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## What Is Leadership?

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Chapter 2 will briefly look at how leadership is defined. To begin, let's look at this piece by Woody Allen describing an imaginary letter from Van Gogh to his brother Theo, taken from 'If the Impressionists Had Been Dentists: A fantasy exploring the transposition of temperament':

Dear Theo, Will life never treat me decently? I am wracked by despair! My head is pounding! Mrs. Sol Schwimmer is suing me because I made her bridge as I felt it and not to fit her ridiculous mouth! That's right! I can't work to order like a common tradesman! I decided her bridge should be enormous and billowing, with wild, explosive teeth flaring up in every direction like fire! Now she is upset because it won't fit in her mouth! She is so bourgeois and stupid, I want to smash her! I tried forcing the false plate in but it sticks out like a star burst chandelier. Still, I find it beautiful. She claims she can't chew! What do I care whether she can chew or not! Theo, I can't go on like this much longer! ... – Vincent. (Allen, 1976)

Leadership is often constructed as a beautiful and rarified idea, but this 'idealized' leadership has about as much use as the 'beautiful teeth' as designed by Van Gogh in this letter. Leadership is often described in a tone which suggests a heroic beauty. Take this example from Bass:

Leaders are authentically transformational when they increase awareness of what is right, good, important and beautiful, when they help to elevate followers' needs for achievement and self-actualisation, when they foster in followers higher moral maturity and when they move followers to go beyond their self interests for the good of their group, organisation or society. (Bass, 1990a: 171)

Leadership is portrayed as something that is a golden chalice, a most sought-after object, yet it seems always just beyond our reach. Annie Pye suggests 'The continuing search for the Holy Grail, which seems to characterize interest in leadership, implies that research efforts are perhaps being directed at "solving the wrong problem"' (2005: 31). There are many answers on the bookshelves, journals and internet, if we apply this formula, that prescription, these seven steps, then we can reach leadership nirvana! Unlike the leadership texts offering idealized images of leaders, Van Gogh at least acknowledges his lack of concern for the practical application of his beautiful creation.

Leadership is portrayed in this seductive manner, to sell leadership books and training courses, and to meet the demand for easy answers and quick solutions. However, at best, these easy solutions are fairly useless in practice, and can be harmful and misleading (Gemmil and Oakley, 1992). To move beyond the idealistic, this chapter will try to get beneath the surface of the question, what is leadership?

There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept. (Stodgill, 1974: 259)

Dubrin (2000) estimates there are 35,000 definitions of leadership in academic literature. (Pye, 2005: 32)

Leadership is a common term but it has many diverse meanings, it has been said that, like beauty, you will know leadership when you see it. This, however, means that leaders and leadership are defined in the eye of the beholder. If this is the case, then there is a multitude of definitions and understandings of what it means to be a leader or to witness leadership. Barnard ([1938] 1991: 81) identified that 'lead' is both a noun and a verb and therefore has a double meaning. The noun could mean 'to guide others, to be the head of an organization', while the verb could mean 'to excel and to be in advance'. Likewise, leadership is used to describe a certain type of social interaction between people and the term leader is used to denote a person (or sometimes a group/company) who has influence over others (Yukl, 2002; Northouse, 2004). The term leadership is also used to describe personality traits, behaviours and also to denote the roles of individuals and collectives. Leadership is inherently complex and is not easily definable; in fact, it is unlikely that any consensus on the term will be found (Grint, 1997). However, leadership does have shared meanings, depending on the social group you are discussing it with. Most commonly, the term leadership refers to an individual's role or their traits and behaviours as in 'she or he showed leadership'.

When leadership is restricted to this populist meaning, it has limitations that create difficulties when attempting to change organizations. When one tries to implement leadership and change, it soon becomes clear that leadership does not simply belong to any one individual and that to understand how leadership works in practice a broader and more in-depth view of leadership must be taken. Northouse (2004: 3) reviewing leadership theory identified four common themes:

- 1 Leadership as a process.
- 2 Leadership involves influence.
- 3 Leadership occurs in a group context.
- 4 Leadership involves goal attainment.

Keith Grint identifies a similar four-fold leadership typology of Person, Results, Process and Position (Grint, 2005).

The relationship between leadership and followership and the process of leadership as a social interaction has become a focal point for critical

theorists to explore (Grint, 2005; Collinson, 2006). This is in contrast to the mainstream focus on leaders as individuals and their behaviours, traits and competencies using positivist theoretical frameworks.

Leadership styles and types comprise an ever growing list as the search for the ideal leader continues unabated. Box 2.1 gives some examples of the leadership styles currently in circulation.

