This book is about what it takes to be a leader. Everyone, at some time in life, is asked to be a leader, whether to lead a classroom discussion, coach a children’s soccer team, or direct a fund-raising campaign. Many situations require leadership. A leader may have a high profile (for example, an elected public official) or a low profile (for example, a volunteer leader in Big Brother Big Sister), but in every situation there are leadership demands placed on the individual who is the leader. Being a leader is challenging, exciting, and rewarding, and carries with it many responsibilities. This chapter discusses different ways of looking at leadership and their impacts on what it means to be a leader.

Defining Leadership

At the outset, it is important to address a basic question: “What is leadership?” Scholars who study leadership have struggled with this question for many decades and have written a great deal about the nature of leadership (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004; Bass, 1990; Conger & Riggio, 2007). In leadership literature, more than one hundred different definitions of leadership have been identified (Rost, 1991). Despite these many definitions, a number of concepts are recognized by most people as accurately reflecting what it is to be a leader.
“Leadership Is a Trait”

First, leadership is thought of as a trait. Defining leadership as a trait means that each individual brings to the table certain inherent qualities that influence the way he or she leads. Some leaders are confident, some are decisive, and still others are outgoing and sociable. Saying that leadership is a trait places a great deal of emphasis on the leader and on the leader’s special gifts. It follows the often-expressed belief “leaders are born, not made.” Some argue that focusing on traits makes leadership an elitist enterprise because it implies that only a few people with special talents will lead. Although there may be some truth to this argument, it can also be argued that all people are born with a wide array of unique traits and that many of these traits can have a positive impact on our leadership. It also may be possible to modify or change some traits.

“Leadership Is an Ability”

In addition to being thought of as a trait, leadership is also conceptualized as an ability. A person who has leadership ability is able to be a leader—that is, has the capacity to lead. While the term “ability” frequently refers to a natural capacity, ability can be acquired. For example, some people are naturally good at public speaking, while others rehearse to become comfortable speaking in public. Similarly, some people have the natural physical ability to excel in a sport, while others develop their athletic capacity through exercise and practice. In leadership, some people have the natural ability to lead, while others develop their leadership abilities through hard work and practice.

“Leadership Is a Skill”

Third, leadership is a skill. Conceptualized as a skill, leadership is a competency developed to accomplish a task effectively. Skilled leaders are competent people who know the means and methods for carrying out their responsibilities. For example, a skilled leader in a fund-raising campaign knows every step and procedure in the fund-raising process and is able to use this knowledge to run an effective campaign. In short, skilled leaders are competent—they know what they need to do and they know how to do it.

Describing leadership as a skill makes leadership available to everyone because skills are competencies that people can learn or develop. Even without natural leadership ability, people can improve their leadership with practice, instruction, and feedback from others. Viewed as a skill, leadership can be studied and learned. If you are capable of learning from experience, you can acquire leadership.
“Leadership Is a Behavior”

Leadership is also a behavior. It is what leaders do when they are in a leadership role. The behavioral dimension is concerned with how leaders act toward others in various situations. Unlike traits, abilities, and skills, leadership behaviors are observable. When someone leads, we see that person’s leadership behavior.

Research on leadership has shown that leaders engage primarily in two kinds of general behaviors: task behaviors and process behaviors. Task behaviors are used by leaders to get the job done (for example, they prepare an agenda for a meeting). Process behaviors are used by leaders to help people feel comfortable with other group members and at ease in the situations in which they find themselves (e.g., they help individuals in a group to feel included). Since leadership requires both task and process behaviors, the challenge for leaders is to know the best way to combine them in their efforts to reach a goal.

“Leadership Is a Relationship”

Another, and somewhat unusual, way to think about leadership is as a relationship. From this perspective, leadership is centered in the communication between leaders and followers rather than on the unique qualities of the leader. Thought of as relationship, leadership becomes a process of collaboration that occurs between leaders and followers (Rost, 1991). A leader affects and is affected by followers, and both leader and followers are affected in turn by the situation that surrounds them. This approach emphasizes that leadership is not a linear one-way event, but rather an interactive event. In traditional leadership, authority is often top down; in the interactive type of leadership, authority and influence are shared. When leadership is defined in this manner, it becomes available to everyone. It is not restricted to the formally designated leader in a group.

