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Who really leads development?

Matt Andrews*

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Abstract

‘Leadership’ is not a common topic for research in international development. In recent years, however, prominent studies like the 2008 Growth Commission Report noted the importance of leadership in development. This and other studies focused on individual leaders—or heroes—when examining ‘who leads development’. The current article asks if heroes really do lead development. It deconstructs the implied theory behind the ‘hero orthodoxy’ into four hypotheses: about how change happens in development; who leads it; how it emerges; and how it is bought to completion. Through a qualitative study of twelve interventions in contexts like Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and Kosovo, the article shows that these hypotheses are too simple to really help explain who leads development. It appears that change is complex and requires similarly complex multi-agent leadership interventions—not individual heroes.

Keywords: development, leadership, reform, growth, governance, leadership, reform
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1 Introduction

The 2008 Growth Commission headed by Michael Spence examined the stories of 13 countries that grew at high rates for a sustained period and saw advances on development indicators. Two of the commission's key observations inspired this article. First, when countries develop and grow they experience dramatic change, to 'the structures of the economy, society, culture, and often the institutions of government' (Brady and Spence 2010: 12). Second, leadership is vital to achieving these changes. When combined, these observations raise a question: 'who leads development?'. Brady and Spence (ibid.) provide a simple answer: 'impressive high-level individuals'. The current article calls this answer the 'hero orthodoxy' and suggests it is too simplified to reflect on who really leads development.

The 'hero orthodoxy' simplifies the view that leadership involves outstanding individuals in positions of power doing heroic things. It is reflected in arguably the most prominent recent work on leadership in development; by Brady and Spence (ibid.), and Jones and Olken (2005). The approach echoes 'great man' leadership theories dating back to the late nineteenth century (Carlyle 1902: 53, 54). It dominates current thinking in development as well, reflected in common calls for champions to lead World Bank projects and benevolent autocrats to spearhead national growth initiatives (Andrews 2013; Easterly 2011). The first section of this article deconstructs thinking behind this approach, yielding four simple hypotheses about who leads development and how:

- Development and growth result from decisions to adopt the 'right' policies.
- These policies are introduced by influential high-level leaders (heroes).
- Crises create opportunities for the heroes to emerge and make these decisions.
- The policies are fully implemented when heroes have long and stable tenures.

This section concludes with a brief example of what Brady and Spence provide to support this theory, of the role Kernal Derviş played in Turkey's economic reforms after the country's 2001 crisis. The authors argue that Derviş was the hero of this story, leading the adoption and implementation of 19 policies that helped his country escape a major financial meltdown.

The second section examines these hypotheses, asking whether and how well they explain change and leadership in the development process. The analysis is based on a qualitative study of twelve recent initiatives aimed at establishing the kind of effective and responsive governments Brady and Spence identify as crucial to facilitate development (Brady and Spence 2010: 3). The initiatives include efforts to strengthen Kenya's legislature, improve service delivery in Afghanistan, Rwanda, and the Central African Republic, and reduce corruption in Kosovo. The section describes qualitative, interview-based methods used to identify what change has involved in these experiences and who has led such change. Evidence informs findings related to the four hero orthodoxy hypotheses:

- Change sometimes resulted from policy decisions but was more commonly a product of new ways of interacting within and between organizations.
- Whereas high-level individuals were identified as leaders, interviewees identified many other leaders as well, contributing to multi-level, multi-agent leadership.

- Crises did create opportunities for high-level agents to initiate change in some cases, but adjustments arose more often long after crises when multiple agents worked from the bottom-up to draw attention to long-festered problems.
- Whereas some leaders did shepherd change beyond initiation, implementation and diffusion required more—and more varied—leaders than were present at the start.

Given these findings, a concluding section argues that the hero orthodoxy is not currently providing a satisfactory theory of leadership in development. It does not capture the importance of change in the way agents interact, or the realities of multi-agent leadership, or the way festering problems can be constructed to foster change opportunities, or the importance of dynamic leadership mechanisms in facilitating change implementation and diffusion. The conclusion points to these problems in the story of Kernal Derviş as hero of Turkey's post-2001 economic reforms. The discussion shows that Turkey's growth story is obviously bigger than Derviş and his policies. The bigger stories behind this and other experiences call for more expansive research into who really leads development. The article concludes with questions this research should address and ideas about theoretical perspectives that may be useful in addressing these questions.

2 Unpacking the hero orthodoxy in development

The literature on economic development routinely side-steps questions about who leads (and how they lead) the process of development. In demonstrating this, a recent review (Lyne de Ver 2008: 24) found that the subject of leadership was addressed in only seven of 1,059 articles published between 2002-07 in the prominent journals *World Development* and *Journal of Development Studies*. Recent studies have broached the topic, however, specifically examining the influence of national leadership on country-level growth records. As already noted, work by Brady and Spence (2010) and Jones and Olken (2005) stands out. The first two authors' publications emerged from work done by the prominent 2008 Growth Commission and have received a fair amount of attention as a result.