### Box 2.1 Leadership styles

Action-centred	Patriarchal
Adaptive	Post-modern
Authoritarian	Post-heroic
Collective	Primal emotional
Consensual	Principle-centred
Connected	Relational
Contingency	Servant leader
Charismatic	Situated
Democratic	Spiritual
Dictatorial	Strategic
Distributive	Technical
Emergent	Thought leaders
Expert	Transactional
Feminized	Transformational
Matriarchal	Values-based
Participative	

Leadership has increasingly become the focus of attention of management literature and executive education in recent years, pushing management into its shadow. Everybody, it seems, wants to be a leader rather than a manager. Kets de Vries notes that in the leadership bible *Stogdills Handbook of Leadership*, an increase in articles on effective leadership studies has grown since 1974, 'from 3000 to 5000 in seven years, a pace of publication that has accelerated ever since' (in Grint, 1997: 250). Kets de Vries then describes the contents of these articles as 'plodding and detached, often far removed from the reality of day-to-day life' (1997: 251). Smith (1997) cites a survey of 250 British Chief Executives who were asked to identify the most important management skills for ensuring business success, and leadership emerged as the top ranked item. The question then is, what do they mean by leadership? While the leadership literature gains increasing popularity and momentum, it is also problematical in many areas. Much of what is regarded as new leadership literature simply recycles previous management/leadership theories. A great deal of leadership theory is critiqued as over-simplistic, reductionist and offering unrealistic solutions to complex problems:

It may make good politics eventually, here and there, for a leader to say out loud 'Those who claim to know what to do are either fools or liars and, by gratuitously claiming certainty about cause and effect, they foreclose experimenting with additional options.' (Judge, 1994: 78)

This also applies to leadership research: 'Despite all the hype about a "new paradigm" for studying leadership, most of the research uses the same superficial methods that have been prevalent for decades' (Yukl, 1999: 42).

Calas and Smircich critique Peters and Waterman's (1982) so-called innovative text, *In Search of Excellence*, and their celebrated transcendent leader: 'Under the guise of "newness" the authors do no more than articulate some empty discourses from the 1980s, while returning to the beginning of the circle' (1991: 589). They refer to the transcendent leader being a reinvention of the popular 'Transformational leadership' (Burns, 1978) which they consider to be 'empty discourses' and the full circle they refer to is Chester Barnard's work 'The Functions of the Executive', written in 1938. This is a common trend in the leadership literature where a subtle rewriting of existing theory takes place with new nuances and a different terminology applied. For example, the 'great man' theory, or hero leader of the classic tradition becomes in the populist leadership press (there are important differences which will be explored later in the book) the exciting and new Transformational leader of the 1980s. The Transformational leader then mutates into Peters and Waterman's Transcendental leader. The main body of leadership literature focuses on solo-actors and individual leadership traits and competencies. This is widely critiqued by a small minority of critical and systems management thinkers, for example, Barley and Kunda (1992), Casey (1995), Calas and Smircich (1995), Tourish and Pinnington (2002). A variety of critiques and potential solutions are offered in an attempt to make sense of how globalization and technological change impact on the workplace, with some new and interesting drawing on post-modern and deconstructionist theories from the new philosophers, for example, Lyotard (1984), Derrida (1982). Other critiques, like their counterparts in the mainstream literature, recycle 'radical' theories in an attempt to recover past ideologies. The post-war social democratic and the social movements of the 1960s are the most common source drawn upon, which pursued greater democratic and collectivized leadership or leaderless organizations and linked them with identity politics.

To summarize: leadership is a growth industry and remains a 'sexy concept' and a buzz word in Business Schools, organizations and social/political arenas. However, much of the mainstream literature is adapted and recycled theory; old news under a new headline. Another of the main problems when reading the leadership literature is that of reductionist theorizing. There appears to be two main reasons for this. First, the mainstream leadership literature is dominated by work from US Business Schools where there is traditionally a focus on positivistic, scientific approaches to management and

leadership that creates a reductionist tendency (Mintzberg, 2004a). Second, the huge business of executive education creates a reductionist pressure; simple solutions are simply an easier sell. A Google search of leadership and executive education courses, consultancy interventions on leadership, or a look at airport bookshops will all provide testimony to the love of the easy answer and the quick fix solution. Leadership is thus 'dumbed down' for the commercial and consumer society in which we live. This reductionism has had a limiting impact on leadership thinking and its most common manifestation is to reduce the complexity of leadership to its most easily understood form: the leader as a solo actor, i.e. the leader as individual. The consequence is that the dominant focus of leadership research and development is the traits and competencies an individual must have to become a better leader. As the book will demonstrate, this marginalizes attempts to problematize leadership, to ask important but difficult questions and to embrace complexity and uncertainty. However, by taking the more challenging critical approach to leadership, there is the hope that we may find more sustainable and realistic leadership solutions, which are greatly needed in our institutions. To take this route we must accept that the solutions we find will be partial, and acknowledge that our work will be part of an ongoing learning process rather than finding a concrete and finite answer.

## Leaders and leadership: individuals, collectives or process?

As already highlighted, there is much confusion and debate within the literature as to what constitutes leadership. Leadership is most commonly referred to and researched as the property of an individual actor, where a leader demonstrates leadership through their personal characteristics and how they behave or act. This view of leadership is culturally coherent, a westernized understanding of individuals where society is viewed as an aggregation of individuals (Luke, 1998); it also fits our heroic narratives seen in history, stories and films. The individual leader is the commonest representation of leadership mainly because it simplifies a complex phenomena. However, as the following statements show, leadership is much more:

- She was a courageous leader.
- The board showed great leadership.
- Scandinavia takes a lead on social welfare.
- Apple consistently demonstrate leadership in innovation and design.
- The Arab league showed leadership in the talks and the tensions subsided.
- An innovative leadership culture flourished in the company.