Thinking of leadership as a relationship suggests that leaders must include followers and their interests in the process of leadership. A leader needs to be fully aware of the followers and all the followers’ interests, ideas, positions, attitudes, and motivations. In addition, this approach has an ethical overtone because it stresses the need for leaders to work with followers to achieve their mutual purposes. Stressing mutuality lessens the possibility that leaders might act toward followers in ways that are forced or unethical. It also increases the possibility that leaders and followers will work together toward a common good (Rost, 1991).

We probably all wonder at the differences in leadership around the world. Why do some countries gravitate toward the distributed leadership of a democracy, while others seem content with the hierarchical leadership of a monarchy or dictatorship?
The definitions of leadership outlined in this chapter are from an American perspective. If you were to travel to nations across the world, you would no doubt encounter different views of leadership specific to those political cultures.

In 2004, Robert House led a group of 160 researchers in an ambitious study to increase our understanding of the impact culture has on leadership effectiveness. The GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) studies drew on the input of seventeen thousand people in sixty-two countries in determining how leadership varies across the world. Among the many findings generated by the GLOBE studies was the identification of positive and negative leadership characteristics that are universally accepted worldwide (Table 1.1).

To summarize, the meaning of leadership is complex and includes many dimensions. For some people, leadership is a trait or ability, for others it is a skill or behavior, and for still others leadership is a relationship. In reality, leadership probably includes components of all of these dimensions. Each dimension explains a facet of leadership.

In considering these various definitions of leadership and based on your conceptualizing leadership questionnaire results, which definition seems closest to how you think of leadership? How would you define leadership?

### TABLE 1.1 Universally Desirable Leadership Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive leader attributes</th>
<th>Just</th>
<th>Plans ahead</th>
<th>Dynamic</th>
<th>Motivational</th>
<th>Decisive</th>
<th>Communicative</th>
<th>Coordinator</th>
<th>Honest</th>
<th>Encouraging</th>
<th>Motive arouser</th>
<th>Dependable</th>
<th>Effective bargainer</th>
<th>Informed</th>
<th>Team builder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
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<td>Foresighted</td>
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<td>Positive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Builds confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Win-win problem solver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative skilled</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Excellence oriented</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative leader attributes</th>
<th>Asocial</th>
<th>Nonexplicit</th>
<th>Dictatorial</th>
<th>Noncooperative</th>
<th>Egocentric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruthless</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

to these questions are important because *how you think* about leadership will strongly influence how *you practice* leadership.

**Practicing Leadership**

There is a strong demand for effective leadership in society today. This demand exists at the local and community levels, as well as at the national level, in this country and abroad. People feel the need for leadership in all aspects of their lives. They want leaders in their personal lives, at school, in the work setting, and even in their spiritual life. Everywhere you turn, people are expressing a need for strong leadership.

When people ask for leadership in a particular situation, it is not always clear exactly what they want. For the most part, however, they want effective leadership. Effective leadership is intended influence that creates change for the greater good. Leadership uses positive means to achieve positive outcomes. Furthermore, people want leaders who listen to and understand their needs and who can relate to their circumstances. The challenge for each of us is to be prepared to lead when we are asked to be the leader.

**Summary**

All of us at some time in our lives will be asked to show leadership. When you are asked to be the leader, it will be both demanding and rewarding. How you approach leadership is strongly influenced by your definitions of and beliefs about leadership. Through the years, writers have defined leadership in a multitude of ways. It is a complex, multidimensional process that is often conceptualized in a variety of ways by different people. Some of the most common ways of looking at leadership are as a trait, ability, skill, behavior, or relationship. The way you think about leadership will influence the way you practice leadership.