In simple terms, these studies posit what this article calls a 'hero orthodoxy' in development, emphasizing the role influential high-level leaders—sometimes called benevolent autocrats (Easterly 2011)—play in the development process. These leaders are seen as heroic figures that fostered miraculous changes in their countries. Park Chung Hee was the hero in South Korea's 'Miracle on the Han River', for instance, and Lee Kuan Yew was the hero of the 'Singapore Miracle'. There is more to the work than simply identifying individuals as the source of leadership, however. Brady and Spence go into some detail explaining what they saw the heroes doing in these countries. Their explanations can be deconstructed into a four-part theory that emerges in answer to basic questions about who leads the change required for development. What did the change involve? Who led it? Why did this leadership and change emerge? How did leadership ensure the change was brought to completion? The answers to these questions are presented here as the framing hypotheses underlying a 'hero orthodox'.

2.1 Development comes from making the right policy choices

A first hypothesis relates to the kind of change considered necessary to facilitate growth and development. Brady and Spence (2010) offer a simple perspective on such issue, 'The necessary change centers on introducing better policies'. They identify a 'right mix' of these

policies. These include laws and other policy mechanisms that promote open economies, predictable, competent bureaucracies, and stable political processes. They posit that the presence or absence of such policies separates high growth and low growth and developed and under-developed economies. Development, therefore, involves changing policies to introduce those that are ‘right’. Similar thinking informs the identification of global indicators that guide how countries think about what constitutes a good government, what is required to foster *Doing Business*, and more (Andrews 2013). The implicit message behind all of these indicator sets is that there are ‘right’ policies that countries and governments and organizations should adopt if they want to develop.

Leadership can facilitate the changes required to adopt such solutions, given the Brady and Spence perspective that: ‘Making the right choices... is what leaders in high-growth economies have done’ (Brady and Spence 2010: 4). The authors support this position by referencing the policy choices made in 13 high-growth countries: ‘Over time, the leaders in these 13 countries ... chose some variant of a successful change strategy ... [and] put together coalitions ... to allow the economic choices a chance’ (ibid.: 4). Development organizations espouse similar views, noting that leaders can foster or hinder project and reform success by supporting or opposing a particular policy decision. The decision is key to making change happen and the ‘hero’ is the one who makes the right decision.

2.2 Leaders are high-level heroes

This perspective leads naturally to a second hypothesis in the hero orthodoxy, centered on *who* provides the leadership in development. The orthodox position on this is simple: *Leaders are high-level individuals in positions of authority and influence*. This perspective is reflected in Jones and Olken’s reference to ‘individual leaders’ making a difference in growth trajectories (Jones and Olken 2005: 835). It is also implicit in the idea of a ‘benevolent autocrat’ emerging from this work and the Growth Commission’s perspective on who leads. According to Brady and Spence, such individuals make a positive impression on growth when they first lead a process of introducing better policy and then lead a process of implementing the policy, often protecting it from other interests. In both processes they need the authority and influence of high-level position to make change happen. The assumption is that this authority and influence has horizontal and vertical effects, shaping behaviors across organizations and within the top-down public bureaucracies vital to implementing public policy.

These leaders are typically argued to augment their formal position with incredible personal presence, knowledge and skill. This helps them make important (and correct) policy choices, build consensus around such, and adapt political institutions to support these choices. Being ‘benevolent’, these leaders are also implicitly assumed to have a deep public service motivation, which curtails their private interests in using power and fosters a long-run perspective necessary to introduce the kinds of policies considered necessary for development.

2.3 Crises create opportunities for leadership

A third hypothesis reflects on contextual conditions under which this leadership emerges. In this respect, Brady and Spence (2010) again offer a simple argument, ‘Crises create the opportunities for leadership and change’. Citing various examples, they argue that ‘crises

gave leaders from Deng Xiaoping to President Park an opportunity to change course with a reduced level of resistance' (ibid.: 7). Their argument is a widely held one, reflected in a comment by Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's first Chief of Staff: 'You never want a serious crisis to go to waste' (Seib 2008).

Brady and Spence do not argue that crises always or even commonly result in leaders making the 'right choices' and leading development successfully, however. Rather, they take a more nuanced and balanced position, suggesting a 'more modest hypothesis' that 'crises create conditions where leaders have fewer constraints on their choice over both economic policy and structural and institutional reform' (Brady and Spence: 7). One would thus not expect every crisis to facilitate better leadership and development. One would, however, expect that instances of leadership and development do emerge from a facilitating crisis. Heroes need a crisis to emerge, but not all crises produce heroes.

2.4 Stable leadership is needed to implement new policies

A final hypothesis reflects on the way leaders facilitate the implementation of new policies, when crisis has been resolved and political conditions create opportunities for reform backtracking. Brady and Spence address this issue partly in arguing that the high-level leaders should facilitate adaptation of new policies to ensure successful implementation. Drawing on this, the implied hypothesis stands out: *Implementation requires stable, centralized and controlling leadership that shepherds change to completion.* The 'greatest political stability', they argue, comes in the form of a 'purely autocratic, one-person, absolute rule' where there is 'only one person to consult, convince, decide' over long periods (ibid.: 8).