As these examples show, leadership can be situated within individuals, groups, whole organizations, nations and even within company culture, suggesting a dispersed leadership process.

Leadership is regarded within the critical literature as a process based on interactions and social relations between people (Senge, 1990; Yukl, 1998; Alvesson, 2002; Burgoyne and Pedler, 2003). Leadership cannot exist solely within an individual, as at least one other person (a follower) is required for leadership to be enacted. It is this relationship between the individual and the follower that establishes leadership, it takes two (or more) to tango, as the saying goes. This is not to deny the influence and agency of an individual who can show leadership qualities, for example, Nelson Mandela, Ghandi and Margaret Thatcher, Jack Welch, Steve Jobs, are widely cited as such leaders. Individuals are also elected and given authority as leaders to make decisions. Leadership is sometimes consciously held up as a collective act for example: a government representing a nation may show leadership to other nations over some contested issue, such as world debt relief. A political party can show leadership, a cabinet within government or a board of directors can take collective decisions and show leadership. Some theorists claim that all leadership is essentially collective leadership, Senge (1990), has defined leadership as 'the collective capacity to create useful things' and Collinson states, 'In effect, leadership is the property and consequence of a community rather than the property and consequence of an individual leader' (2006: 183). Burgoyne and Pedler sum up the common view taken by those advocating a more critical and collective approach to leadership, which they call a 'new view of leadership':

Our approach is based on three core beliefs; leadership should be more:

- Focused on challenges rather than upon the person.
- Collective and less individualised.
- Various and less one-size-fits all.

However, like the criticisms of Transformational leadership re-inventing 'Great Man' theory, much of the collective leadership literature re-visits democratic and collectivist theories that arose from social liberation movements, which often had an anti-leadership stance (emerging from Nazi Germany, Stalinism, and other examples of leaders abusing their power). This becomes problematic when discussing what is good leadership, if there is an underlying distrust of all leadership.

Critical theorists now interpret leadership in a more complex way, which extends the idea of leadership beyond the individual, adding breadth to the debate. This breadth can work both ways, it can broaden the view of leadership in a useful way but at the same time leadership can appear to be everywhere, as the panacea for all problems. Alvesson argues that the current popularity of leadership means that it colonizes social and personal life:

There is a tendency for 'leadership' to colonise a wider spectrum of social and personal life. At least in Sweden, leadership is increasingly viewed as a solution also in work areas and professions where self-governance is – or used to be seen as – the norm, like in schools, universities and the church. (Alvesson, 2003: 13)

The popularity of leaderism can also lead to the colonization of the discourses which in the past have been about teamwork, communication, group dynamics, self-management and self-governance etc. This is true of mainstream and critical theorist perspectives.

There are many diverse assumptions made about leaders; the most common perception that persists is the leader as a heroic individual, with male attributes – the ‘Great Man’ theory, who now appears in many theoretical guises. A minority, but important, view is that leadership is socially constructed or regarded as a process (Douglas, 1983; Grint, 1997). Both arguments have their merits but the debate can easily become polarized, one side (the mainstream) researching and debating individuals as leaders, the other side advocating a social-process leadership theory. There is little clarity in the literature, and, in my experience, even less in practice, as to how individual leaders and collective actors relate or how the role of the individual leader fits into the social process of leadership.

One of the key themes from the literature is that, in the past, leadership has been seen as an elitist activity related to power and to hierarchy. Today it is commonly agreed that leadership is needed at all levels of organizations. Distributive or dispersed leadership are very popular concepts and relate to the changing post-industrial work conditions that cannot be managed in a top-down, expert, command and control structure. Daniel Goleman describes this distributive leadership as ‘every person at entry level who in one way or another, acts as a leader’ (2002: 14).

Elmore agrees, ‘[in] knowledge intensive enterprises like teaching and learning there is no way to perform these complex tasks without widely distributing the responsibility for leadership among roles in the organization’ (2000: 14). The aim is to maximize the human potential of an organization (Western, 2005). However to achieve an understanding of leadership, one of the key issues which is under-researched and hugely problematic is the relationship between the individual and the group. Turning to psychoanalytic theory, Wilfred Bion, a Tavistock psychoanalyst, describes the difficulty individuals have in managing their relationship to groups, describing the internal tension an individual has between the self and being a ‘group animal’: ‘The individual is a group animal at war, not simply with the group, but with himself for being a group animal and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his “groupishness”’ (Bion, 1961: 131).

