Creative ways of thinking about leadership are helpful to guide practice and personal growth. This book builds a strategic roadmap for creative leadership practice, putting the spotlight on a leader's professional development journey in the process.

The book is about leadership on the ground in higher education, where the 'rubber hits the road'. It can also be useful in business, or for anyone wanting to think outside the square. Through a creative storytelling approach, the author takes the reader through Tuscany and her on-the-job experience as a leader of learning and teaching. Along the way, she explains some of the theoretical influences on her thinking and practice – in ways and combinations she hadn't read about in other leadership books, or experienced in professional development programmes.

Through real stories, the author shows how she made creative connections in building her own knowledge on present and past experience, with reflection on how practice can be improved with a clear focus on collegiality and strategic outcomes. This approach reflects the five creative leadership signposts that she explains and illustrates throughout the book.
Creative Leadership Signposts in Higher Education
Creative Leadership Signposts in Higher Education

... Turn Left at the Duck Pond!

J. Fiona Peterson
School of Media and Communication, RMIT University,
Melbourne, Australia
The book is dedicated to my children, Andrew and Kate, who have always encouraged and supported me on my journeys.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the support of my family, friends and many colleagues at different universities, for which I am very grateful. In particular, my former Dean, Professor Stephanie Hemelryk Donald set me the challenge of writing the book two years ago; and with Professor Martyn Hook has encouraged me across the finishing line. Dr Louise McWhinnie, Saskia Loer Hansen and Ruth Moeller also encouraged me right from the start and gave me valuable feedback along the way. Dr Marianne Sison and Graham Forsythe have been sounding boards too. Dr Shaun Wilson’s advice on memory and narrative was helpful; and Dr Jeanne Keay’s support was much appreciated.

I also acknowledge Professor Margaret Gardner AO, and Professors Gill Palmer, Jim Barber, Colin Fudge, Barbara de la Harpe, Geoff Crisp, Andrea Chester, Noel Frankham, Craig Mahoney, Allan Walker, Peter Smith and Bob Zehner.

My special thanks go to those at Villa Bordoni in Italy – David, Catherine, Ricardo, Hugo, Colin, Farida, Niccolo and Zaman. Without them I would not have taken my first memorable walk past the duck pond, which was to become such a significant signpost to me on my journey. And if it were not for my fellow travellers at the Villa, Frank and Patricia, I would never have seen some other strange signposts, the best of which was two signs together pointing in opposite directions to Siena. This helped to inspire me to think about the significance of signposts for leadership, and to write the whole story in this book.

Kate Peterson took the photographs of Tuscany, and Alex Syndikas assisted her with production. Kate and I designed the book layout together, as we remembered our time at the Villa and I attempted to explain the meaning I wanted to convey. Dr Christine Schmidt helped with the technical format of the book, and Andrew Peterson kept me on track. Thanks to them all for working with me so patiently! Last but not least, my sister Ros is my lifetime ‘constant’.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR’S LEADERSHIP ROLE

Fiona Peterson has had a lifetime career in education, after an initial few years in advertising. She received an Australian Learning and Teaching Council Citation Award in the 2008 Australian University Teaching Awards, for excellence and sustained contributions to student learning.

Fiona’s teaching has spanned communication at vocational, undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Courses/units taught have included corporate and professional writing, editing for public relations, business communication, communicating technical solutions, international corporate communication, strategic communication, global relationship management, managing people, management skills, organisational behaviour, leadership…and more.

She once taught business computer applications as a 6-month assignment at a secondary school, when she was at home with her small children. Her young son Andrew kindly showed her how to turn the computer on. Undaunted, she went on to design and develop e-learning (in her Master’s degree) and strategic knowledge networks for global education (in her PhD). She became Programme Director of a postgraduate degree in digital media and communication, putting theory into practice and vice versa. Next she was a Director of Learning and Teaching, and then a Deputy Head of School.

Now, as Deputy Dean (Learning and Teaching) in the relatively new and large School of Media and Communication at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, her role focuses on the strategic and scholarly leadership of all learning and teaching activities.

The School’s programmes span journalism, media, music industry and sound, screen, animation and interactive media, games design, communication design, photography, advertising, public relations, professional communication, professional writing, editing and publishing, creative writing and screenwriting. This means that along with different disciplinary perspectives, theories and practices, there are diverse pedagogical traditions at play such as the studio mode of learning and teaching, large-group lectures and lectorials, tutorials, seminars, workshops and online delivery.

Approximately 6,000 students are studying in the School, including local and international students. Well over 200 people are employed, with another 400 who teach on an hourly basis. Undergraduate and postgraduate studies are offered through coursework and research, together with vocational education and training. Some programmes are also delivered in a number of countries.

All this gives you some idea of her background and the scale and complexity of the organisational unit in which she works – as a specialist leader of learning and teaching.
INTRODUCTION

This book is about leadership on the ground in higher education, but it could be about leadership more broadly. It builds a strategic roadmap and puts the spotlight on a professional development journey in the process.

Throughout the book I explain some of the theoretical concepts that have influenced my thinking and practice, in ways and combinations I hadn’t read about in other leadership books or experienced in professional development programmes. It’s a mix of autobiography, ethnography, scholarship, narrative and travelogue (real and metaphorical). And it’s written from the heartland in higher education – I share my own lived experience of attempting to lead strategic change at the local level within a university.

The book is really about creative ‘way finding’. I begin and end with a storytelling approach as we wander together through Tuscany, where I had the joy of space to think and be inspired. But the book is also filled with theory that I have found useful for practice, and vice versa, in the hermeneutic tradition.

You might just want to read the light-hearted stories at Villa Bordoni (in Sections 1 and 5), or discover how I arrived at my creative leadership signposts with the integrated strategic approaches I developed (Section 2), or find out what they are (Section 3). Or you could simply skip all that to see how the signposts and approaches played out, with reflection on what I think matters most on the ground for leadership practice and for the professional development of leaders (Section 4). Or you could skip right to the end to see how I join up my thinking, together with my summarised strategic roadmap for creative leadership and some of the key challenges and opportunities for the future (Section 5). But I’m hoping you might want to read the whole book to understand the parts, and vice versa, again in the hermeneutic tradition.

***

The form of the book may be surprising. I have combined genres ranging from the academic approach of a scholarly text, to light-hearted storytelling with visual narrative along the way and even a shared recipe, inspired by my love of Tuscan cookbooks! I know I am taking a risk here.

In creating the book in a less conventional way, I take heart from Da Silva and Davis (2011), who point to the literature indicating that a sign of a creative person is someone who is unconventional, playful and open to new experiences, an independent risk taker, and a hard worker who demonstrates both confidence and autonomy (Amabile, 2001; Axtell et al., 2000; Martindale, 1989; Stein, 1991). Turning to the business arena, we hear that creative output can be strengthened through ‘immersion in unexpected environments’, ‘confronting ingrained orthodoxies’ and ‘using analogies’ (Capozzi et al., 2011, p.8).

