# 8　**Leadership as Greedy Work**

I conclude this book by advancing the thesis just alluded to that the new work of educational leaders is being reconstructed as greedy work and that educational leadership is to be understood as an increasingly greedy occupation. This represents the core idea of what might be termed the grammar of the new educational leadership. Following Abbott (1997), I argued in the Introduction that a new trajectory of school and educational leadership is taking shape. Then, in the first part of the book, I outlined some of the key architectural features of this emerging trajectory. It is during such periods of social and institutional transition and transformation, suggests Lewis Coser (1974, p. 33), in his book *Greedy Institutions*, that 'reliable servants of power become especially useful', because: 'rulers want to wrest economic and political resources from dispersed power centers not under their control. At such historical junctures rulers become especially greedy. They then attempt to recruit to their staff men [*sic*] who will serve them totally'. As historical examples of the exploitation of segments of society by greedy institutions, Coser considered such disparate groups as the eunuchs and alien nationalities employed in courtly society, royal mistresses, celibate religious orders, domestic servants, housewives in male-dominated families and societies, and militant utopian and religious sects among others. My purpose in the discussion that follows is to build on Coser's concept of greediness to show that, far from being a historical aberration, and having disappeared as a result of the cessation of the exploitation of some of Coser's examples, greediness has recently colonised a range of new work practices, particularly amongst what were previously referred to as the autonomous or semi-autonomous professions.

I shall begin by distinguishing voluntary, greedy and total institutions. Then I develop the theme that the logic and ethos of work in the service sectors of increasingly service-based and knowledge-based economies, in particular the leadership of schools, represents a new form of servility. Here, in effect, I shall be inverting Hayek's (1994 [1944]) claim in *The Road to Serfdom* that the greater dependence of a civil society on the apparatus of government substitutes corrosive enslavement for liberty, by showing that, rather than diminishing servility, the marketised regulation of public sector agencies and the creation of an enterprise culture breed their own new and unique forms of exploitation and serfdom, which I term greedy work practices. Next I flesh out the idea of greedy work in respect of leadership roles, leadership identities and the claims that greedy policies make on leaders. Finally, I consider some of the consequences of this new mode of occupational servility.

### Greed and Institutional Greediness

Coser (1974, p. 4) defined greedy institutions as those powerful groups and agencies which 'make total claims on their members' and 'attempt to encompass within their circle the whole personality'. Such institutions seek 'exclusive and undivided loyalty' by endeavouring to: 'reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries. Their demands on the person are omnivorous'. Even though it may make substantial, undivided or total claims on its members, Coser is careful to distinguish a greedy institution from Goffman's (1961, p. 11) idea of a total institution, which was: 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life'. Goffman's examples included prisons, barracks, mental asylums (as they were once known), boarding schools, convents, prisoner-of-war camps, concentration camps and all places and agencies where the membership comprises mostly extended, isolated and involuntary incarceration. While the line distinguishing these two forms of membership may be thinly drawn, both contrast with the membership of voluntary agencies. The latter, which are generally seen by social theorists as the core of the fabric that defines a civil society, include numerous interest groups: community associations, sporting bodies, churches, youth groups, service clubs (e.g., Rotary), and leisure and recreation societies. Unlike the two other institutional types, volunteerism comprises mostly unremunerated, part-time or spare-time work arising out of individuals' goodwill allegiances as citizens. Such is the nature of the voluntary ethic that citizens will often divide their loyalties between a number of institutions with claims on their personal energies and resources.

This implied continuum of voluntary–greedy–total forms of institutional membership is not meant to be definitive, but it is helpful for delineating the qualitative differences in the levels and types of work demands made on individuals. The key point is that wherever there exists evidence of work intensification, one should expect to find instances of greedy work. Thus, in public sector work settings, such as schools, hospitals, local and municipal governments, libraries, universities and welfare agencies, and in some broad areas of management, where there has been a significant diminution of a public agency's government-derived funding base, a downsizing of its staff, and an increased reliance of non-tenured and short-term contract staff, there is likely to be found evidence of the new greediness. Agencies faced with significant shortfalls in resources, but also corresponding increases in responsibilities (e.g., increased case loads, student enrolments, patient care needs), are imposing a significantly higher burden of work on fewer staff. In these circumstances, greedy work becomes a leitmotif for societies which, in accordance with increasingly pervasive 'greed is good' ideologies, function as vehicles for the realisation of self-interests and the pursuit of personal aggrandisement. In their greedy work environments, educational leaders in self-managing schools, for example, especially principals, work at the kind of relentless, full-on, treadmill pace expressed so graphically earlier on by NEWPRIN#4. They respond incessantly to the demands of their employers, but they are reluctant