Sigmund Freud in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) identified the struggle individuals face to maintain autonomy and be part of a social and civilized group which always limits this autonomy. Civilization (group living) demands limits on our unconscious and primitive drives and emotions, for example, our innate biological sexual and aggressive drives. These are both essential and dangerous for group survival. These tensions are played out very much through leadership that represents an active element in this struggle. The leader or leadership of any social group; team, community or nation, often becomes the focal point, the object which represents this boundary between the individual and the group. Perhaps this is why leadership is such an emotive and important issue to each of us, why we love to criticize or idealize

leaders. It is rarely that we do not have an emotional response to George Bush, Tony Blair, the national sports coach, or the boss at work.

Bion cites Freud (1921: 3) who points out that individual and group psychology cannot be absolutely differentiated because the psychology of the individual is itself a function of the individual's relationship to another person or object. Bion continues: 'The individual cannot help being a member of a group even if his membership of it consists in behaving in such a way as to give reality to the idea that he does not belong to a group at all' (1961: 131). A monk living in a solitary cell is an example of this; while physically isolating himself, he remains very prominent (a powerful symbol) in the minds of the community he has left and vice versa. He is also connected to his monastic community in spite of his choice of being alone. It is a common preference for theorists to reduce the relationship between the individual and the group to either/or scenarios. A major task in my work as a leadership developer, and leadership coach is to continuously find ways to help HR Directors and Senior executives to think beyond developing individual leaders through coaching or competency frameworks, and to link individual development to organizational development and culture change. There is a huge block in making this link, and either/or scenarios are much too common: 'Should we put our efforts into O.D (organisational development) and culture change or personally develop the high potential leaders?' Individual approaches to leadership such as traits, behaviours and competencies ignore the dynamics and emotions of the role of followers, i.e. they ignore the group. Social construction and collective approaches to leadership focus on the process, and the group, minimizing the role of the individual. This book will attempt to work across the boundaries of leadership, understanding how it is both a process and also how individual leadership is very real and a necessary part of the leadership process.

## Defining leaders by their traits and competencies

One of the most common ways to define leadership is through observing individual leaders and analysing their internal personality traits which make them successful leaders. This approach fits within the individualistic leadership camp. Today the multi-million dollar business of leadership development tends to focus on developing leadership traits and competencies. There has been a long search historically to try and define what aspects of the personality (what traits) make a good leader. Observations and studies of different exceptional leaders try and identify what aspects of their personality enabled them to be 'great men' (as the studies were usually on male heroic figures) and examples such as courage, charisma, vision, fortitude were identified as traits to be exemplified. This focus on the innate personality of leaders was known as 'Great Man' theory. Another approach which closely relates to, and often arises from, behavioural and cognitive behavioural psychology attempts to identify what leaders do, rather than what their personalities consist of. This approach has an individualistic and

functionalist approach in that it isolates component parts of an individual's behavioural repertoire with the aim of being able to modify and develop potential leader's behaviour, in order to improve their leadership skills and abilities. This approach is reductionist as it attempts to reduce leadership to a finite set of behaviours. Having identified the traits and competencies that good leaders have, individuals are trained and tested against this list to improve these competencies. I will briefly summarize and critique the trait and competency approach, in order to address the complexity of leadership.

A classic piece of trait theory in management came from McGregor in the 1960s and perhaps best sums up trait theory; it is very over-simplistic focusing on the individual and dividing humanity into two main camps: Theory X and Theory Y (Box 2.2). This approach is still taught in many business schools and can be found in many MBA texts.

### **Box 2.2 Theory X or Theory Y type manager**

From Maslow's work on self-actualization came Douglas McGregor's (1960) Theory X or Theory Y type manager which offers a polemic over-simplification, yet is still cited in much of the management literature: 'Many managers still easily identify with the Theory X and Y distinction and its normative view of good and bad leadership' (Fulop and Linstead, 1999: 165).

McGregor's theories present a philosophical stance and are therefore difficult to validate. McGregor stated that Theory X management/leadership was based on the assumption that:

- 1 The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if at all possible.
- 2 Because of this, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed and threatened with punishment to put adequate effort into the achievement of organizational objectives.
- 3 The average human being prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition and wants security above all else.

Theory Y of management/leadership represents the other view that:

- 1 Work is natural.
- 2 People will exercise self direction.
- 3 Satisfaction and self-actualization are the most important rewards for individuals.
- 4 Individuals seek responsibility and development and the average person's potential is not being fully used.

(McGregor, 1960: 33–4)

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McGregor did say that Theory X was an acceptable style at certain times, perhaps during economic recession, for example, but in general there was one best way of management and that was Theory Y. Theory X led to a more autocratic leadership style because of the need to control and coerce unwilling workers whereas Theory Y built relationships and encourages a participative leadership style.

This example of trait theory shows how people are divided into functional groups, in this case, you are an X or Y type. There are numerous examples in the leadership literature of competency and trait approaches. There are thousands of tests: personality tests, psycho-metric tests and frameworks, which attempt to assess leaders. The tests give a pseudo-scientific empirical legitimacy to this approach to understanding leadership and leader development. The popularity of the tests and this approach rely on two fundamental observations:

- 1 People seem inherently curious about themselves and simplistic answers to the complex problems of personality grab the attention of the individual. Check any magazine rack and the internet for tests to show what type of person you are, and you will be inundated with results. I am always amazed how a buzz enters the university lecture theatre when groups are asked to undertake and discuss their Myers Briggs Test or their Enneagram. As a trainer, it is an almost failsafe way to have a successful seminar, these tests engage immediately with our ego states and our narcissism! Personality tests are used as sales tools because of their popularity, which helps explain the growth in leadership testing.
- 2 Companies and organizations get a formulaic simplistic quasi-scientific and measurable solution (always popular in the rational-positivist world of management) to the very difficult and complex challenge of leadership development.