The form of the book is a deliberate attempt to recreate a glimpse of ‘place’ and my ‘lived experience’ in Italy, where I found rich inspiration to think and write about leadership. I realised there just how important it is to make space for
reflection. Creating the book in this way also reminded me very much of the time when I wrote my doctoral thesis and was encouraged to blend different genres. The thesis included both scholarly text and storytelling through text and image, as a way to reflect on my lived experience. A visual journey through India was a metaphor for my journey as an educator.

I also drew then on the cues of Hans Peter Rickman, who wrote about the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey and hermeneutics. I was particularly inspired when I read that "our creative picture of the world colours our whole outlook...[and] we react to the world according to the way we interpret it, feel its effect upon us and relate it to our interests and needs" (Rickman, 1979, pp.96, 110). I wanted to explore this again and know more about what it meant.

And I really wanted to follow the cues again from John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, whom I have long admired. In their seminal text *The Social Life of Information* they explain that the way in which information is produced not only supports interpretation, but may even shape it. They also describe how physical cues can influence the ways in which we interpret meaning from documents – for example, if someone else had turned the corner of a page, we may be intrigued to know what that person found so interesting. A memorable story they tell suggests that there may be hidden and unexpected cues that influence and even transform interpretation, such as the historian reading letters from the time of the American Revolution while documenting outbreaks of cholera:

When that disease occurred in a town in the eighteenth century, all letters from that town were disinfected with vinegar to prevent the disease from spreading. By sniffing for the faint traces of vinegar that survived 250 years and noting the date and source of the letters, he was able to chart the progress of cholera outbreaks. His research threw new light on the letters I was reading. Now cheery letters telling customers and creditors that all was well, business thriving, and the future rosy read a little differently if a whiff of vinegar came off the page. Then the correspondent’s cheeriness might be an act to prevent a collapse of business confidence – unaware that he or she would be betrayed by a scent of vinegar.

(Brown & Duguid, 2000, pp.173-174)

While there are no hidden cues in my book involving fragrances, *real stories* are shared throughout, including both text and images as prompts. I have chosen this path because, as Rickman reminds us, I believe that the way we interact and engage with the whole textual and visual story is very much part of developing our own interpretation and understanding.

You’ll find different ways to navigate the book for building knowledge iteratively. You could look sequentially at the images before each of the five sections to create one little story, or the images and quotes sequentially before each chapter to create another. Or you could just focus on the chapter text and think about each chapter in relation to the quote and image nearby. The images might intrigue you (this time in Italy), much as Brown and Duguid alluded to in the story about being drawn to a page if someone has folded the corner. You might wonder: why these images? Why were they important to me and what do they signify?
Again, though, my hope is that you will read the images and text as a ‘whole’ to understand the parts and vice versa, in the hermeneutic tradition.

While there is a good deal of complexity in the book, with stretches of the imagination that then have to be joined up, it is designed to be an interactive experience. Hopefully it can be enjoyed and returned to. While it can be used for browsing, it can also be used for focused reading and in-depth reflection – making your own sense of it all, and creating your own story by relating it to your own context. And while some of my stories are humorous, all are serious. You’re invited to dip into them and I hope they either resonate with your own leadership experience, or offer something new to consider for your situation and the challenges you face.

Mistakes or less successful experiences along the way were valuable learning for me, as I strived to achieve meaningful and strategic outcomes on a small scale, and then a progressively larger one. I hope my learning will prove useful to you, whether you are also working at the local or senior leadership level in higher education, or wanting to think outside the square in some other context.

Through my real stories I show how I made creative connections in building my own knowledge on present and past experience, with reflection on how practice can be improved with a clear focus on leadership for strategic outcomes. This approach reflects the five creative leadership signposts that I explain and illustrate throughout the book:

- Real Stories – tell real stories to engage interest
- Creative Thinking – make creative connections and explore possibilities
- Social Constructivism – build knowledge together on experience
- Reflective Practice – reflect on theory and practice to improve practice
- Strategic Outcomes – join up strategic goals and actions to achieve change

The book is arranged in these five sections as a journey of discovery from my practice. This includes cues I’ve found helpful as a leader, as well as my learning and some of the outcomes along the way. Reflections on my practice and my own professional development are shared, specifically in terms of creative leadership on the ground in higher education – where the ‘rubber hits the road’.

Journey of Learning about Leadership (Section 1)

We begin by transporting ourselves to Tuscany! This is a deliberately slow start. I tell light-hearted stories and offer insights on leadership that I was reminded of there, along with the realisation of just how important it is to find a place and space to reflect. (Chapter 1)

Next, I set the scene for the book, in terms of why I wrote it as part of scholarly practice and what I focus on as a journey of learning. (Chapter 2)

Influences on Ways of Thinking about Leadership (Section 2)

I introduce some of the major influences on my pedagogical and leadership thinking a decade ago. I made connections for myself to guide my practice, drawing on aspects of philosophy, sociology, and education. (Chapter 3)
INTRODUCTION

I share my lived experience of creating a postgraduate degree for the networked world of work. This involved the design and development of a collaborative model – a strategic knowledge network – along with the normal requirements of leading any new programme of study. (Chapter 4)

Building Knowledge about Leadership (Section 3)

Building on experience, we construct the five signposts for creative leadership, incorporating the cues identified through the stories and ideas discussed so far. The creative leadership signposts are intended to point us towards fostering academic commitment through a combined collegial + strategic approach. (Chapter 5)

Next we see how the cues can be used in different ways to guide holistic, integrated and strategic thinking for change. Five integrated strategic approaches emerge. They help to guide the design, development and implementation of strategy, including the essential monitoring and evaluation. (Chapter 6)

Application of Thinking about Leadership (Section 4)

We look at what happened in my attempts to transform the direction and interconnected practices of learning and teaching at the local level. I share my early intentions and then we see how my approaches played out, including what difference they made. (Chapter 7)

I reflect on how I have extended and enriched my practice in collaboration with others, such as a national network for learning and teaching leaders. I also discuss creativity and different ways to think about professional development, including why it matters. (Chapter 8)

Roadmap for Creative Leadership (Section 5)

I think about what makes an effective leader. Then I bring forward my creative leadership roadmap, which connects the strategic knowledge network model, the creative leadership signposts, and the integrated strategic approaches. I sum up creative leadership and highlight some of the key challenges and opportunities ahead. (Chapter 9)

At last we return to Villa Bordoni, a special place of inspiration for me, where I was able to make space to reflect on leadership – a luxury I intend to keep repeating. Again, I think about my leadership learning for joined up thinking, and sum up the final roadmap for creative leadership. (Chapter 10)

Appendices

At the end of the book you will find aspects of my key thinking, duplicated from throughout the book. This final collection is provided as a snapshot for ease of reference.

So, ‘where to’ first?

xx
Dealing with change, ambiguity and uncertainty, and the effect of that everyday reality upon us as well as those we interact with and lead, seems a good place to start.