to call on senior officials for their advice or help because they fear that to do so may be interpreted as personal weakness and, consequently, as an indelible blot on their annual performance appraisals. After all, to self-manage a school means to be on one's own and to work it out all by oneself within one's own resources. Such is the way in which greedy rulers and policy-makers, in Coser's terms, secure total service from dispersed power centers, individuals and heads of operating units. From the perspective of overall NPM steerage capacity, then, the solution to the system's problem of alleged provider capture is the imposition of greedy work on its rowers. Greedy work is such that it demands one be constantly and 'fully there' (Kahn, 1992): always attentive, alert, absorbed in and utterly committed to the particular task as a totally functioning, fully available, non-stop cognitive and emotional presence in the workplace.

## The New Servitude

There are four key features of the new grammar of servitude that is a product of greedy work which are worthy of comment. These are: changed understandings of the idea of service, reconfigured roles, reconstructed identities and new claims on leaders.

### Service

Economic prosperity in the knowledge economy is claimed to depend less on the production of physical goods and increasingly on the outputs of the services sector. This sector covers institutions in both the public and private realms, and includes such diverse endeavours as insurance, banking, finance, computing, education, heath care, tourism, the arts and media, and numerous emerging high-tech, knowledge-based 'sunrise' occupations. In the public sector, instrumentalities and agencies whose charters include service provision continue to deliver services directly themselves or, increasingly, indirectly through such mechanisms as outsourcing to a range of providers in accordance with the contractual provisions of 'service agreements'. In these and similar ways, the market economy puts a price on diverse commodified services, such as the provision of care and learning, for in this cosmology of marketisation, service, like everything else, is required to 'pay its way'.

   This understanding of service, however, is a corruption of longstanding ideals of altruistic public duty and servanthood. Traditionally, service to society was legitimated in non-market terms as a vocation or calling. This sense of disinterested motivation, complete with its implicit religious overtones, was equally true of doctors, dentists, engineers, teachers, etc., regardless of whether they were employed on a salaried or a fee-for-service basis. In short, as an occupational neophyte one trained and then pursued a career in a chosen domain that permitted the free expression of one's inherent and acquired gifts, out of an implicit sense of duty and public spiritedness, and for the attainment of various ethical ends associated with the betterment of some aspect of the human condition. At least, that was roughly what was understood as the role of the professions in

society. Status, power and other occupational perquisites formed part of this kind of idealist mindset, but (at least in theory) they were kept in check as by-products of more noble considerations such as duty, loyalty, devotion and trust. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, western liberal democratic governments, in particular, swallowed the Osborne and Gaebler (1993, p. 51) line that existing public bureau patterns of service provision undermined the confidence and competence of citizens and communities, and resulted in the iniquity of dependency or 'client-hood'. The antecedents of this reasoning go back as least as far as Hayek (1994 [1944], p. xxxix), for whom the principal evil of the incubus of government inter-vention in the life of a free society, in particular 'the blessings of a paternalistic welfare state', was 'a psychological change, an alteration in the character of the people'. The NPM antidote for this and other abuses, such as the alleged provider capture of taxpayer-funded resources (e.g., through so-called 'cushy' employment conditions and associated 'rorts') otherwise intended for service beneficiaries, was seen as citizen empowerment through competitive provision, which was designed to unlock 'bureaucratic gridlock' (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p. 79). But the adoption of competitive service provision has a number of implications. One significant implication is that service provision agreements create a strong incentive for the providers of services to think of their resources, including per-sonnel, as potential costs. The reduction of resources, and a concomitant expan-sion of the expectations of the work to be performed within an existing quantum of resources, serve to intensify the performance of service work, thereby provid-ing fertile ground for the seeds of greedy work.