**References**


1.1 Conceptualizing Leadership Questionnaire

Purpose
1. To identify how you view leadership
2. To explore your perceptions of different aspects of leadership

Directions
1. Consider for a moment your own impressions of the word leadership. Based on your experiences with leaders in your lifetime, what is leadership?
2. Using the scale below, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about leadership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When I think of leadership, I think of a person with special personality traits.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Much like playing the piano or tennis, leadership is a learned ability.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Leadership requires knowledge and know-how.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Leadership is about what people do rather than who they are.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Followers can influence the leadership process as much as leaders.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Some people are born to be leaders.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Some people have the natural ability to be a leader.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The key to successful leadership is having the right skills.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Leadership is best described by what leaders do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Leaders and followers share in the leadership process.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. A person needs to have certain traits to be an effective leader.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Everyone has the capacity to be a leader.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Effective leaders are competent in their roles.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scoring

1. Sum scores on items 1, 6, 11, and 16 (trait emphasis)
2. Sum scores on items 2, 7, 12, and 17 (ability emphasis)
3. Sum scores on items 3, 8, 13, and 18 (skill emphasis)
4. Sum scores on items 4, 9, 14, and 19 (behavior emphasis)
5. Sum scores on items 5, 10, 15, and 20 (relationship emphasis)

Total Scores

1. Trait emphasis: ___________
2. Ability emphasis: ___________
3. Skill emphasis: ___________
4. Behavior emphasis: ___________
5. Relationship emphasis: ___________

Scoring Interpretation

The scores you received on this questionnaire provide information about how you define and view leadership. The emphasis you give to the various dimensions of leadership has implications for how you approach the leadership process. For example, if your highest score is trait emphasis, it suggests that you emphasize the role of the leader and the leader’s special gifts in the leadership process. However, if your highest score is relationship emphasis, it indicates that you think leadership is centered in the communication between leaders and followers, rather than on the unique qualities of the leader. By comparing the differences between your scores, you can gain an understanding of the aspects of leadership that you find most important and least important. The way you think about leadership will influence how you practice leadership.
1.2 Observational Exercise

*Conceptualizing Leadership*

**Purpose**

1. To develop an understanding of the complexity of leadership
2. To become aware of the different ways people define leadership

**Directions**

1. In this exercise, select five people you know and interview them about leadership.
2. Ask each person to give you their definition of leadership, and to describe their personal beliefs about effective leadership.
3. Record each person’s response on a separate sheet of paper.

   Person #1 (name) ____________________________________________
   Person #2 (name) ____________________________________________
   Person #3 (name) ____________________________________________
   Person #4 (name) ____________________________________________
   Person #5 (name) ____________________________________________

**Questions**

1. What differences did you observe in how these people define leadership?
2. What seems to be the most common definition of leadership?
3. In what ways did people describe leadership differently from the definitions in Chapter 1 Being a Leader?
4. Of the people interviewed, whose definition comes closest to your own? Why?
1.3  Reflection and Action Worksheet

**Conceptualizing Leadership**

**Reflection**

1. Each of us has our own unique way of thinking about leadership. What leaders or people have influenced you in your thinking about leadership? Discuss what leadership means to you and give your definition of leadership.

2. What do the scores you received on the conceptualizing leadership questionnaire suggest about your beliefs on leadership? Of the five dimensions on the questionnaire (traits, ability, skills, behavior, and relationship), which two are the most similar to your own beliefs? Which two are the least like your own beliefs? Discuss.

3. Do you think leadership is something everyone can learn to do, or do you think it is a natural ability reserved for a few? Explain your answer.

**Action**

1. Based on the interviews you conducted with others about leadership, how could you incorporate others’ ideas about leadership into your own leadership?

2. Treating leadership as a relationship has ethical implications. How could adding the relationship approach to your leadership make you a better leader? Discuss.

3. Think about your own leadership. Identify one trait, ability, skill, or behavior that you could develop more fully to become a better leader.
Recognizing Your Traits

Before you begin reading . . .

Complete the *Leadership Traits Questionnaire*, which you will find on pp. XX–XX. As you read the chapter, consider your results on the questionnaire.