Ongoing change is a hallmark of working life and this has been the case for well over a decade in higher education, which means that the ability to cope with leading change in a constantly changing environment is a key challenge for us (Davies et al., 2001; Kezar et al., 2006; McInnis et al., 2012; Scott et al., 2012; Tourish, 2012; Wooldridge, 2011).

As well as constant changes in the education environment worldwide, the area in which I work in higher education is dynamic. This is media and communication, where rapid change is the norm. Inevitably, there were also many changes experienced in our new school that was previously two in my university. Different ‘worlds’ had certainly come together in our school merger. Everything was new and involved change management, from the smallest to the largest process and practice – quite apart from strategic initiatives to make our offerings more competitive, such as beginning to transform a suite of postgraduate programmes by embedding internationalisation and constructivist approaches to learning and teaching, or undertaking a full portfolio and systems review for the school.

Dealing with all this is certainly my everyday reality. From the outset, I had to adjust my own approach to leadership – given the different scale and complexity of the newly formed and emergent organisational unit of the ‘mega’ school – and it is still an internal struggle for me sometimes. I could not do everything I used to in the smaller school, or in the same ways.

I knew I had to learn to lead differently.

It had been a challenging two years for us, when I decided that I needed time to rest, refresh and reflect. What better place than bella Italia? So let’s begin slowly at a little piece of heaven in the heart of Tuscany, where I found rich inspiration to start writing this book. It dawned on me, there, that a secret to leadership is to draw a circle around the all-consuming activities and relentless demands of the environment in which we work. As you will see, I was able to step out of that circle and make the time to think differently about cues and signposts for creative leadership – about what I had done, what I was doing, and what I could do.

And it all started with a walk in Chianti.
Figure 1: Ritual of the new oil, old oil – Near Villa Bordoni, Tuscany
SECTION 1: Real Stories

Journey of Learning about Leadership
Figure 2: The terrace – Villa Bordoni, Tuscany
CHAPTER 1

VILLA BORDONI

We begin by transporting ourselves to Tuscany! This is a deliberately slow start. I tell light-hearted stories and offer insights on leadership that I was reminded of there, along with the realisation of just how important it is to find a place and space to reflect.
meaning…reflects both an actual situation and the way it is grasped by a particular consciousness

(Rickman, 1979, p.112)
CHAPTER 1

Figure 3: First signposts on the way to Montefioralle – Near Villa Bordoni, Tuscany
We are at the beautiful Villa Bordoni in Tuscany. I went there for inspiration to write and to feed my soul, but I learned more than I expected. The experience reinforced some valuable ideas about leadership.

***

Villa Bordoni was quite a distance from the nearest town of Greve-in-Chianti and the possibility of local buses. I did not have a car, not being game to drive on the ‘wrong’ side of the road. But I only wanted to enjoy the ambience so not having a car wasn’t really a problem for me. I could sit in the garden here, take a cooking lesson there, sleep, eat, or walk in the magnificent surrounds when I felt like it. I was in Italy, after all.

On my second day, I was offered a ride to Greve by some Australians who were moving on from the Villa to their next stop. A few hours later, Ricardo had to come to my rescue for the return trip to the Villa, as there are no taxis in Greve (he had warned me, I have to confess).

Next day, I asked the indispensable Ricardo about the walk to the nearby old but still living village of Montefioralle on the next hill. He gave me a pre-prepared instruction sheet and was encouraging about my prospects of getting there and back – it sounded like a great idea to try out and I wanted the exercise.

TURN LEFT AT THE DUCK POND!

Optimistically, I followed Ricardo’s instructions to take the ‘road’ from the Villa and turn left at the duck pond, go past the old church on the left, then turn right down the track opposite the second large iron cross, walk through the vines and go up the hill to the village.

The instructions said the track went ‘straight up the hill’…but the track forked. The often-used track veered to the left and I could not see if it then went up the hill to the village; on the other hand, the little-used track did go ‘straight up the hill to the village’. This was my first decision point. I chose the straight track but it was rough, quite overgrown and a challenging climb – I had to be careful as I walked and tripped a few times, congratulating myself for wearing my strong walking shoes.

I reached the top and there was the expected car park, but it was on the right instead of the left. Had I come to the wrong side of the village, or were the instructions written for facing the other way? I soldiered on up past some private driveways, thinking ‘this can’t be right’. Eventually I found myself in a little street in the village where Amerigo Vespucci, the explorer who discovered America, was born…so the story goes.

From the village piazza in front of the inevitable church, the circular route back to Villa Bordoni was again to take me uphill after a short reprieve walking downwards. At least this time it was a made road and not a dirt track. After ‘gradually climbing again for about half a mile’ (hard to estimate when walking and having switched to metric measures many years ago), I should take the track on the right at the ‘junction’ to get me back to the duck pond and home. But after
the first wrong turn, I found myself in the middle of a field where the track petered out under an olive tree. I had sensed it was not the correct track because where it began was not what I would call a ‘junction’, but thought I should try it just in case.

Chuckling to myself under the olive tree in the field, I turned back and climbed on up the road. A number of cars passed me with the passenger in the front seat pouring over a map – obviously their navigator. I started wishing fellow tourists would be kind enough to stop and offer me a ride up the hill, as I was getting a little hot and bothered. Nobody did.

I had set out to walk this journey rather than be driven. I was not looking for an easy way out. Certainly I did not want to avoid the problems I was experiencing or simply give up, but I was not sure of the way and was losing confidence. There was nobody along the way to ask, unless I hailed one of those passing cars of summer tourists who probably didn’t know the way either, judging by their arguments over maps in the pantomimes I observed. It did not feel like a good idea with nobody around for some time by now, to try to stop the truck that eventually passed. There was a fairly dubious looking character driving it, judging by the way he looked at me. He was probably a perfectly nice gentleman, but I could not be sure.

I started to feel somewhat vulnerable out on the road by myself.

The second wrong track I tried was no better and took me to the middle of a collection of farmhouses. I felt a wave of gratitude when I caught sight of a duck pond but that was short-lived, because from this different side it did not look like the duck pond I was watching and hoping for. I could not see how to reach it anyway without venturing into the vines, and Ricardo’s instructions clearly stated that I should ‘not deviate from the track’. In any case, I thought there was probably more than one duck pond in the area. It really did not look the same from that side (though I discovered later it was the correct one).

It’s amazing how looking at something from a different angle or perspective can make such a difference to interpreting what we see, and to making decisions on that basis.

The day was warm. After a few hours now of tramping up and down hills on rocky dirt tracks and roads with no signs, I was feeling uneasy. I knew I was headed in the general direction, but I was hot and getting tired by this stage and could not find my way. I was no longer amused by the situation and almost turned back to retrace my steps as the only sure way to get home, but something made me try once more to find the correct track. I decided to attempt one last hill. I was determined to do what I had set out to, especially as a family member who knew the area had cautioned that it would not be suitable for me to walk there ‘because it’s too steep’.