*Roles*

In this kind of service provision environment, work becomes greedy when, as part of its intensification, as was seen particularly in Chapter 2, the role space occupied by a role incumbent expands. Role expansion increases to such an extent that an incumbent becomes responsible for an amount and quality of work output, and a depth of emotional and cognitive commitment and work engage-ment that might previously have been demanded of more than one person. Moreover, that same role incumbent's zone of discretion tends to be circum-scribed and regulated, less by the need to obey the directives of a supervisory superior than by a framework of target-driven accountability requirements tied in turn to publicly audited performance-related and target-related levels of remu-neration. An important factor here is enterprise-level wage bargaining. Typically, each successive round of negotiations between employer and employee interests for the purposes of achieving industrial agreements compounds these tendencies towards work intensification. This is because higher productivity targets and trade-offs related to working conditions are frequently invoked as preconditions for salary increases. In order to obtain salary increments under a new industrial award, then, employees are required (and they invariably agree) to work even harder (e.g., in what was once thought of as their own time and during weekends) for additional wage increments, which means, in effect, that salary increases amount to a form of overtime payment.

Distributed forms of workplace leadership have arisen for a number of reasons. One is organisation managers' recognition that effective leadership requires the support and participation of one's colleagues. Thus, distributed leadership is a response to the pressures of time, the scope and extent of the accountabilities to be fulfilled by a role incumbent, and the need to rely on pooled expertise and the collectivisation of risk assessment. These factors have led to the formation of working partnerships, teams and similar synergistic structures, with a view to achieving quality decisions and a sense of enhanced ownership. Distributed leadership is also a response to role expansion and intensification although, in some ways, distributed leadership compounds the difficulties associated with these trends because the consultation involved in the allocation of work tasks, information and responsibilities can lengthen the lead time required to complete complex tasks, and increases the number of potential veto points throughout the process. In addition, greater participation in decisions requires more time, energy and identification with colleagues. Despite this apparent symbiotic relationship between distribution and intensification, as self-managing unit-level leaders search for adaptive solutions to problems created by their contextualised role demands and constraints, customised service provision threatens to create even greedier leadership work. As we saw in Chapter 1, for example, recently introduced designer leadership standards and competencies have escalated beyond all previous recognition the expectations that are now intended to shape role performance. Curiously, the reward for individual competence has become ever more work overload and responsibility. As the evidence considered in Chapter 3 showed, however, a pattern of teacher resistance to being gobbled up by greedy policies has emerged in the form of a withdrawal from potential leadership roles, particularly principalships. The idea of co- or partner-principalships (in effect, an increase in the number of incumbents to occupy an expanded role space) may provide a temporary antidote to role overload (Court, 2001), although the appointment of two people instead of one is open to the criticism that it is an unduly generous concession to greedy demands.

### Identity

The effect of greediness may be to narrow and concentrate the life commitments of school professionals, particularly at the expense of their engagement in domestic and voluntary institutional activities. Coser (1974, p. 7) notes how, historically, conflicting pressures on individuals from contradictory expectations and cross-cutting ties have been minimised by greedy institutions because 'outside role partners have, so to speak, been surgically removed or because their number has been sharply limited'. As suggested above, a feature of the work of voluntary institutions is that the membership's commitments, allegiances and ties are usually segmented and compete with one another. The effect is that an individual's identity is always an amalgam of a variety of affiliations. Such, however, is the level of work commitment currently demanded of school leaders, that the possibility of multiplex sources of identity formation has been significantly diminished.