Brady and Spence note that no country has such a system in reality, but point to ways in which countries attempt to mimic some second best solution that ensures consistency in leadership and sufficient centralization to facilitate control over implementation decisions and actions. Dimensions of this approach include ensuring consistent leadership by the same agent, and bolstering the power and influence of such agent, through creation of one-party states and reshaping of political processes to lock-in policy choices. The implicit assumption is that stable, high-level individual leaders can enjoy authority and influence over all the horizontal and vertical dimensions of social, political and organizational mechanisms involved in implementing policy—even over time. This sustained influence and control is needed to bring change to completion.

2.5 Putting the hero orthodoxy together in an example

Brady and Spence identify Turkey's recent growth experience as an example of this theory in action. All four hypotheses come to light in the evidence these authors provide for such a case:

- In the spirit of hypothesis one, they argue that the country's impressive growth began in 2002 after a raft of policy improvements. These manifest in 19 new laws passed by the parliament, all targeting steps to open the economy and modernize the government.
- The second hypothesis is reflected in the identification of a key individual as the leader of this process. This was Kermal Derviş, a prominent minister of economic

affairs who is credited with introducing the policy choices and ensuring they were implemented.

- The third hypothesis is supported by views that such leadership was made possible by Turkey's 2001 financial crisis, which provided 'more room to choose new economic plans and policies' (Brady and Spence 2010: 7). Derviş, they argue, 'used the crises as an opportunity to get legislation through the Turkish parliament, which probably could not have been passed under normal circumstances. The 19 major reforms that were passed during and immediately after the crisis have helped Turkey grow its economy' (ibid.: 7).
- The fourth hypothesis is implied in the argument that these policies were shepherded through implementation by powerful, stable, high-level leaders who supported Derviş.

3 Examining the hero orthodoxy

There is something attractive about the hero orthodoxy and the idea that individuals like Kernal Derviş can lead major policy-based reforms that foster growth and development. It is a difficult theory to test properly, however. Ideally, one would want to look at experiences in all 19 reforms that Brady and Spence attribute to Derviş' leadership, and examine what kind of change they really involved, where they all came from, how they were introduced and implemented, who was involved in such processes, and what these agents all did. This would allow one to assess if the reform experiences were really all about formal policy changes, if Derviş was the authoritarian and charismatic leader of such changes, if the 2001 crisis was the key contextual instigator, and if stable leadership mechanisms were vital to facilitating implementation.

This section reflects on research into these kinds of experiences, intended to tell a story of what change and leadership actually looks like in the development process. It reports on a study of twelve initiatives where reforms were introduced to foster development in complex under-developed contexts, asking what change looked like in these experiences, who led, whether crises motivated the adjustment, and if implementation was supported by stable leadership. The following sub-section describes the method used for gathering data in these experiences and the next discusses the way evidence reflects on the four hero orthodoxy hypotheses.

3.1 Research method and data sources

The research questions raised in respect of Turkey's development experience are commonly addressed in sociological versions of the new institutionalism, where authors examine the particularities of change and the role of leadership in change processes. This research is typically qualitative, allowing granular analysis of specific change events. Information is commonly drawn from historical documents and in-depth interviews. Both sources provide researchers with a detailed perspective on the change experience from the perspective of those who had been directly or indirectly involved. Thornton and Ocasio's (1999) analysis of executive succession in the higher education industry stands out as an illustration. This research examined the interaction of firm leadership and industry 'logics' using information from industry specific documents and 30 interviews. Other examples include Greenwood and Suddaby's (2006) analysis of change in Canada's accounting profession; and Reay and Hinings' (2005) study on institutional change in the Alberta health system. The two studies

drew information from archival sources and a limited number of in-depth interviews: Suddaby and Hinings conducted 62 interviews with representatives of 11 firms, and Reay and Hinings interviewed 45 individuals across the entire health sector.

This article reflects on evidence from a similar qualitative study of leadership and change experiences in various developing countries. The study was commissioned in 2008 by a multi-donor group called the Global Leadership Initiative (GLI). The research design was simple. A selection of experiences was identified where development was being promoted with apparent success. Agents involved in these reforms were then asked about the intervention, what its impact had been, who led it, and why these agents were called 'leaders'. The responses were aggregated into a dataset about the role agents play in facilitating development; and coded, manually, by multiple coders, to reflect relevant themes (as discussed in Andrews, McConnell and Wescott (2010), and Andrews (2013) and referenced in this analysis).

The various research cases were identified through a multi-step process, initiated by a public call for examples of successful public sector reform interventions in developing countries. These interventions are the typical vehicles through which developing country governments and international organizations attempt to foster change they see as relevant for development. Over 100 responses were received and subsequently winnowed down using a purposive sampling strategy.¹ Twelve engagements were chosen for analysis, from eight countries. This number is close to the 13 stories told by Brady and Spence in their 2010 article on leadership in development. Selected interventions related to two of the three factors referenced as important for growth by Spence's 2008 Growth Commission; better bureaucracy and improved political processes:

- Seven initiatives focused on improving bureaucratic competence and public sector incentives. These included capacity building in Afghanistan's senior civil service, local level corruption reduction in Kosovo, and service delivery improvements in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Kenya, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone.
- A further five reforms targeted political structures needed to foster stability. These included Afghanistan's multi-party planning process, Kenya's post-2000 legislative reforms, Rwanda's local government results management interventions, Sierra Leone's efforts to engage women in political leadership, and Uganda's move to multi-party policy making.