So, pride still intact, I walked up that one last hill…and then, around the bend, there was a sign pointing to Villa Bordoni! There really was a junction (crossroads), but I had not been sure if the word meant the same thing to everyone.

Crucially, I did not know there would be a signpost at the junction – if I had known that, I would not have taken the wrong tracks earlier. That last correct, signposted track did involve more hills, but then took me through a lovely forest
with the birds in full song. I did indeed eventually reach the familiar side of the
duck pond and was then able to find my way back easily to the Villa.

The round trip to the village of Montefioralle had been hard for me, but
perseverance had paid off. I felt both relieved and energised as I livened the pace,
walking mostly downhill through that forest and along the final dirt road to the
Villa after the duck pond.

I knew exactly where I was going this time.

I had taken some risks and tried out a few ideas, had not panicked when I made
mistakes and took a few wrong tracks, and eventually achieved what I set out to do
with a little determination. The ‘one hour walk’ was two and a half hours for me,
but the detours were interesting. I felt good that I had been resilient enough to keep
trying despite the difficulties, and that ultimately there was a successful outcome.

Safely back at the haven of the Villa, I sipped a cool drink while recovering on
the terrace – looking over the lovely garden filled with roses and lavender and bees
buzzing, then beyond the little hedges and the curved stone wall covered in
climbing roses, to the vine-covered hills and cypress trees on the horizon. I glanced
in another direction towards the olive groves, and yet another to the gentle greens
and blues of the rolling hills. This is the essential Chianti region landscape in
Tuscany. Completing the feeling of absolute serenity in this beautiful place, there
was classical music playing softly in the background.

I drank in the moment and thought to myself: ‘life is good’.

Later, I laughed with Ricardo about my adventure. He told me that some people
miss the iron cross altogether – one of the early signposts – and never even get
close to the village, ending up instead in the nearby town of Greve-in-Chianti.
Others, however, are able to follow the signposts and sail through the walk in quick
time, with no problems at all.

Everyone is different, he reassured me.

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I learned a lot about interpreting the cues and signposts for that round trip past the
duck pond. This meant that I was able to pass on what I had learned, including my
mistakes, to supplement those written instructions for other guests who asked me
about my experience before they set off themselves.

This prompted me to reflect on how much easier it would have been if someone
else had gone with me to talk through the instructions, the signposts and the
journey, or at least if my phone had worked so I could quickly check with Ricardo.
It is not always easy walking alone (‘la signora e solo’ echoed in my mind from the
first night in the restaurant), especially when there are no signposts or when one
has to interpret them alone in unfamiliar territory, filling in what is missing by
relying on common sense, intuition, or simply hoping for the best.

The experience of the circular walk was a salutary reminder to me that signposts
can help me as a leader. But I also need to provide adequate signposts for those I
lead, and allow room for us all to make mistakes and learn from them. The journey
may be challenging and even a little scary. Sometimes we need help to interpret the
signs and the whole story.
As leaders we can get tired if the hill is steep and the climb is difficult, especially if we are not sure of the way. Having the courage for risk-taking and inventing the possibilities is part of leadership. So we should give ourselves permission to make mistakes and take the wrong track. This can become an excellent learning experience such as my close encounter with an olive grove, all the more meaningful after my cooking class. Perhaps next time I return to Italy I will also have the courage to drive. But this will feel more achievable if I have someone else with me to help navigate, while I focus on keeping to the right (for me, the ‘wrong side of the road’) instead of the left (what I’m familiar with).

I believe it is important to be able to work independently as a leader (it’s true, sometimes ‘la signora e solo’), but also to know when to reach out to colleagues. Peer learning, sharing, collegiality and collaboration can make the journey much more interesting and fun. Developing trust-based relationships with colleagues is key.

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At the Italian villa I also met a wonderful American couple, Frank and Patricia, who invited me on a few road trips with them to Lucca and San Gimignano. Frank chided that I had ‘flunked’ navigating because I took them on the scenic route to Lucca. In my defence, the signposts (if they existed) were usually situated at the actual turn rather than with any advance warning, so of course we sailed past many times. Those who have driven in Italy will be familiar with the many ‘roundabouts’, each with its own challenges for the novice to negotiate. The places we were looking for were often mentioned in small print on the signs and that definitely did not help. It was also great fun when there was no mention of our preferred destination at all for a while, making us wonder if we would end up in Milan or Rome instead!

Signposts are one thing, but being readable and in the right place at the right time is another. The GPS could have saved the day but it was not much use either, often leading us astray. Once we ended up in a driveway at a closed gate, in the middle of an industrial estate.

In contrast to my solo walking experience of the circular route from Villa Bordoni to the hilltop village and back, there was much laughter, collegiality and storytelling in that car on our way to Lucca. Any difficulties we had with navigation somehow did not matter much. We made it to Lucca, albeit via some ‘interesting detours’ and looping back a couple of times on the highway.

En route we passed two signs for Siena, with the signs together but pointing in opposite directions. This was very amusing. Again it showed that there is often more than one way to reach a destination, as I reminded Frank.

***

The story of my circular walk from the Villa to Montefioralle is living proof for me that “the most personal of all that he knows is that which he has discovered for himself” (Bruner, 1979, pp.82-83). The story of the journey to Lucca also had
personal significance for me, in reinforcing the fact that there is more than one way to approach leadership. I am a great believer in the value of the ‘lived experience’ for making meaning and will talk about that a lot more.

In his book, *The springboard: How storytelling ignites action in knowledge-era organizations*, Stephen Denning advocates storytelling as being ideally suited to communicating change and stimulating innovation. He also believes that abstract analysis is easier to understand through a well-chosen story, because a springboard story helps to catalyse understanding rather than merely passing on information (Denning, 2000). Stories, including text and images, can also contribute significantly to learning, rather than relying on facts (Wurman, 2001).

While everyone’s journey will be different, perhaps some of the stories, cues and signposts suggested throughout this book will resonate with the experiences you have had, or help you to think differently or simply to navigate some part of your leadership terrain. Stories about things that did not go so well, or mistakes I have made, may also be helpful because “people learn more from their mistakes than from their successes” (Denning, 2004, p.125). This was particularly evident to me in my walk from Villa Bordoni and back, past the now all-important duck pond.

As leaders, I believe we need to look beyond the expected, and be willing to find inspiration in unexpected and even unconventional ways and places. We also need to encourage and enable others to think outside the square with us. In times of constant change, we need to be able to manage the sometimes very real fear of change. And it is essential for leaders to expect the unexpected and be able to adapt. We also need to facilitate professional support and peer learning for others; however, they need to be open to that support and interested in improving the situation. I have found that relationship management is key to engagement here.

Summing up, the first cues for leaders highlighted so far, include:

– Perseverance, resilience, courage, confidence, vulnerability
– Peer learning, sharing knowledge, collaboration, collegiality, relationship management
– Creativity, imagination, resourcefulness, learning from mistakes
– Multiple ways to reach a destination, different ways to look at things
– Looking beyond the expected, taking risks, inventing possibilities
– Expecting the unexpected, acknowledging fear, adapting, encouraging and enabling

Let’s keep these cues in mind as we travel on together. I hope you find my stories useful for re-interpreting in your own context.