Manfred Kets de Vries finds the literature on leadership traits overwhelming and confusing but identifies some commonality in the findings: 'conscientiousness, extroversion, dominance, self-confidence, energy, agreeableness, intelligence, openness to experience and emotional stability' (Kets de Vries, 1994). As Kets de Vries points out, these traits are very open-ended and, when discussed, they open up a heated polemic as to the nature of what they really mean. He goes on to say how individuals' characters need to be assessed using clinical methodologies (Kets de Vries is a psychoanalyst and Director of Insead Global Leadership Center, Insead Business School, France). Many of the traits identified are the obvious traits which could be applied to anybody who is successful in multiple dimensions beyond the idea of leadership. Gemmil and Oakley (1992) identify a resurgence in the

1990s of the 'traitist' approach, identifying charisma as an embodiment of this approach, 'Charisma is the leadership trait most often examined by members of the "leadership mafia"' (in Grint, 1997: 277). Gemmil and Oakley's anti-leadership polemic names Bennis and Nanus (1985), Zaleznik (1989) and Tichy and Devanna (1986) as part of the new wave of leadership theorists drawing on the trait approach. They link the resurgence of leadership and the trait approach in particular as part of a Great Leader Myth which undermines autonomy and creates dependency (this will be revisited later in the book in some depth). Having worked with leadership tests in executive education, one of the real strengths of this approach is that although the focus is on an individual and is reductionist, it can act as a catalyst for a broader discussion about leadership and can offer a common language for a group or organization to discuss some of the leadership issues it faces. Too often, however, this strength is overlooked as individuals are encouraged to focus on their own performance.

The most common criticism of the trait/competency approach is that they are one-size-fits-all approaches. Defining leadership by a set of given competencies or traits suggests a preferred leadership style which all individuals must have if they are to be successful leaders. These approaches are limited in two important areas: first, from a critical theorist perspective, they represent a hegemonic approach. This refers to an elite powerful group, i.e. the senior management team, agreeing on the leadership traits and competencies necessary for success and then demanding, testing, training and measuring these in traits potential leaders in the company. This in itself is a homogenizing approach to leadership that has totalitarian overtones: 'Our leaders will demonstrate to followers these specific personality traits and these competencies ... which the followers will embrace and then mirror these behaviours.' This approach does not embrace personal difference or gender, racial and other aspects of cultural diversity. Where do creative mavericks find a space to experiment in an organization that limits leadership to traits and competencies? Where does the quiet introverted leader who builds success through teamwork, fit into a competency framework that embraces only extrovert qualities? Some more advanced uses of these psychometrics are designed to put together teams with different personal qualities, but these still rely on unsound science and are mechanistic and formulaic in their approach.

The second major concern is that a trait or competency approach is a one-size-fits-all approach which ignores context. For example, a National Health Service Quality framework for leadership provided a competency framework for its leaders (see [www.nhsleadershipqualities.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsleadershipqualities.nhs.uk)). From a critical theorist perspective, these frameworks reinforce the underlying assumption that leadership resides in the individual. These frameworks identify standard competencies such as self-belief, self-awareness, personal integrity etc. which are generic traits of any successful person. How these are developed in individuals is another question. The contextual problem is that there is the assumption that a Medical Surgeon, a Charge Nurse running a community psychiatric project and a Health Service Financial Officer, all

require the same leadership competencies. To embrace this diversity, the competencies are so open-ended and they become so generic as to be fairly useless: for example, 'leading change through people' begs the question, how else would one lead change? 'Empower others', 'drive for results', 'seizing the future'. Discussing slogans of leadership with many NHS executives and managers/leaders, I hear over and over that there is widespread cynicism about these leadership slogans and mantras and the training programmes which are in place to deliver them. The cynicism I hear reflects the literature that critiques this approach, they are too generic and they conflict with the context and the reality at work where structural, process and resource issues undermine the stated goals of collaboration and empowerment.

This approach ignores the context of a situation and the complexity of running very challenging and diverse workplaces. The experience on the ground may be that there is little room for *seizing the future* and *empowering others* when the context feels disempowering due to a production-line atmosphere where success is measured against meeting targets and deadlines. In practice, there is little evidence that the naming and defining of leadership competencies translate into training or behaviour modification which has had a significant impact on improving leadership and change in organizations.