All twelve interventions are listed in Table 1, which also identifies their intended goals. Prior publications provide greater detail about the engagements, their selection, and their impact (Andrews et al. 2010).

The research aimed to investigate leadership and change in these experiences. Data were captured primarily by interviewing individuals involved in the interventions. This interview data was augmented by secondary information accessed through publications about the reform interventions. Interviewees were chosen using selective identification and snowballing approaches, given complementary strengths and weaknesses of each.² A final group of 148

¹ The selection approach and research method is described in Andrews (2008a), and Andrews et al. (2010).

² An initial list of interviewees was identified in each case by parties who had responded to the call for examples of successful reform. A process of snowballing then allowed interviewers to find unidentified interviewees. Selective identification ensures access to actors considered key from an external perspective. It

interviewees were identified in eleven of the experiences, averaging over 13 for each. Interviews were not possible in Burundi, where a participant observation approach was adopted instead; to augment documentary evidence on the rapid results reform experience.³

Table 1: Basic details about all twelve experiences examined

Country (Period) Intervention title	Intended goal of the intervention
1. Afghanistan (2006-08) Civil Service Leadership	Develop cadre of top and middle-level officials
Afghanistan (2002) Towards a National Plan	Establish national planning process and plan
Burundi (2007-09) Rapid results management	Improve service delivery, accountability
Central African Republic (2004-05) Post conflict management	Build consensus around plan, deliver services
Kenya (2004-09) Rapid results and performance management	Improve service delivery in key areas
Kenya (2000-09) Legislative reform	Strengthen parliament
Kosovo (2004-06) Municipal anti-corruption	Develop municipal inspectorates
Rwanda (2007-09) Imihigo	Develop localized accountability mechanisms
Rwanda (2007-09) Rapid results	Promote rapid service delivery
Sierra Leone (2007) Empowering women in government	Introduce more women to political leadership
Sierra Leone (2004-09) Decentralize, rapid results	Promote rapid service delivery
Uganda (2006-07) Preparing for government transition	Develop multi-party policy-making process

Source: Andrews et al. (2010).

A structured protocol was used to gather information about the eleven cases where interviews were used. This allowed the comparison of answers across cases—given that research intended to recount a story of how change and leadership happens across the contexts and not tell twelve stories of change.⁴ Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and two hours, averaging about one hour in length. Written data was collected into a single spreadsheet,⁵ and a selection of about 30 per cent of the data was verified against taped recordings.⁶ There was no evidence of inaccuracy in the data collection process or of bias between the interviews.⁷

can lead to limited access of those who were not externally visible. Snowballing allows access to this latter group of agents.

³ The author was allowed to observe and participate in a two-day workshop in Burundi in 2009 where rapid results service delivery reform experiences were discussed by senior government officials.

⁴ The instrument blended open-and closed-ended questions about the interviewees themselves, the problem being addressed in the intervention, contextual factors that contributed to the problem, the intervention, and results following the intervention. It was pre-tested in telephone-based interviews and slightly adjusted as a result; all other interviews were conducted face-to-face in the countries themselves.

⁵ Data collected in each interview is extremely thick, given that the average interview lasted an hour and fifteen minutes, and takes multiple forms (closed numeric answers and narratives, for example).

⁶ A total of 42 interviews out of 148.

⁷ Recordings exist for all the Africa cases and for Afghanistan. Various controls were used to account for different understandings of concepts and common concerns about sample and interview bias and the reliability of interviewee memory. See Andrews et al. (2010).

3.2 Does development come from making the right policy choices?

The data allowed direct analysis of the four hero orthodoxy hypotheses introduced earlier in this article. *The first hypothesis stated that change in the development process requires introducing better policies.* This was scrutinized by looking at responses to three related questions about the reasons why change was needed, whether change had indeed taken place, and what the change had involved.⁸ As noted, three researchers coded responses to these questions to see if they supported the hypothesis at hand (referring to positive changes that had transpired because new and better policies were introduced). Inter-coder reliability was high for the entire exercise.⁹

Most interviewees (88 per cent) responded to these questions by noting that change had indeed occurred and the initial problems requiring change were being better addressed given the interventions.¹⁰ Most of the respondents in this group also gave descriptions of the improvements they had witnessed. In total, the interviewees identified 121 different manifestations of progress and change in these difficult contexts (what the changes had involved or how they had become apparent). Of the 121, seven centered on the role an improved policy played in facilitating change. These references included comments about the way a new law helped authorize change in Kenya's legislative experience, a new policy allowed modern human resource management activities in Afghanistan, new legislation demanded results management in Kenya, and a code of ethics formalized inspections processes in Kosovo.

As one can deduce, these 'policy change' references were not the most commonly referenced manifestation of change. Other types of change included adjustments in the way organizations worked with each other, organizational processes functioned, and individuals were engaging in the workplace. Kenyan legislators started working with civil society groups to vet budgets, for instance; Deputy Ministers in Afghanistan initiated communication across ministries and departments; and Rwandan communities became more involved in local infrastructure projects. These and other behavioral and organizational changes accounted for over 90 per cent of the comments about what change looked like in the eleven experiences. They thus appeared to be the major mechanisms through which development-enhancing change took place. Formal policy adjustments were not the main change mechanism.