We’ll return to Villa Bordoni later, but now for a change of pace…
Figure 4: Destination Montefioralle – Near Villa Bordoni, Tuscany
CHAPTER 2

MY CHALLENGE

Next, I set the scene for the book, in terms of why I wrote it as part of scholarly practice and what I focus on as a journey of learning.
discovery, like surprise, favors the well-prepared mind…
(Bruner, 1979, p.82)
Having reinvigorated ourselves in bella Toscana, we begin with why I think there is a need for this leadership book and what my focus is, to set the scene for what is to come in the journey.

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WHY DID I WRITE THIS BOOK?

Well, there is a short answer and a long answer to this question.

The short answer is that I believe there is a need for in-depth stories such as mine – the ‘ground truth’ as Cohen and Prusak (2001) would put it – of what is really happening on the ground, for me at least, at the local level of leadership in higher education. This book is intended to be for the benefit of colleagues in such roles, but may also be interesting for those in very senior levels of leadership or those in other organisational contexts.

I wish I had read such a story when I started out as a leader; or, better still, down the track with some experience behind me. Sometimes we may feel ‘rudderless’ and so this book is really about having the confidence to build our own rudder for the voyage. I have to confess that (most of the time) I have enjoyed the challenge of trying to work it all out creatively for myself, beyond the leadership programmes I’ve attended or taught. But the best thing has been discovering that there’s a lot we can learn from others, and that sometimes a problem is not actually unique to us or quite so difficult after all. I’m convinced there is a lot to be said for sharing knowledge, for peer learning and support.

So whether you are new to a leadership role, or with the benefit of experience behind you, and whatever level or context you are in, I hope the whole story makes sense to you and is useful for your leadership practice and professional development. Recording the whole story has been cathartic for me. But more than that, exploring the literature and ‘writing as research’ has definitely strengthened my learning about creative leadership.

Here is the long answer.

In terms of books already published on leadership in higher education, these have so far focused on a variety of aspects such as cultures and change, and how academics respond to changing environments (for example, Trowler, 1998; Trowler et al., 2008), and the significance and influence of disciplines/territories (for example, Becher & Trowler, 2001; Trowler et al., 2012). Ramsden (1998) wrote about proficient academic leadership, clearly at the local level. Not long after, Knight and Trowler (2001) also focused firmly on the departmental level, but there has not been a great deal since.

A few years later, Kezar et al. (2006) highlighted the changing and competitive landscape of higher education. They focused on new paradigms, theories and concepts of leadership contextualised for higher education, and included case studies. Stephanie Marshall’s (2007) edited book was about effectively leading universities through major change, such as embedding global perspectives across a university. Interestingly, for me, she also believes in the value of storytelling as an engaging style to present ideas, both in book form and in leadership practice.
CHAPTER 2

Change capability has certainly become a more recent focus (for example, Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Branson, 2010; Fullan & Scott, 2009) and may include case studies, roadmaps, or pointers on the individual qualities of a leader such as “courage, passion, confidence, flexibility, resourcefulness, and creativity” (Bolman & Gallos, 2011, p.9). You will find these features in my book too. However, these other books have not been about a specific journey of practice written by a leader at the local level, with reflection on professional development. Unlike my book, these others have not been a personal, in-depth and scholarly story of one academic’s ‘lived experience’ and creative thinking about strategic outcomes on the ground.

In terms of what journal articles can tell us about what is important and any likely gaps, I found the following well-known samples helpful in deciding to write the book and what to focus on.

Paul Trowler and Peter Knight pointed out over a decade ago that a great deal of research in higher education institutions has relied on individual academic interviews or questionnaires. However, they identified a need for additional local level ethnographic studies on leadership, which they advocated in order to reveal the “important social processes at work within communities of practice in higher education settings” (Trowler & Knight, 2000, p.40). It is unclear whether or not they meant such studies should be in book form, or if they included the possibility of autoethnography. But in any case, they identified the need for scholarly work based on the local level experience of leadership in action.

In 2007, seven years after Trowler and Knight’s article, Malcolm Tight analysed 485 journal articles published in 20 specialist higher education journals in multiple countries in the year 2000. He also identified a scarcity of articles focused on leadership at the department level – finding that only 19 of the 485 articles reviewed had included such a local level focus (Tight, 2007).

Also in 2007, Alan Bryman undertook a review of the literature on effective leadership in higher education, in which he focused on departmental leadership. His review covered journal articles spanning the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Australia from 1985-2005 (a much longer period than Tight’s review of articles that had been published only in the year 2000). Just as Malcolm Tight had found, Bryman also discovered that “[s]urprisingly little systematic research has been conducted on the question of which forms of leadership are associated with departmental effectiveness” (Bryman, 2007a, p.693).

Interestingly, for me, Bryman explains that his review focuses on articles about those with formal roles who are in charge of departments and so on. However, he also acknowledges that there are ‘other roles’ such as directors of programmes, of research, of learning and teaching, etc that are “sometimes uncovered by researchers concerned with departmental leadership in universities (e.g. Smith, 2005), but [such other roles] are rarely considered in relation to the issue of departmental leadership effectiveness” (Bryman, 2007a, p.705).

I have one such ‘other role’ as a leader of learning and teaching at the local level in a large school in a university, rather than a smaller department. Mine is also a formal role as Deputy Dean and I am responsible for strategic and scholarly leadership of all learning and teaching activities in the school, but there are
MY CHALLENGE

minimal direct reporting lines to me from other academics. On the other hand, in the past seven years I have frequently been Acting Head of my previous school and then Acting Dean in the new merged school. There are direct reporting lines and accountabilities in this role that are quite different from my substantive role as Deputy Dean.

So I know from first-hand experience that the roles of Dean and Deputy Dean (or you could substitute other titles such as Head and Deputy Head/Director) are not the same, and that each type of role presents its own opportunities as well as challenges. In any case, I think it takes a certain kind of courage to be a leader of any sort in the higher education environment. And I am convinced that both roles contribute to the work, effectiveness and standing of the school and the wider university, so there is always more we can learn about this.

As I interact with colleagues within and beyond the school, I find that transitioning back and forth quite frequently between the two different roles is one of the challenges I face. Perhaps this is the case for those in ‘deputy’ roles more broadly. It should also be acknowledged that being in an acting role for a short period is not necessarily the same as being in the substantive one for the long haul, and brings its own challenges.

Irrespective of interpretations and expectations of roles (or perhaps because of them), over time I have developed my own perspective on leadership of learning and teaching at the local level. This begins with the ability to influence. And I believe at the heart of being able to influence academics on the ground is to know them and what they do. It is also vital to recognise the significance of their commitment to their students, each other and the discipline, to learning and teaching and scholarship, to the department/school and institution, etc. Their priorities and the level of their commitment in each of these areas separately, and as a whole, can play a huge part in academics being receptive to change, or indeed resisting it.