## Situational leadership: leaders to fit the context

Fred Fiedler's Contingency approach (1967, 1974) attempted to rescue management theory from the simplistic notion of the 'one-best-fit' manager/leader for all situations. Fiedler proposed that the leadership style would need to be different to fit different situations, i.e. it had to be situational and contingent. He attempted to find the optimal match between leadership style and situation. Critics challenge his research claims of success on the grounds that there has been a failure to replicate results and some of the results conflict with subordinates' accounts of leaders (Bryman, 1986). Contingency approaches challenge the notion of the one-best-style leader for different situations and they have focused on the two-factor model of *Relationship- or Task-Centred* leader. Task-Centred leaders focus on the task rather than people and are more directive. This approach suits certain situations, for example, in hierarchical organizations with unstructured tasks, whereas Relationship-Centred leaders are favoured in the majority of situations as they focus on people and participation. Unfortunately this offers yet another dualistic model, 'relational or task', that does not account for the complexity of understanding relationships, power and leadership from multiple perspectives.

The contingency approach attempts to address some of the social context issues faced by leaders and managers but tries to package it into over-simplistic assumptions. Much more work is required in this area as a one-best-fit leadership style or an over-simplified contingency approach to leadership is still common practice. There are many factors requiring further

research in the area of understanding how leaders address context and situational difference, for example:

- 1 *Organizational size:* How different leadership approaches may be required within different size organizations. Can we talk about a single leadership approach and refer to a small start-up company and a global institution?
- 2 *Leading people: One-one, a small team, a large group and unseen masses in a global organization:* People skills and relational skills are not universal skills that can be applied to all situations. The leadership skills and relational/communication skills differ hugely when working with different size groups. A leader of a large multinational company will have to lead individuals on a one-one basis, in teams, large groups, and she/he will have to communicate and influence unseen masses of employees in diverse contexts. This has implications for communication and leadership skills which cannot be accounted for through the dualistic contingency model. It implies that leadership needs to intrinsically be diverse in nature which would usually imply that this would not reside in any single person. There are unusually gifted communicators. Bill Clinton is such a leader, who is renowned for his ability to communicate across these groupings and have a leadership impact in individual, team, large group and global situations. However, even with an exceptionally gifted individual, a leadership team and a dispersed leadership are required to meet the multitude of demands of leading organizations.
- 3 *The social context of an organization:* Different organizations have diverse organizational structures and cultures depending on the wider environmental, social and political context. This must take into account the geography, political interests, the multiple stakeholder interests and the product or output of the organization. All this impacts on the leadership requirements and needs of that organization and how it functions. For example: leadership of a public sector hospital differs from leading McDonald's food chain or a global weapons manufacturer. Multinationals have found to their cost through the failure rate of mergers and acquisitions that under-estimating diverse cultures can have a huge impact on success and failure. The output of the organization impacts on the technical and structural aspects of organizational life and also on the environmental, political and the psycho-social dynamics of the organization. Within organizations there is a diversity of outputs depending on the department or part of the organization one works. Outputs can conflict within an organization or can appear to. As different skills, training and cultures are required in different departments, so also are different leadership styles, structures and processes.

There will be some consistent features and universalities of leadership within each scenario but also major differences. These approaches need problematizing from a critical perspective as they are too often presented in a solution-focused way, providing answers to leadership problems. In the search for good leadership, the problems and questions asked are too often

the wrong questions, framed because they can be answered rather than because they are the difficult questions which need answering. As this chapter has identified, the answers given, i.e. a set of leadership competencies, have limited impact on leadership development and leading organizational change. In leadership studies, contingency and situational leadership theory are discussed under social constructionist theory whereby the influence of the social relates to how an individual leader will behave and how their leadership will be received. This is in contrast to the functional/behaviourist trait models of leadership. However, these approaches should not be polarized, as is sometimes the case, because of the different theoretical camps, as they do not compete with each other. Both are important and complementary and both contribute to the wider leadership narrative.

## Managers and leaders

The terms 'management' and 'leadership' can be used interchangeably and both management and leadership are words which evoke multiple meanings. Managers can demonstrate leadership and likewise a leader can have managerial skills. In recent times leadership has been rediscovered and reconstituted to take a newly elevated position in the world of management theory and practice, as pointed out by Bennis and Nanus.

**Management typically constitutes a set of contractual exchanges ... What gets exchanged is not trivial: jobs, security, and money. The result, at best, is compliance; at worst you get a spiteful obedience. The end result of leadership is completely different: it is empowerment. Not just higher profits and wages ... but an organisational culture that helps employees generate a sense of meaning in their work and a desire to challenge themselves to experience success. (1985: 218)**

Leaders and leadership have become a very sought-after commodity. Bennis states that many American companies are 'over-managed and under-led' saying, 'I tend to think of the differences between leaders and managers as those who master the context and those who surrender to it' (1986: 45). This shift in focus, which elevates leadership from the pitfalls of managerialism, is now common. Leadership has been rediscovered, apparently, as an attempt to address the contemporary social and economic conditions faced by organizations. Leadership and leaders are thought to possess more of the qualities to address the contemporary organizational challenges than management and managers. There are many articles discussing the managers versus leadership debate (Barker, 1997; Kotter, 1990; Zaleznik, 1992), but the general tone is similar; managers are more scientific, rational, controlling, they relate to structure stability and bureaucracy whereas leadership is about passion, vision, inspiration, creativity and cooperation rather than control. Burgoyne and Pedler (2003) note: 'Leadership is often defined as

being about “voluntary” obedience and there are assumptions of harmony and convergence of interest, seldom the leader uses formal authority or means of rewards/punishment in order to accomplish compliance [Barker, 1993; Zaleznik, 1992]’.