Interestingly, 18 respondents noted that these behavioral and organizational changes actually gave life to past policies that had not been implemented before the initiatives that were being examined. The 'better' policy was in place, formally, in a *de jure* sense, but additional change was needed to make the policy matter. A number of respondents commented that many new laws and policies had been adopted but were not being implemented before Afghanistan's senior capacity-building exercises, for instance, partly because the civil servants did not agree with or understand some key concepts and approaches (including versions of meritocracy embedded in the laws). Similarly, interviewees noted that Rwanda's decentralization and

⁸ Interviewees were asked—at the start of the interview—to describe the problem addressed by the initiative in question, which gave a baseline understanding of what the intervention was focused on doing. Later on, they were asked whether the problem had been better addressed since the intervention began, and they were required to share data or stories about how the problem had been addressed.

⁹ Inter-coder reliability exceeded 80 per cent at all times.

¹⁰ The lowest positive response rate to this question was 69 per cent (for the Afghan planning intervention). The positive response rate was 100 per cent for the Kenyan legislative and results management interventions, Kosovo's inspection reform, and Rwanda's Imihigo initiative.

development policies had been in place for years without having much influence, but were activated and fully implemented after various organizational changes were sparked by home-spun interventions.

The kinds of organizational changes through which change seemed to enter the agenda appeared to emerge organically in these and other examples, and were not as pre-determined and pre-designed as some supporters of a hero orthodoxy might believe. Rwanda's locally-devised performance management reform (the Imihigo programme), for instance, developed organically over a number of years, with an emergent rather than pre-arranged solution that ensured better accountability of public officials. The initiative has spawned an effective results-oriented management mechanism that blends modern and traditional mechanisms and is as functional as any best practice Western device. In another example, Afghan officials underwent pre-designed training in high-level management skills but some of the key changes interviewees spoke of were at a lower level—in the way managers spoke to their subordinates, or cleared their desks, or used daily planners, or held meetings. These unforeseen and perhaps mundane by-products of the capacity-building workshop appear to have been important manifestations of change and catalysts of additional change, but did not involve the introduction of new policy or the precise rendition of a predetermined solution.¹¹ They were also not the pre-determined focal products of the reforms, which were much more elaborate.

Given such evidence, hypothesis one of the hero orthodoxy must be considered limited. Policy change is indeed one vehicle for—and manifestation of—change needed in development, but there are other types of change that matter (and maybe matter even more). These include, particularly, informal changes in the way agents interact within and between organizations. Further, the change that promotes development is not always open to pre-design. It emerges organically and takes shapes that may be surprising; sometimes more modest and mundane than one might consider necessary (as with the Afghan deputy ministers) and sometimes more impactful than one might have considered possible (as with Rwanda's Imihigo programme).

3.3 Are leaders high-level heroes?

As presented earlier, the second hero orthodoxy hypothesis suggested that *a single leader in a position of authority will be central to the story of change in development*. The current study scrutinized this hypothesis by examining data emerging from two questions asked in the interviews: 'who led change at the start?' and 'why do you call this person a leader?'. Multiple researchers coded responses to the questions to examine whether evidence supported the hypothesis (again, with high inter-coder reliability in the analysis). Proponents of the hero orthodoxy would expect a small number of answers in each reform experience, with respondents identifying a singular leader at the extreme. One could also have expected these 'leaders' to be in high-level positions, presidents or mayors or ministers in government, perhaps, or bureaucratic heads in the reform organizations. Finally, one would have expected

¹¹ Andrews and Moynihan (2002) offer a similar example of organizational change emerging from new interactions in the city of San Diego. The employees began adopting a new policy but were constrained from doing so because of legislative barriers. A hybrid solution did emerge, however, because the employees were engaging around issues in new and different ways. The new policy was not itself the basis of change; the interaction to introduce the new policy was the foundation of change.

interviewees to recognize their leadership because of the way they led from the ‘front stage’, with charisma or authority, as per ideas of the hero orthodoxy.

Responses show that a third of all those identified as leaders were in fact recognized because they ‘led from the front’, ‘used their authority’, or ‘motivated’ others—as one would expect heroes to do. A number of these were also in high-level positions. These included the vice president responsible for public administration in Afghanistan’s capacity-building intervention, President Kagame in Rwanda’s Imihigo programme, and a senior parliamentary leader in Kenya’s legislative reform initiative. Interestingly, however, these high-level officials were not the unanimous ‘leader’ in any case. They were a minority group of over 103 leaders identified by respondents in the eleven interview cases. The median number of leaders identified per case was seven, with many more names reflecting agents who were not prominent high-level officials in the governments undergoing change. There were many references to organizations as leaders as well, which seems a strange idea for advocates of the hero orthodoxy. Can the World Bank or ministry of finance be a ‘hero’?

When discussing Afghanistan’s capacity-building initiative, for instance, three people identified the vice president responsible for administration as the leader, eight pointed to the Civil Service Commission, six to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), two to the World Bank, and a further four to technical specialists in these organizations. Similarly, interviewees noted that Kenya’s legislative reforms were led at the start by USAID and its contractors, various civil society groups, the parliament, prominent parliamentarians, and other individuals who were not in prominent positions. These other individuals included three women who held secretarial and administrative positions in USAID, its primary contractor in Nairobi, and a non-governmental organization. One of these less prominent agents was identified more often than others, apparently recognized as the glue that connected others together.