This may seem an obvious statement in any context. But I believe we still need to take up Alan Bryman’s lead and understand more about what constitutes and influences the commitment of academics, such as autonomy and collegiality including participatory decision-making, in our own local contexts. Looked at from another angle, we should heed the caution that the commitment of academics may be damaged through ineffective leadership strategies – particularly those strategies that do not proactively support the department/school per se, or that undermine “collegiality, autonomy and the opportunity to participate in decisions...” (Bryman, 2007a, p.707).

So enhancing our understanding of this ‘commitment’, and what sort of strategies may be useful to anticipate and address resistance to change in our local contexts, is therefore important. Significantly, Bryman points out that because ineffective leadership strategies can damage the commitment of academics and may actually be counter-productive, and little research into this area had been undertaken to date at the time of his review, this should be investigated further.

There is also a need in higher education institutions to: 1) strengthen support for the professional development of learning and teaching leaders, with a focus on action learning, personal mastery, situated learning, critical analysis/scholarship,
expert guidance/mentoring and networks/peer mentoring; and 2) strengthen recognition of the value of, and reward for, learning and teaching leadership (Bosanquet et al., 2009; Marshall et al., 2011). Further work in these areas is important to make connections with departmental/school effectiveness.

The gaps identified by Bryman highlight that we need to know more about which forms of leadership promote academic commitment in our own context, and are associated with departmental/school effectiveness. Professional development for leaders, and the motivation for learning and teaching leadership, have also been highlighted and require ongoing discussion.

We now turn to samples of research reports, to see what matters most and where there are gaps or areas needing further exploration. Significantly, in reporting on leadership capabilities in the changing context of higher education in Australia, Geoff Scott, Hamish Coates and Michelle Anderson note that “studies of how higher education leaders manage change along with their own learning and development are relatively rare…” but add that where studies do exist, there is a consistent theme of uncertainty by leaders about how best to lead change in their daily practice (Scott et al., 2008, p.vii, bolding added).

Their report provides rich data on the higher education context and the capabilities required of a range of specific learning and teaching leadership roles, including my role category among others. They mention practical approaches, such as ways of listening, which leaders have found useful for resolving typical problems and issues (Scott et al., 2008). In a later report, the mantra “listen, link and lead – always in that order” is again suggested as one important approach for effective leadership, involving contextualisation and ownership by participants (Scott et al., 2012, p.19). This practical tip was highlighted previously in 2009, in Michael Fullan and Geoff Scott’s book, Turnaround leadership for higher education. Another suggested effective leadership approach is “model, teach and learn” which puts a spotlight on a leader’s personal qualities and improvement as well as capability (Scott et al., 2012, p.20).

At the senior executive level, Craig McInnis and colleagues emphasise the importance of outcomes. They say:

Academic leadership for learning and teaching requires a strong emphasis on impact. Student success – in all dimensions of their experience – is the paramount concern. For this reason, leadership is judged by its effects rather than by the leader’s possession of competencies. Its purpose is to promote the conditions that enable high quality teaching, to raise the awareness of colleagues so that they work together to deliver visible improvements to the student experience and the quality of teaching.

(McInnis, Ramsden & Maconachie, 2012, p.9)
With this in mind, they put forward five principles to guide the executive leadership of learning and teaching: 1) shape the strategic vision; 2) inspire and enable excellence; 3) devolve leadership of learning and teaching; 4) reward, recognise and develop teaching; and 5) involve students (McInnis et al., 2012). In another study, Marcia Devlin and colleagues also argue that “professional development, reward and recognition mechanisms and enabling career pathways for those committed to teaching and learning are important components in the successful leadership of teaching and learning enhancement” (Devlin et al., 2012, p.6).

Collaborative and inspirational/transformational leadership at departmental level has been found to positively influence teaching and the student learning experience (Martin et al., 2003; Ramsden et al., 2007), and “a collegial commitment to providing an outstanding learning experience and a focus on enabling effective learning outcomes is associated with more stimulating and collaborative forms of leadership” (McInnis et al., 2012, p.59). Also highlighting the importance of a collaborative culture, another study focused on distributed leadership in higher education institutions. In their report, Sandra Jones and colleagues recognise that distributed leadership is context specific, and they see this approach to the leadership of learning and teaching as complementing, rather than replacing, formal leadership. As a starting point, based on their project experience, they describe the approach as follows:

Distributed leadership for learning and teaching is a leadership approach in which individuals who trust and respect each other’s contributions, collaborate together to achieve identified goals. It occurs as a result of an open culture within and across an institution. It is an approach in which reflective practice is an integral part enabling action to be critiqued, challenged and developed through cycles of planning, action, reflection and assessment and re-planning. It happens most effectively when people at all levels engage in action, accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise.

(Jones et al., 2012, p.21)

Leadership capabilities and the effectiveness of leadership have been prominent themes in reports on higher education, including collaboration and some emphasis on strategic outcomes. The significance of professional development for leaders has emerged quite strongly.

However, in his discussion of the higher education system in the United Kingdom, Dennis Tourish reports that limited research has been done on leadership development, and says that robust models are needed to enhance leadership effectiveness. Such models can include formal programmes for leadership development, but these are not enough. For longer-term impact, he
advocates that formal programmes are combined with mentoring, coaching, job-based activities, and especially other interventions “designed to sustain deep reflection and ongoing learning in the real world of work…[putting] action at the heart of the learning process” (Tourish, 2012, p.15). Others agree that applying such contemporary student learning approaches to the professional development of academic leaders is important (Bolden et al., 2012; McInnis et al., 2012).

In reporting on their study on academic leadership in relation to teaching, research and service, Richard Bolden and colleagues highlight the importance of personal professional autonomy and ‘self leadership’ to academics, which of course applies to academic leaders too. According to their study, the ‘social identity’ approach to leadership appears to be very important to academics. We are likely to be regarded by other academics as ‘real leaders’ if we are perceived to be “working on behalf of the group, helping to frame group identity, and putting in place structures and processes that further the interests of the group” (Bolden et al., 2012, p.2). This applies to leaders such as Deans with line management responsibilities, and to other roles such as Deputy Dean Learning and Teaching with different accountabilities.

Thinking about the social identity approach to leadership takes me back to what I said earlier, about my own perspective on leadership that I have developed at the local level. This has always been very much around knowing my colleagues and what they do, as well as being aware of their levels of commitment to their students, each other and their discipline, to learning and teaching and scholarship, and to the school and institution – probably in that order for many colleagues, in my experience. It is important for me to know ‘where we are at’ if I am to have any hope of tapping into commitment, and of developing strategy to strengthen and broaden commitment, or simply to sustain it. If change is perceived as coming from ‘the centre’ of the university, or even the department/school, and unless the academics see a good reason to adopt the change and have a commitment to the department/school or institution, they are less likely to engage with it and more likely to resist.