Apposite to this point are the observations of historians of schooling who have noted that, particularly during the early era of nineteenth-century proprietor school heads in England and colonial Australia, long-serving bachelor and spinster school-owners were, to all intents and purposes, married to their enterprises. This was understandable, if only because in a number of cases these small preparatory schools were conducted in the owners' homes. At any event, the observation signalled the depth of the owners' body and soul identification with their vocational livelihoods. Without their schools, these owner-heads were, literally, nothing for the threat of penury waited them should they fail to attract pupils. The depth of the commitment of these early heads is analogous to that now required of current school leaders. This is Coser's point about omnivourousness. This phenomenon results in the kinds of time binds and personal conflicts identified by Hochschild (1997, p. xxi), in which the balance between the respective 'pulls' of family and work have been found to be shifting: 'The cultural world of paid work was growing stronger, while families and communities – the social worlds with which we associate our deepest bonds of empathy – were growing weaker.' But at the same time that greater levels of OCB are being demanded of leader-managers and their colleagues, contemporary career identities are displaying much more malleability and less predictability. This is the phenomenon which commentators refer to as career boundarylessness. Younger generations of teachers, as I pointed out in Chapter 3, have learned well the lessons promoted and modelled by their elders. The signs are that they may be less career committed in the vocational sense of service distinguished above and that, as part of the increasingly acceptable 'greed is good' social ethos, they seem willing to pursue their self-interests through role choices designed to keep their career options open, rather than locking themselves in, and to countenance leaving education altogether for other work sectors. This would seem to be a case of greediness coming back to bite the hands of those responsible for greedy policies.

### Claims on Leaders

This last observation suggests that the notion of greediness is two-edged, in that while greedy work may be hugely draining and demanding on individual role incumbents, or even exploitative, it also, ironically, encourages the greedy pursuit of self-interestedness. But there is a third dimension to greediness. Workers in greedy occupations seem to be increasingly complicit in their own greediness. That is, by being willing to rise to the intensification challenges imposed by the new work order, as we saw was the case in Chapter 3 with NEWPRIN#4 when she exclaimed 'But I love it', employees are also signalling their own preparedness to be entrapped.

In this way, greedy work is addictive. The explanation for this curious phenomenon, which was likened in Chapter 3 to the fatal attraction of a moth to a flame, is not clear. Hochschild (1997, p. 34) queries why, in the case of working parent families, their newly intensified work demands are not prompting them to forge a 'culture of resistance'. Her speculation is that changes in work practices are giving rise to the phenomenon of 'reversals'. This notion means that the

workplace is beginning to be seen as a respite or an escape route, where people are freed from their domestic emotional entanglements and where their identities as persons are affirmed, in some cases, in increasingly supportive workplace communities. Thus, the experience of some service sector managers and professionals has been that they (Hochschild, 1997, pp. 44–5): 'virtually marry their work, investing it with an emotional significance once reserved for family, while hesitating to trust loved ones at home'. Further, as one rises to meet the challenges created by work intensification, one may jettison or reduce a range of competing social attachments to make space for a greater commitment to work, which is perhaps made possible for the first time at that point in the career cycle when one's offspring leave the domestic nest. The effect is to so narrow the number and range of one's non-domestic and non-work attachments that work rhythms begin to shape lifestyle commitments, in which case (Hochschild, 1997, p. 45): 'The more attached we are to the world of work, the more its deadlines, its cycles, its pauses and interruptions shape our lives and the more family time is forced to accommodate to the pressures of work.' The hallmark of the emerging work servitude, as the fieldwork studies of teams in Chapter 6 revealed, is the preparedness of workers to submit themselves to self-disciplined control and sophisticated systems of surveillance.

## No Laughing Matter

In greedy occupations, then, workaholicism is fast becoming the grammar or culturally accepted norm of the new work order. According to this norm, work has to become an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. Thus, when one signs up for or takes on a leadership role and joins the growing army of greedy workers, one is signing up for an implicit work contract, the terms of which are that 'One lives to work, rather than works to live'. That is, work becomes the overriding end of and for one's life. In consuming one's whole being, it does more than merely provide the physical and psychological wherewithal for a life. Because it becomes one's life, greedy work consumes one's life, so that work becomes the measure of what one is and not just what one does.