Interestingly, 27 per cent of the 103 ‘leaders’ across all eleven cases were recognized for playing some kind of connecting or convening role. This role often appeared to be out of sight to external observers; in the organizational ‘backstage’, far from a hero’s spotlight. Over half of the leaders seemed to be recognized for doing things that were similarly more mundane than the hero orthodoxy would suggest. Some were identified as leaders because they found money when it was needed. Others were seen as leaders because they helped others understand the problems inspiring change. Others were called leaders because they supplied important information or ideas to the change process, or empowered people to participate in the process. Most of these leaders were not in formal positions of authority when playing these leadership roles; or their authority was coming from across a variety of organizations, suggesting less of a vertical expression of leadership from one central player and a more horizontal manifestation across multiple players engaging in multi-agent collaboration.

Once again, evidence calls a central hero orthodoxy hypothesis into question. While high-level actors do play a role in development, they seem to be only part of the leadership solution—and not the most important part. Similarly, high-level, front-of-stage activities provided by such heroes are important but constitute only one in a mixed set of functions needed to lead change and development. Some of these functions are mundane and seem to come from non-heroes, maybe even by necessity, suggesting that less prominent players must always be part of a leadership solution.

3.4 Do crises create opportunities for leadership?

The third hypothesis of the hero orthodoxy recognizes that context affects the potential for leadership. It posits particularly that *crises are required to create conditions under which leaders facilitate change*. This perspective was assessed based on multi-coder analysis of interview responses to questions about the contextual factors that led up to and influenced change in the eleven reform experiences.¹² Given the hypothesis, one could have expected respondents to speak about the importance of clearly defined negative events that disrupted the status quo, drew urgent attention to problems, and created immediate opportunities for previously unthinkable responses.

Most of the responses met part of this expectation, with 77 per cent of the interviewees referencing some or other negative disruption to the existing order when asked about the political, economic, and cultural factors that influenced change.¹³ In the Central African Republic, such disruption centered on the challenges of a new post-conflict government, given that, ‘The new administration was not entirely accepted’. Uganda’s political order was also disrupted by an election and transition from one-party to multi-party democracy. A respondent notes this in stating that ‘the last 20 years had a single party—there were no competing centers of power or need to get buy-in on the agenda’. The prompting disruption in Sierra Leone and Rwanda’s rapid results interventions came when central government started facing pressure to decentralize public service delivery. In Kosovo, local governments were trying to ramp up their role and replace United Nations agents, but growing corruption revealed that the local governments lacked core capabilities to do so (such as functional inspection mechanisms).

Interestingly, less than ten per cent of the interviewees described a sudden crisis when speaking about these disruptions.¹⁴ Instead, most respondents spoke of gradually emerging problems that took a while to garner attention and register a response. Afghanistan’s senior leadership programme emerged four years after the Taliban was toppled, for instance, and after three years of other reform activity. In explaining this lag, one interviewee noted that,

After 9/11 and the removal of the Taliban, the government had a set of top priorities that it had to focus on, from stability to political issues such as getting along with international donors. So the top priorities at that minute were more important than capacity-building. Once the government had enough time to focus on the structure of the government, and to see the huge gap in capacity, then leaders began to focus on it.

Other comments from the same experience are similar and cite the time it took for top-level capacity building to register as a priority problem. This realization emerged especially when it became obvious—after a period—that government could not implement many new laws foreign donors had introduced after 2003.

¹² Interviewees were asked, ‘why were the problems that required change not addressed before this experience?’ and, ‘how was this situation influenced by political and economic factors at the time?’.

¹³ Responses were classified as identifying disruption in the context if they noted an interruption to normal processes that had garnered attention to the problem under discussion. The interruption could be economic, political, or other.

¹⁴ Comments about disruptions were classified as crisis-induced if they emerged directly from a one-off shock or jolt to the system, and if this event occurred close in timing to the intervention/reform under investigation.

This evidence should be interesting for supporters of the hero orthodoxy, and especially those advocating the third hypothesis about crisis, leadership, and change. As with the other evidence, it suggests that part of the explanation about how context matters is valid. Some kind of disruption is an important facilitator and catalyst for leadership and change. The idea that this disruption must take the form of a one-off crisis event or that leadership responses are urgent and immediate in the wake of such crises seems limited, however. The evidence here suggests that leadership and change can emerge gradually as attention is drawn to disruptions that may have been festering beneath the surface for long periods. The leadership solution emerging in this manner may not be as flashy and attention-drawing as the story of a hero saving his people in the face of impending disaster suggests. Instead, leadership appears to involve more backstage work that brings problematic conditions to light and onto already-full agendas, and fosters emerging responses to such—often quite long after a focal crisis—when the context has been readied for change.

3.5 Is stable leadership needed to implement new policies?

The final hero orthodoxy hypothesis noted *the importance of stable, top down leadership in ensuring that change is fully implemented*. At the extreme, such hypothesis underscores an expectation that the same narrowly defined, highly authorized leader is needed to carry change from initiation to completion. This was analyzed through multi-coder analysis of answers to questions about who led change years into implementation and comparing such with the analysis of earlier answers these interviewees had given about who led reform at the start. Respondents were pressed to identify why they named these agents as leaders in both cases, which allowed a view on whether the leadership demands were similar in implementing and initiating change.

