity) mediate both individual expert power and collective control while structure (group charter, routines, agreements) are developed to prevent controversial issues. The first candidates for building structure are goal setting (direction), internal relations (alignment), and wealth distribution and task expert selection (commitment). Finally, collective leadership is not for the indolent or the faint-hearted. It requires value consensus, effort, courage and active participation by all members in the group; this is noticeable among contemporary bands, in the Black Swans story as well as in today's organizations.

Suggested future research

Two lines of research emerge from this study, one qualitative and one quantitative. A general hypothesis is that the SL/DL will benefit from liberating itself from its dependence on big mainstream organizations with deeply entrenched hierarchical leadership. This study, therefore concurs with scholars like Burrell (1992) and Reedy and Learmouth (2009), who encourage management/business scholars to study alternative organizations – the other 2% in the study by House and Aditya (1997). Fruitful cases for bringing the SL/DL discourse forward can be found among employee-owned cooperatives (Rothschild-Whitt, 1986; Summers, 2004); knowledge-intensive organizations dominated by experts (Alvesson, 2004; Klenke, 1997); new organizational forms such as the Grameen Bank (Papa et al., 1995); or in the performing arts as demonstrated by Koivunen (2007). Further qualitative micro level studies in shared leadership settings are required to explore the mechanisms of rotational leadership, possibly using Day et al.'s (2004) IMOI model. Also close-up studies of concertive control in various organizational contexts are needed, progressing the work by Larson and Tompkins (2005) and Bergström et al. (2009). Sociologists have studied politics in collectives more actively than leadership studies and can contribute both theoretical insights (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979) and case studies (e.g. Klandermans and Roggebrand, 2010; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). A further suggestion is that the SL/DL scholars may benefit from alternative methods, and Drath et al.'s (2008) DAC ontology is worth applying further.

Two ethnographic studies Summers (2004) and Papa et al. (1995) also demonstrate the value of ethnographic methods.

Measurement of collective leadership is underdeveloped. Suggested quantitative scales (Avolio et al., 2003; Conger and Pearce, 2003; Pearce and Sims, 2000; Solansky, 2008) are only tentative at this stage, but the upside-down hierarchy of egalitarian contemporary forager bands should be at the extreme point on any such scale. The power-symmetric model in Figure 1 would inhabit a less extreme position. Leadership in forager bands therefore offers benchmarks for solving the perplexing issue for measurement of shared leadership posed by Pearce and Sims (2000: 134): whether or not to include the leader in the measurement. At the extreme point there is no leader to include, in the power-symmetric model there is rotation or serial emergence of task leaders, but no positional leader.

Conclusion

This article has drawn upon Australian Aboriginal traditional knowledge and anthropological studies of contemporary African bands to analyse two collective leadership models developed by forager peoples: one egalitarian upside-down hierarchy and one power-symmetric model. The existence of at least two models for collective leadership among forager peoples has several implications for leadership research. It encourages SL/DL scholars to shift their current reactive stage toward building collective leadership theory more on its own terms, and it shows the value of exploring alternatives outside the mainstream, both in terms of organizations and ontology. Both models demonstrate the importance of power relationships. This needs to be considered more explicitly in collective leadership theory. Finally, it shows that collective leadership is not a recent phenomenon confined to modern organizations – but rather a form for achieving conjoint action in human groups, developed by the first peoples on Earth and still practised. In times when modern industrialized states are discussing how to move toward societies and organizations sustainable for this planet, it is of value to know that we can learn from the first peoples, both in terms of sustainable environmental practices and in terms of leadership. The article does not suggest that modern organizations should apply the practices and values of forager bands – on the contrary. We may not wish to accept their values and we cannot apply all their methods – but we can learn from the principles of collective leadership from those who practised it long before us. By deriving a theoretical framework for collective leadership from Aboriginal law, anchoring the study in the modern leadership discourse and suggesting hypotheses for further study, this article has tried to demonstrate the value and the relevance in doing so.

There is a final question about the Aboriginal people, always pending, sometimes asked explicitly: if it was so good, why did the Aboriginal model not 'win'? The answer is that no society survives a loss of more than half of its people. Western germs were the worst assassins of the Aboriginal people and when the people died, the model with the longest proven track record for survival on the planet also disappeared. Their tragedy is thus ours too, because the Western model never 'won'. To paraphrase Albert Gore: An uncomfortable truth is that the jury is still out...