Greedy work is no laughing matter, for at least two reasons. From the point of view of individual role incumbents, for example, the potential for work stress is not funny. On the other hand, the strength and depth of the commitment across party political lines to NPM-style policies in many western countries is also no joke. In retrospect, the speed with which NPM became the new public policy orthodoxy during the 1980s was extraordinary. In fact, so strong has the current endorsement of NPM become that to question its assumptions or to countenance alternative possibilities to competitive service provision is to invite serious ridicule. While much of this political commitment exists for reasons of ideology, its support is also fuelled by political expediency. Governments everywhere see a huge potential for electoral success, provided they can appease the voters with promises of 'more bang for the buck' (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p. 80) in the form of budget savings with which to underwrite tax relief for middle- and

high-income earners. Despite these personal and social costs of greedy work, those who espouse NPM-style policies take themselves very seriously. The zealous, true believer commitment to public sector reform and to greedy work as the price which has to be paid for it, calls to mind an anti-Marxist joke once intended by the former critics of communism to pillory its claims to human liberation: 'Under capitalism man exploits man. Under socialism it is precisely the other way around' (Davies, 1984, p. 144). Transposed to the current context of greedy work, a corresponding way of mocking the reinventing government agenda might be: 'Under welfare state bureaucratic service provision, service needs were met by greedy people; under state-sponsored, competitive service delivery it is exactly the same.'

What, then, is the grammar of leadership practice? In his preface to Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt's (1999, p. x, original emphasis) *Hot Groups*, the management guru Tom Peters suggests that what is missing in the appearance of rafts of books on the impact of the new technology is the work itself: 'What is it? (The *new* it.) How does it get done?' In respect of leadership in school and educational settings, this book has endeavoured to provide an answer to these what and how questions. The realm of leadership practice has been shown to be marked by the dynamism of processes and flows, a fluid world in a state of perpetual and almost seamless motion. In these circumstances, educational leaders are made as much as makers, and agents acted upon as much as initiating agents. Enmeshed in networks of interdependent workplace relations, they live a life increasingly on the edge: engulfed by wave upon wave of information, beset by incessant demands on their time, required to be constantly on the go and attentive, but made to feel unendingly world weary and devoid of energy. They have little time for considered judgement and reflective thought, nor for indulging in personal or domestic interests and pursuits. During the period in which they are engaged at work, and for most of the remaining time and space that is available to them outside their work, the extent of their emotional commitment is almost total. 'To be always at the highest pitch of involvement, commanding the entire span of attention', remarks Coser (1974, p. 134) of the demands traditionally imposed by greedy institutions, is to prevent the mind from 'running in other perpetual grooves'. Further, in addition to a policy environment populated by mandated performance targets and the need for audited outcomes – in short, a life controlled by numbers – the educational leader's scope for creative movement is further circumscribed by a bevy of designer-leadership standards.

## What is to be Done?

*In The Making of Educational Leaders* (Gronn, 1996), my purpose was to develop the theme of leader formation. The aim was to provide aspiring and incumbent leaders with a conceptual template for understanding their own personal career trajectories. There, for the most part, I concentrated on a range of micro-level factors, such as personal socialisation and organisational succession processes, which I suggested provided vehicles for the expression leaders' professional agency. Subsequently (Gronn, 2002b), I developed a macro-level

outline of leader formation processes from both a historical and a culturally comparative perspective. This was summarised in Chapter 1. Throughout the present discussion, I have said very little about the agency of leaders, other than when citing occasional research details that illustrate my core themes. Instead, the discussion has been skewed towards structural factors, such as the most recently emerging environmental imperatives that are beginning to shape the roles and role contexts of educational leaders, and organisational processes. Thus, although my notion of designer-leadership is predicated on the existence of a standards and assessment policy component nestled within an overarching accountability regime, I have not traversed the details of particular policies or policy contexts to any great extent.