The evidence once again provides partial support to the hypothesis in question. A number of the agents identified as leaders at initiation were also named as leaders in implementation. The extreme of this was in Uganda, where five of the six agents identified as leaders when change started were also considered leaders when change was assessed five years into implementation. A number of interviewees named the cabinet secretariat in a key leadership role at both times, for example, ostensibly providing leadership stability implied in the hero orthodoxy. The secretariat was seen to play a similar role in both periods as well; convening, connecting and coordinating others in the change process. This role is not one normally ascribed to hero leaders, however, which is the first suggestion that the evidence may not fully support the hero orthodoxy.

There is more problematic evidence as well. Most fundamental is the fact that the number of leaders identified in implementation was much greater—in all cases—than in initiation. Thirteen agents were identified as leaders of implementation in Uganda's policy reform, for instance, which was more than twice the six agents named as leaders at its start. Interviewees identified 146 different agents as leaders of implementation across the development experiences, which was a number nearly 50 per cent higher than the 103 identified as early stage leaders. Additionally, there was significant variation in the leader lists when contrasting initiation and implementation. Over 80 of the implementation leaders were not named as leaders in initiation, and only about 60 of those named as leaders of reform at its start were still seen as leaders in implementation. As already discussed, five of the six leaders at the start of Uganda's intervention were identified as implementation leaders a few years

afterwards, but eight new leaders were also recognized. Other examples show even more churning in the leadership structures:

- Five of the twelve agents named as implementation leaders in Afghanistan's planning reform were considered leaders at its start. A number of initiating leaders had dropped out and seven new leaders were identified.
- Four out of the 20 agents seen to lead implementation of Afghanistan's senior capacity building initiative were also considered leaders at initiation. Three of those named as leaders at the start were not seen to lead implementation, and 16 new leaders had emerged to actually do the reforms others had initiated.
- Only ten of 21 named implementation leaders in Kenya's rapid results reform were also identified as leaders at the start. This meant that over ten agents considered leaders at the start were not leading implementation, and ten agents who were not named as initial leaders were recognized as implementation leaders.

This evidence suggests that some leadership continuity is needed to facilitate the change required in development processes. However, the leadership story seems to get more complex as one progresses from initiation of change to its implementation. The number of those required to lead grows in implementation, and the mix of leaders changes as well.¹⁵ This suggests that leadership must be more dynamic and distributed than the hero orthodoxy would have one believe. Once again, the underlying hypotheses of this orthodoxy appear less than convincing in the face of actual development experiences.

4 Leadership beyond heroes?

This has been an article of two parts. The first part identified four hypotheses that underpin a hero orthodoxy recently dominating work on leadership and economic development. These hypotheses emphasize a variety of points:

- i. Policy changes are the key levers of development.
- ii. High-level heroes with autocratic power are needed to effect such change.
- iii. Prominent crises create opportunities for this change.
- iv. Stable and continuous top-down leadership is required to ensure change gets implemented.

The hypotheses are common to models of teleological leadership, which assume that answers pre-exist to development challenges and that high-level leaders can force these answers into being by edict or persuasion.

The second part of this article showed that this model is too simple for explaining leadership in development, however. Drawing on a qualitative study of change initiatives in various developing countries, it provided evidence that causes one to question the hero orthodoxy:

- i. Change seems to involve much more than new policy ideas; adjustments to interaction and engagement patterns are more important.
- ii. There are commonly many leaders involved in initiating a change process.

¹⁵ This observation is also discussed in Andrews (2008b), Andrews (2013), and Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2012).

- iii. Disruptions do foster change, but these disruptions are often not related to one-off crises and instead emerge as backstage work by agents draws attention to festering problems.
- iv. Implementation demands dynamic and distributed leadership solutions; not stable, top-down autocratic control.

Some may question the evidence provided here and its challenge to the hero orthodoxy. Readers might take issue with the qualitative method adopted, for instance, or the number of experiences analyzed. They might also argue that the interventions referenced here take place at a lower level than the interventions examined by people like Brady and Spence and the 2008 Growth Commission. Perhaps heroes do not make appearances in these activities but have their effect at a higher level, in sparking national growth and development policy processes?

Such critiques will always arise in respect of empirical research on leadership and development, which is difficult to do and fraught with methodological problems. While acknowledging this, however, the current study shares many similarities with respected work on organizational leadership and change that should give readers confidence in the emerging storyline. The qualitative approach adopted here is commonly used to examine the details of leadership and change stories, for instance. Further, the number of experiences reviewed is about the same as that reflected on by Brady and Spence in their Growth Commission paper on leadership in development (Brady and Spence 2010). Finally, while it is clear that Brady and Spence examine leadership at a higher level than is done here, there is no reason to believe that a hero orthodoxy works differently at different levels of social engagement. The current sample of experiences reflects the kind of changes that Brady and Spence see as critical for development. These include the creation of efficient bureaucracies and political systems. If leadership in these various parts of the development puzzle is more complex than the hero orthodoxy allows, surely it is more complex at the broader puzzle level as well, when pieces are fitted together?