I know I have credibility with many colleagues, and have worked hard to foster group identity and put structures and processes in place to further the interests of the group (see also Bolden et al., 2012). I have made many forays into the territory of translating policy requirements for academic colleagues and providing templates, prototypes, mentoring, etc. But I could do more in terms of enabling academics to make believable connections for themselves through the scholarship of learning and teaching. So this is something I have wanted to think more about and explore further.
If a collaborative culture and collegiality are relevant to the commitment of academics (Bryman, 2007a), and professional autonomy and self leadership are also important to academics (Bolden et al., 2012), it is clear to me that we need to know more about the ‘social identity’ approach to leadership. In particular, we need to know more about how to adopt this approach successfully at the local level, in winning the hearts and minds of our academic colleagues and achieving strategic outcomes.

Jacky Lumby reviewed research commissioned by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education in the United Kingdom, in relation to a wider literature search. In highlighting the need for further research, she suggests:

Evidence would be useful about the impact of leadership on teaching and learning, research and enterprise; that is, whether and to what extent outcomes are influenced by leadership. It may be helpful to fill in some of the gaps about how leaders operate, particularly in micropolitics, through observation and ethnographic material. (Lumby, 2012, p.2)

Given that leadership in higher education is context-specific, there is clearly a need for ongoing research at the local level in institutions “to identify, evaluate and promote effective and desirable approaches to leadership” (Bolden et al., 2012, p.46). As mentioned, however, not a great deal has been published in terms of books on higher education leadership, pitched at conceptualising ways to think about effective leadership, relating that thinking to real practice and strategic outcomes, and giving a personal in-depth account of the reflection and professional development of a local level leader in the process.

My book is a response to this challenge. I address the issues I have just highlighted as being important and relatively under-researched. These include effective leadership in a local context, particularly a roadmap for the ‘social identity’ approach to promote and foster academic commitment and achieve strategic outcomes – enhancing departmental/school effectiveness. I also explore professional development for leadership, particularly creative ways to reflect deeply on workplace practice for continuous learning and improvement.

Sue Clegg’s work on academic identities springs to mind here as another incentive for me to explore, learn from, and share my experience with you. She says, with some optimism, “…individuals have created spaces for the exercise of principled personal autonomy and agency…[and] it appears that identities in academia are expanding and proliferating…[thus] paying detailed attention to how changes are being experienced is an important element in theorizing what is happening inside the university sector” (Clegg, 2008, p.343). I have kept this in mind while attempting to learn more about how to reconcile ‘self leadership’ and the ‘social identity’ approach to leadership, with my own development as an analytical and strategic leader, to achieve change.

I am encouraged by Glenys Drew’s study involving a group of senior leaders in
an Australian university. They identified key challenges faced, as addressing the need for strategic leadership, flexibility, creativity and change-capability, among others. Drew proposes that “engaging productively with others to achieve change has never been more critical in educational environments, such as universities” (Drew, 2010, p.57) and, importantly, that discussing common challenges and sharing ways of facing these challenges contributes to the community of practice (see also, Scott et al., 2008).

Academic communities should be supported, by encouraging “colleagueship” (Bolden et al., 2012, p.44). To that end, I decided to share my personal reflections and propose ways of thinking about leadership that I have found useful. I also explain my interpretation and application of that thinking, and discuss the strategic outcomes that have been possible as a result.

While the context of my experience is in higher education, it may be that my stories, ideas and learning about leadership on the ground are useful in other settings too. And while my experience is in the field of media and communication, my ideas could be interpreted and adapted across a range of disciplines.

WHAT DO I FOCUS ON?

This is a contemporary account of lived experience for just over a decade. I offer my own interpretation of what I think it means to lead learning and teaching on the ground, how I have gone about it, and what transformation happened (or not), including my own learning and professional development.

I draw on a wide range of theoretical perspectives and relate these to examples from my practice. I show how this thinking related first, to pedagogical developments in my teaching practice; second, to the leadership of learning and teaching more broadly in a large school; and third, to my professional development.

Upholding collegiality has been described as an ethos of universities, to be combined with more strategic and business-like approaches (Davies et al., 2001). This struck a chord with me. I describe my attempts to foster the shared commitment of my academic colleagues, at the same time as attempting to reconcile strategic intention and action with the opportunities and constraints of the changing environment in which we work in higher education. This has been a complex challenge and called for creative thinking.

My account echoes some of the findings in Bryman’s (2007a) analysis, particularly in relation to collegiality. In his report for the United Kingdom Higher Education Leadership Foundation, he also identified two interpretations of ‘collegiality’ as “decision-making through the involvement and full participation of staff”, and as creating an environment of “mutual supportiveness among staff” (Bryman, 2007b, p.19). I believe it is important for departments/schools to have both characteristics of collegiality in a learning community of scholars. I am equally convinced that collegiality must be complemented by a strategic approach with structure and governance, including monitoring and evaluation frameworks and a clear outcomes focus (see Creech & Willard, 2001; Peterson, 2004, 2009). This resonates with an Australian study in higher education, in which
participants highlighted key aspects of leadership as having vision and direction; communicating the vision and aligning it with stakeholders, strategy and resources; and implementing the vision through enabling, motivating and inspiring engagement and contribution of stakeholders (Marshall et al., 2011, pp.91-92).

I have outlined issues raised in the literature, and believe that distributed leadership has widespread application in the sector. At the same time, I note that Smith (2005) undertook a study of leadership and management in two engineering departments, each from a different type of university in the United Kingdom. While that study was inherently limited to a small sample, and there were other factors at play at the two universities involved such as a different emphasis on research versus teaching, there was an interesting finding. The less collegial department, which had formally dispersed leadership, was found to have more successful leadership and management practices. On the other hand, the less successful department had a more natural distribution of leadership.

My own view is that there should be a mix of collegiality including participatory decision-making in a supportive and collaborative environment, together with clear strategic vision, structure and governance. For me, this very much includes both formally dispersed and naturally distributed leadership (see also Jones et al., 2012).

There may be a tension in reconciling all these priorities, however, particularly for an inexperienced leader. I believe that balancing such priorities, expressed simply as strategic/formally defined + collegial/emergent, is a key challenge of leadership at the local level in higher education, so this is an underlying theme of this book.

Balancing these priorities has been helped, in my case, through collaboration with a colleague who was the senior manager in my school. As I explain later, such effective collaboration across job functions for learning and teaching has not been the norm over my long career in higher education, but it has yielded excellent results. Given the emergence of a significant focus on the overall ‘student experience’ in higher education, and the leadership needed to ensure a positive student experience (McInnis et al., 2012), Ewart Wooldridge also suggests that the competitive positioning of institutions “benefits from academic and professional support staff groups working together, and crossing traditional boundaries that traditionally divided them” (Wooldridge, 2011, p.247). This has been my positive, and unexpected, experience.