Another take on the rise of the leader is that a leader creates change while a manager creates stability. Alvesson and Svenginsson sum up their reading of the leadership literature:

Contemporary writings usually frame leadership in terms of the visionary and heroic aspects, it is the leader’s abilities to address [by talking and persuading] the many through the use of charisma, symbols and other strongly emotional devices, the ambition being to arouse and encourage people to embark upon organizational projects. (2003: 4)

Zaleznik (1992: 126) separates leadership and management neatly, perhaps too neatly:

A managerial culture emphasises rationality and control. Whether his or her energies are directed toward goals, resources, organisation structures, or people, a manager is a problem solver ... It takes neither genius nor heroism to be a manager, but rather persistence, tough-mindedness, hard work, intelligence, analytical ability and perhaps most important, tolerance and goodwill.

Zaleznik sees managers as conservative folk who work towards conflict resolution, who are ambiguous in an attempt to blur things to avoid offending others, but are better team players. The managers’ conservative nature leads them to work hard to defend institutions whereas leaders are more likely to be loners, to inspire creativity that may create conflict and to challenge the status quo, changing institutions. Whereas Leaders:

Leaders work from high-risk positions; indeed, they are often temperamentally disposed to seek out risk and danger, especially where the chance of opportunity and reward appears promising’ (ibid.)

Others see the leaders very much as network builders, integrators, communicators and much more wedded to the ideas of cooperation (Alvesson, 2002). Bryman (1996) says that leaders have an integrative role: creating change and organizational culture through the transmission of cultural values. A key difference, which seems agreed, is that contemporary leaders seldom use formal authority or means of rewards/punishment in order to accomplish compliance (Zaleznik, 1992).

### *Management as the ‘Other’ to leadership*

In short, management has assumed the derogatory ‘other’ to leadership. The manager has been relegated to an outdated, functionalist and mechanistic mode of operating more suited to the industrial age than the post-industrial workplace. Dubrin points to the need for leadership as well as management

'Without being led as well as managed, organisations face the threat of extinction' (2000: 4). However, there are some notable critics and warnings as to the demise of the manager (Mintzberg, 2004a, 2004b).

Paul du Gay's (2000) *In Praise of Bureaucracy* and Elliot Jaques' article (1990) 'In Praise of Hierarchy' also challenge this general trend, which puts leadership in front of management in contemporary organizational life. Until recently, management existed in its own discourse within business schools and went largely unchallenged. Disputes were about what sort of management worked best rather than questioning management itself. Now management itself, like bureaucracy before it, is being questioned as being the best way to run a business. Failing to ignite the imagination and idealism of the moment and seen as unfit to provide ongoing success in the post-industrial and global 'knowledge society', management has been pushed into a subservient position and become the 'other' which helps define the new popular 'object of desire' leadership. Set within a two-dimensional framework, there is a dualism in which the 'object' and the 'other' help define each other. In this case the leader is defined as a liberating actor bringing meaning to followers, to the 'otherness' of the controlling and bureaucratic manager, who brings alienation. Dubrin (2000) offers the following leader/manager dualisms: visionary as opposed to rational, passionate vs consulting, creative vs persistent, inspiring vs tough-minded, innovative vs analytical, courageous vs structured. Yukl critiques four two-factor leadership examples, Task Versus Relations, Autocratic Versus Participative, Leadership Versus Management, Transformational Versus Transactional Leadership and finds 'These dichotomies provide some insights, but they also oversimplify a, complex phenomenon and encourage stereotyping of individual leaders (Yukl, 1999: 34).

Helping define an object using the 'other' can be helpful, particularly when the object is obtuse and difficult to define, such as leadership. However, duality can also reduce complex phenomena to simplistic forms that lead to misunderstandings. Yukl's (1999) overview of leadership research is that two-factor model research and theorizing are over-simplistic; they stereotype people and are too dyadic and leadership research focuses on the relationships between two people, leader and follower, which does not take enough account of the context.

Leadership is very clearly in vogue and 'sexy', and the claims and hopes are that it will provide answers to the new era rather than manage the present. Managers are presented within the literature as mundane, resonating with a transactional theory of exchange and a more 'rational ideology' as opposed to the contemporary knowledge and learning-based economies of the West which, it is said, are suited to the leader, who focuses more on emotions and meaning rather than control (Barley and Kunda, 1992). The problem is that while 'sexy' attracts attention and gets journal articles and books published and sold, many businesses, practitioners, shareholders and academics are more conservative. The deep-seated ideology of rationality, rigorous empiricism and reliability still holds great power and sway.