Notes

1. In a heterarchy no one dominates. It is the relation of elements when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways (Hedlund, 1990).
2. The language the Nhunggabarra spoke is today known by only very few people. A dictionary has been compiled as part of a project to revive the language in contemporary Australia (Ash et al., 2003).

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Appendix

Referring to —>>>>	Worldview	Specifically Task Expert	Both Expert and Collective			Specifically Collective	Source
Leadership beliefs from the stories	All are connected	Respect the collective	Rule of law	Build com-munity	Keep inter-community peace	Respect the task expert	From story in Sveiby and Skuthorpe, 2006.
It is a collective responsibility to achieve direction, alignment and commitment.		◆		◆			Black Swans #1
Respect the views and integrity of other people.	◆	◆				◆	Black Swans #1, Crane and Crow, Mirrai Mirrai
An individual action must benefit the collective.	◆	◆		◆			Black Swans #2, Big Buurra, Narran Lake
Foreign people's customs and knowledge have value also for us.	◆	◆		◆	◆		Black Swans #2, Mirrai-Mirrai
Knowledge is a collective good.	◆	◆		◆			Black Swans #3, Crane and Crow
The collective includes the weak and ignorant.	◆	◆		◆			Black Swans #4
Openness and honesty are expected.		◆				◆	Black Swans #5
Change is risky.		◆					Black Swans,#6, Crane and Crow
Individuals must accept responsibility for the impact on the collective of their actions.	◆	◆		◆			Black Swans #8 and 9, Crane and Crow
Only the collective can punish.		◆				◆	Black Swans #10, Crane and Crow
Possessions of other people must be respected.		◆					Black Swans #6

Appendix Continued

Referring to —>>>>	Worldview	Specifically Task Expert	Both Expert and Collective			Specifically Collective	Source
Leadership beliefs from the stories	All are connected	Respect the collective	Rule of law	Build com-munity	Keep inter-community peace	Respect the task expert	From story in Sveiby and Skuthorpe, 2006.
An individual must accept responsibility for his or her wrongdoings.		◆					Black Swans #11, Crane and Crow
The collective bears a joint responsibility for actions of all its members.	◆					◆	Black Swans #6, Big Buurra
The law is above both individual and collective.		◆	◆			◆	Black Swans #10, Narran Lake, Southern Cross

Referring to —>>>>	Worldview	Specifically Task Expert	Both Expert and Collective			Specifically Collective	Source
Leadership beliefs from the stories	All are connected	Respect the collective	Rule of law	Build community	Keep inter-community peace	Respect the task expert	
Look to ourselves for errors.			◆			◆	Black Swans #7
The collective is strong only when keeping together.				◆			Black Swans #7
Accept responsibility for individual wrongdoings.		◆	◆				Black Swans #11
Punish only your own people.			◆	◆	◆		Black Swans #10, Crane and Crow,
Behave with responsibility towards other communities.	◆		◆	◆	◆		Black Swans #2, Crane and Crow
Care for the vulnerable.	◆		◆	◆	◆		Black Swans #4, Willy Wagtail
If you break the law you carry the shame.			◆				Black swans #11, Crane and Crow
Do not seek revenge.		◆	◆	◆	◆		Black swans #10, Crane and Crow

(continued)

Appendix Continued

Referring to —>>>>	Worldview	Specifically Task Expert	Both Expert and Collective			Specifically Collective	Source
Leadership beliefs from the stories	All are connected	Respect the collective	Rule of law	Build com-munity	Keep inter-community peace	Respect the task expert	From story in Sveiby and Skuthorpe, 2006.
Split the task expert roles.			◆	◆		◆	Crane and Crow
If you break the law you will be punished.			◆				All law stories
Material wealth is only ephemeral.			◆	◆			Baaluu and Muboop
Do not use superior physical force against women.			◆	◆	◆		Mirrai Mirrai
Knowledge is powerful. Learn about the responsibilities before access to knowledge.	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆		Black Swans, Big Buurra
Buurras for community building (gatherings with all neighbouring countries).	◆		◆	◆	◆		Big Buurra
Corroborees = (community "parties" with educational purpose).	◆		◆	◆			Big Buurra
Number of beliefs (Total = 29).	12	16	14	17	8	6	