There are a number of ways, in relation to the emerging 'new work' trajectory of design, distribution and disengagement, that future research might address the agency of leaders and build on the preceding analysis. First, there is a series of issues concerned with aspects of professional career and institutional role identities. Some of these arise out of the implementation of designer-leadership and were canvassed in Chapter 1. Leadership standards may be expected to 'bite' during practitioners' overall career development mainly at the time of their initial accreditation and during subsequent reassessment or reaccreditation of their role competence. But beyond those critical points of identity transition, what difference, if any, are standards and competencies likely to make to practitioners' day-to-day leadership practice? To what extent will principals and other school leaders pay mere lip-service to standards, and regard them as yet one more systemic hurdle to be negotiated and then forgotten until next time? Finally, what will be the impact of standards and competency frameworks on potential and aspiring educational leaders? Will an unintended consequence of the implementation of standards, as was foreshadowed earlier, be to confirm incumbents in their current roles and to dissuade them from pursuing career advancement? These questions connect with a wider set of issues being addressed by commentators in the field of career theory. Here, opinion is currently divided over whether career jobs and career ladders as traditionally understood are dead or slowly dying. Jacoby (1999, p. 124), for example, insists that employers have shifted more of the burden of employment risk sharing to their employees, but that this is a change 'of degree, not of kind' in welfare capitalism. Cappelli (1999, p. 148), by contrast, maintains that career jobs, understood as advancement prospects with the same employer, 'are in decline'.

The second main avenue for research concerns distributed leadership. The key to understanding the realities of practice, as has been suggested throughout, is for researchers to attend to changes in the division of leadership labour. I have also suggested that the commitment of the field to the hero paradigm of leadership might, finally, be wearing thin. Not merely in Sayles's (1964) pioneering work, but in a number of other research studies, the hints that some key theorists have recognised for some time the interdependence between leader-managers and their colleagues, rather than the dominance of the former over the latter, are palpable. The tenacious adherence of the majority of commentators to focused conceptions of leadership, despite Gibb's early iconoclasm, seems to be weakening, with increasing numbers of mentions of distributed leadership appearing in the literature.

That said, with the exception of those studies cited in Chapter 2, there are still remarkably few analyses of the dynamics of distributed practice. The discussion in Chapter 6 highlighted the current state of knowledge of teams, as versions of distributed practice but, unlike the burgeoning numbers of ethnographies in the interdisciplinary field of workplace studies, there are, as yet, no first-hand field investigations of the distributed leadership of schools. An activity theory template for such research was outlined in Chapter 4. Equally, there is a paucity of knowledge about schools as intelligent learning systems and the extent to which they encourage distributed practice as part of the development of school-wide leadership capability. Finally, with school leaders currently labouring under an intensified regime of greedy work, the question of the extent to which distributed forms of practice have been adopted with a view to easing the pain of the new servitude, or whether these patterns have emerged in local contexts quite independently of the constraints imposed by policy, still requires an answer.[1]

The work of educational leaders described in this book is analogous in its greedy demands to that undertaken by high profile CEOs. Over the last two decades or so, a number of these entrepreneurial types have been appointed by corporate boards, amidst massive media hype and fanfare, to head up ailing firms. Unlike their humbler school principal counterparts, however, these CEOs earn salaries running into millions of dollars, along with associated stock options and benefits. As good company men (invariably), they work punishingly long hours, give of themselves body and soul, and try to perform the miracles sought by dividend-hungry shareholders. Then, when their contracts expire, or if their efforts at market turnaround fail, their services are likely to be dispensed with, usually amidst the high public drama of threatened legal challenges or out of court financial settlements. When at last the dust settles, a new replacement 'white knight' may be welcomed on board with elaborate marketing hype and media billing. Television viewers have become accustomed to the solemnity of such rituals with their passing parade of such faces, each of them in their turn consumed by the onerousness of their shareholders' expectations. Every hapless CEO is ground down, chewed up, spat out and then replaced, often by a successor who is paid at an even higher level of remuneration and embodies equally or more demanding expectations of performance, by still hungrier boards of directors. While the profile and drama associated with the conduct of educational leadership may pale into insignificance by comparison, the greedy work expectations of educational policy-makers have brought about a very similar kind of work intensification narrative in education. Such is the new world order of greediness. In numerous ways, greedy work has become a powerful and pervasive metaphor for our times. The new educational leadership work ethic is the cult of salvation through greedy work.

**Note**

1 These and related aspects of distributed leadership are currently being investigated by the author and his colleague Dr Felicity Rawlings as part of a Monash University project funded by the Australian Research Council and entitled 'Patterns of Distributed Leadership in Australian Schools'.