In the past century, leadership has often been merged with the management discourse, leadership being seen as one of the attributes of being a

good manager. It is only recently, with the popular rise of the leader, they have commonly been discussed as being separate. However, A.K Rice, a Tavistock psychoanalytically informed theorist, writing back in the 1960s points to the difficulty in separating leadership and management:

Both leaders and managers have to deal with a different number of followers and subordinates, extending all the way from the small intimate face-to-face group of immediate colleagues to extended commands and even crowds ... To be successful a manager has to display qualities of leadership and use techniques of management appropriate to the task of the group he is managing. (Rice, 1965: 20)

Rice identifies the blurred boundaries between manager and leader, but acknowledges that some leaders are better at leading and inspiring their followers and institutions than they are at managing them, while some managers are better at managing than they are at leading and inspiring. Other managers are better at developing strategies than at implementing strategy. Rice identifies functions and skills in which a leader or manager may excel. Rice is very clear that a manager also takes up a leadership role because 'any institution whose managers do not give leadership in primary task performance is obviously in difficulty' (ibid.: 20). Mintzberg agrees with this view which is still being debated 41 years later: 'Leadership is supposed to be something bigger, more important. I reject this distinction, simply because managers have to lead and leaders have to manage. Management without leadership is sterile; leadership without management is disconnected and encourages hubris' (2004a: 6).

Rice then takes up an unusual stance from his psychoanalytic perspective and says that a key difference between a manager and a leader lies within the concept of unconscious behaviour. He sees management as essentially rational and conscious (manifest) whereas leadership can also be exercised unconsciously (covertly). This can lead to tensions, as he explains: 'In this sense, whatever the institution, managers need to understand the problems of leadership and particularly to be aware of those kinds of leadership both manifest and covert, which oppose their management,' (Rice, 1965: 20). Rice goes on to identify two tasks of leadership: a conscious (manifest) task and an unconscious task. At a manifest level, the primary task of leadership is to manage relations between an institution and its environment so as to permit optimal performance of the primary task of the institution. At the unconscious level, the leader expresses on behalf of the group the emotions associated with the basic assumption (ibid.: 20). The basic assumption he refers to is Wilfred Bion's (1961) work on the primitive unconscious emotions that groups identify with and which undermine the group and prevent them from working effectively. Rice then says, 'If the manifest leader fails to deal adequately with the repressed emotions and assumptions, other leaders may be thrown up to express emotions that are opposed to the overt task of the group' (Rice, 1965: 22). He is suggesting that leaders need to develop an awareness of their own conscious and unconscious roles. This implies that

the conscious manifest role is to manage the explicit environment, and an unconscious role is to manage the emotions and expectations they have placed on them by the group. If leaders are not aware of the unconscious expectations of their followers, which are based on primitive anxieties, then tensions will arise between the explicit, conscious expectations and the unconscious individual and group anxieties which present themselves as powerful fantasies. He suggests, in line with other psychoanalytic theorists, that unless these unconscious fantasies are acknowledged and 'managed', conflict and destructive behaviour will result. A leader can be rendered impotent if the conscious task (e.g. to sell cars) and unconscious task (e.g. to win the approval of the boss) conflict too powerfully within a group. Rice's insights are helpful as they blur the lines between managers and leaders, identifying that they are not dichotomies but that they co-exist: a manager will usually have a leadership role and a leader usually has a management role.

Two key points arise from Rice's work:

- 1 Managers who do not show some leadership are likely to fail.
- 2 There are two tasks of leadership: a conscious task and an unconscious task.

The conscious task has many theorists' attention and it is the unconscious task of managing, representing and influencing the emotions and unconscious fantasies of the group, which are often overlooked. The unconscious task relates to understanding and influencing the group culture and the unconscious processes within the organization.

One of the differences between an accomplished leader and manager is that the manager is more likely to be skilled in the conscious task whereas the leader definitely needs both. In practice, mixed messages and confusing expectations exist for those who take up senior roles in organizations, whether they are called managers or leaders.

In this book I will not attempt to separate the manager and leader with surgical precision, as this is not possible. When discussing leadership, I will assume some managers will also have some leadership qualities and responsibilities and vice versa.

## Conclusion

When asking what is leadership, the answer depends on what one is looking for, and from where one is looking. Leadership is many things to many people. Looking awry is vital in this situation to get a multi-perspective view, and to see leadership in new and insightful ways. Leadership has been separated from management in an artificial way, but there are differences, and while the distinctions may not be black and white, they are still important. Management is closely associated with efficiency and control, there is nothing wrong with this, it is very important. Leadership is associated with moving forward, taking authority, creating change through influencing.

## CHAPTER 2

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Leaders and leadership are very commonly polarized: either idealized or denigrated. This is a social and psychological process, whereby we project desire and anxiety onto 'saviours' or project our envy and fears onto those 'idiots' leading us. These processes require understanding in context, rather than arguing whether leadership itself is right or wrong. The task is closer to sense-making rather than searching for concrete and definitive answers (Weick, 1995; Pye, 2005). The 'Holy Grail' of leadership is to be found when we stop searching for it, and see that it is all around us, in the processes, behaviours, and the social systems in which we work on a daily basis.