It has not always been easy to develop and maintain my own strategic and collegial leadership stance. This is especially the case, given that I have a formal senior and influential leadership role as part of the school’s governance structure but I am only ‘formally in charge of’ one academic. As you will see throughout the book, I emphasise the value of true collaboration in shared endeavours, including those that are strategically driven but also those that emerge within a collegial learning community. I recognise that the academic colleagues I work with are ‘professional’ and ‘internally motivated’ as Bryman (2007a) reminds us, and I have always believed in the importance of relationship management intertwined with my strategic role. Relationship management is an important skill for academic leaders and is something that I rely upon in my daily repertoire, to engage and influence others; but it is not enough.
Scott et al. (2008) explain the three overlapping aspects of personal, interpersonal and cognitive leadership capability needed by a learning and teaching leader, as taking in emotional intelligence (personal and interpersonal aspects) and the ability to diagnose, differentiate what is important, and match an appropriate course of action (cognitive aspect). They say the personal, interpersonal and cognitive aspects of leadership are intertwined and all three should function together. These aspects of leadership capability are underpinned by “generic competencies like the ability to organize, run meetings, use IT, and an understanding of how universities work; and role-specific competencies (in this case a high level of skill and understanding about learning and teaching in higher education)” (Scott et al., 2008, p.18). But significantly, for me, they add that a real test of a learning and teaching leader’s capability is how one responds when things ‘go wrong’ or in the face of a resistant or passive culture, which is certainly a feature of some higher education environments.

In their study of academics’ perceptions of learning and teaching leadership and management, Marshall et al. (2011) identified diverse understandings of the terms ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ but say that conceptions of leadership and management emerged as follows: leadership is concerned with having a forward-thinking vision, communicating it, and motivating and inspiring others to engage with it; management is concerned with operational aspects such as planning, organising and problem solving.

Given the existence of these and numerous other accounts of leadership attributes, characteristics and theories, my book does not attempt to span and interrogate the literature on leadership; or, for that matter, creativity. In any case, Tudor Rickards and Susan Moger point out that ‘creativity’ and ‘leadership’ still “remain highly ambiguous in definitional and operational terms” and add that “creativity and leadership are more complex and more contested areas of study” than management and innovation (Rickards & Moger, 2006, p.14). In their study of the literature on creativity, Beth Hennessey and Teresa Amabile were also surprised by the diversity of opinion on creativity and the lack of consensus even among psychologists. Furthermore, they believe that despite the development of promising technologies “we are not anywhere near the point of being able to image the creative process as it unfolds in the human brain” (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010, p.574).

Such contestation over theoretical perspectives on leadership and creativity may well depend on the context or discipline (such as a business orientation, rather than a design one). In a business context, for example, Robert Epstein and Victoria Phan report on four competencies of creativity for creative expression: capturing new ideas as they occur, challenging by taking on difficult tasks, broadening or expanding skills and knowledge, and surrounding through arranging stimulating physical and social environments (Epstein & Phan, 2012). In a design context, for example, in their study exploring the cognitive profile of creativity in design, Hernan Casakin and Shulamith Kreitler report that more creative designers feature qualities of “external as well as internal realities, expressing one's personal experiences and binding constructs in multiple and often unusual ways...[and that] the cognitive profile of the creative designer is rich, variegated and combines..."
various tendencies that may be even considered as contradictory” (Casakin & Kreitler, 2011, p.167).

I was particularly interested in the views put forward by Sven Hemlin, Carl Allwood and Ben Martin, about the extent to which the expression of individual or group creative potential is influenced by the environment in which people work. They say that group collaboration contributes strongly to what they describe as a ‘Creative Knowledge Environment’. However, they caution that such collaboration takes time and effort and a clear sense of strategy, and that a focus on collaboration should be monitored so there is sufficient time to allow for creativity and knowledge generation to develop. Significantly, they add that: “creativity can be helped if, in addition to group interaction, time is also allowed for individual reflection” (Hemlin et al., 2008, p.205). This is certainly a path I have followed in my book.

If we continue to delve into the literature, we could be opening a ‘Pandora’s Box’. In linking creativity and leadership, for example, Jennifer Mueller and colleagues also report that unless the ‘charismatic’ leadership prototype is evident, there may even be a tension and negative perception in the minds of some employees when expressions of ‘creativity’ are associated with ‘leadership’ potential (Mueller et al., 2011). If I chose this path to follow in the book, and do it justice, I could not focus on what I decided to. So that will be for another day, or other interested colleagues.

We will definitely return to some of the ideas mentioned above, particularly in terms of fostering collaboration for creativity, a creative leader’s attributes of thinking outside the square, and continuing to broaden one’s professional development. However, in view of the multitude of opinions and contested theories on both creativity and leadership, and their possible inter-relationships (or not), my intention is not to reinvent the wheel or to make such a literature review my main focus.

I feel comfortable in this stance, because in their Australian study of specific leadership roles for learning and teaching in higher education, Deborah Southwell, Deborah West and Michele Scoufis say that a leadership theory may have relevance for some more than others. They explain that ‘leadership’ as a concept is influenced by the context and is open to a wide range of interpretations, depending on factors such as the discipline. Significantly, they also say that “[h]ow leadership is conceptualised holds great ramifications in terms of leadership development” (Southwell et al., 2008, p.7).

This idea encapsulates and sums up what I focus on in the book. I certainly draw upon the considerable work of many others, but the focus is clearly on my own experience on the ground and my conceptualisation of what ‘creative leadership’ means, including leadership practice and development. In particular, this book is authentic; it is not an exposition by others, about what leaders such as myself need to know and put into practice. It comes from the heartland of local level practice – for better or for worse!

My personal inspiration for creative leadership was realising that successful strategy is about “actively shaping the game you play, not just playing the game you find” (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1995, p.95). This has been uppermost in my
CHAPTER 2

mind for a long time, at both pedagogical and organisational levels. My learning and how I have developed as a leader has occurred in an ongoing way around real-world challenges and dilemmas common to my role; it has involved active learning supported by peers in the same role; and I have made sense of my experience through reflection on action and outcomes (Scott et al., 2008; Tourish, 2012).

The book culminates in making explicit a strategic roadmap that I have found very helpful for creative leadership. I have also realised that this roadmap can be used to guide both creative leadership practice and development.

My ideas have certainly been emergent. It was comforting and quite a relief to discover that it is normal for all this to come together retrospectively through scholarly reflection, to make sense of what has already happened and to inform future thinking. Michael Fullan says that the “most effective leaders use practice as their fertile learning ground. They never go from theory to practice or research evidence to application. They do it the other way around: they try to figure out what’s working, what could be working better, and then look into how research and theory might help” (Fullan, 2011, p.xii).

I can move forward with confidence, with that reassurance in mind!

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In the next chapter I’ll draw together some theoretical influences on my thinking as I reflected on my practice, and the key cues and signposts I started to identify on the way towards defining what creative leadership means to me.
Figure 5: Choosing the right path—Near Villa Bordoni, Tuscany