Actually, the more complex story of leadership beyond heroes is apparent when examining most high-level economic development stories. Consider the example of Turkey that was referenced earlier in this article. Brady and Spence suggest that Turkey's growth record was a result of many policy changes introduced by Kermal Derviş (the hero) after financial crises in 2001, which were then shepherded by a stable set of high-level leaders supportive of Derviş. Commentators raise complicating perspectives for such simple story, however. First, they note that Turkey's story was only partly explained by better policy decisions. Many of the 'new' policies were on the books before 2001, for instance, and the pivotal changes after 2001 involved organizational adjustments that facilitated better implementation of these pre-existing policies. The country's revival also happened because of new international engagements that ensured the country enjoyed external support through its darkest hours. Organizational adjustments that fostered such change included the creation of Derviş' coordinating position in the 2001 government. This allowed new interaction between the Central Bank, Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency, and entities negotiating with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Commentators note that Derviş was not alone in leading these kinds of organizational and policy changes. Other leaders included Prime Minister Ecevit, the staff that Derviş inherited and appointed (including a new under-secretary of finance), finance ministers Sümer Oral and Kemal Unakitan, erstwhile foreign minister Ismael Cem, and the deputy prime minister

in 2001, Husamettin Ozkan. Ecevit authorized Derviş' work; Derviş' staff unearthed, developed and implemented many of the policy solutions; the respected new under-secretary of finance bought internal credibility to various interventions; Derviş' cabinet colleagues at the time led important negotiations about foreign support and civil service wage cuts; and people like Unakitan helped to embed policies into key government processes like the budget. Interestingly, Unakitan and others were the ones who took ownership of the changes beyond 2002, when political upheaval and tension caused Derviş, Ozkan and Cem to leave government. Development continued even with political transition, and economic growth was sustained for years afterwards.

The characters credited with the post-2002 growth are now completely different to those who sowed the seeds in 2001. New dominant characters include current Prime Minister Recep Erdogan, who has become the new hero to some observers. Apparently ignoring the broader historical story and mix of leaders, a Pakistani journalist now simplifies Turkey's development leadership story as being primarily about Erdogan: 'It is remarkable what a leader, committed to serving the nation he believes in, can do to a country's fate. Turkey's Recep Erdogan is a case in point'.¹⁶ The current hero, Erdogan, is certainly part of the Turkish growth story, as is the prior hero, Derviş. The story is greater than both of these agents, however, and leadership that facilitates change and development almost certainly requires the multi-agent leadership solution that seems a more accurate description of Turkey's experience.

Given such evidence, it should be apparent that Turkey's development experience involved much more leadership than was provided by Kermal Derviş, or any other individual hero. These front stage agents had roles that were important, but the story of leadership in Turkey actually involved Derviş plus people like the undersecretary of finance Derviş alludes to (but does not name) when speaking of the events. The hero orthodoxy simplifies the story of leadership such that these other players are excluded from key parts of the tale. This is problematic, because they are crucial to a proper understanding of leadership and development in Turkey. The true lesson of leadership in this case should tell about how these multiple leaders engaged, and what they all did.

More important than these questions about the individuals' roles, however, are questions about how they engaged—across space, time and with respect to the challenges they were facing—to draw attention to a social problem and introduce and implement dramatic change. These kinds of questions emerge as vital when reviewing evidence discussed in this chapter. Many agents led in many different ways to effect change in bureaucracies and political systems in Kenya and Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Kosovo, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and Uganda. Some of these roles may have been front of stage, but many were more mundane and less visible. Leadership solutions seem to require both, not one or the other, which calls for serious thought about how leadership manifests beyond heroes, how heroes connect to more mundane agents, what provokes their interaction, and how this interaction can be facilitated over the prolonged periods needed for contexts to become ready for change.

This article does not intend to pronounce the death of any kind of single 'hero' leader model in development. Rather, it aims to empower an analysis of the basic hypotheses underlying such single-leader theories. In so doing, it shows that these kinds of theories are limited (not

¹⁶ This was in an 12 April 2012 blog in the *Express Tribune*; <http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/10829/does-pakistan-need-a-turkish-leader-to-succeed/>

necessarily absolutely incorrect) in the way they promote understanding of change and the role of agents in change and development. Hopefully this argument will resonate with some in the development community and provoke more research on who leads development, how, and why. The kinds of questions raised in this conclusion should guide such work. The questions commonly refer to the idea that leadership is more complex than Great Man theories or other versions of the hero orthodoxy allow. Research should recognize this complexity and apply new theories to answer these questions. Various recent studies are already doing this, including the work on adaptive systems in government, problem driven change, and team, network, and functional leadership. In particular, complexity theory and interdisciplinary versions of new institutionalism are proposed as ways of thinking about the subject. Whereas these schools of thought have only been marginally reflected in development work to date, they could be vital sources of thought in the future. Such theories have informed the new work on capability traps and problem driven iterative adaptation,¹⁷ which embraces the idea of multi-agent leadership and promises to be a source of research into this area in future.

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¹⁷ Andrews et al. (2012); Pritchett, Woolcock and Andrews (2013).

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