CHAPTER FIVE

Reinventing Leadership: A Radical, Social Psychological Approach

JAMES R. MEINDL
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This chapter calls for more social psychological perspectives on leadership. In contrast to the conventional wisdom, the value of a social psychological approach to leadership inheres in the emphasis on followers and their contexts over factors associated with leaders themselves. I argue for a reinvention of leadership from a radical social psychological point of view. Ideas stemming from the “romance of leadership” notion are used to illustrate how a useful, anticonventional approach might be developed.

PART I

Introduction

Leadership is everything and nothing. Few topics in organizational behavior have inspired as much passion and polarization over the years. To many, leadership studies are indirectly connected to a number of important values, including national competitiveness in the global marketplace, political influence, and, ultimately, effectiveness, empowerment, and humanity in the workplace, corporations, morality, and social responsibility. For them, leadership is everything; for others, the accumulated wisdom of literally thousands of studies on the subject is seen as irrelevant and uninteresting. For them, the study of leadership is, at best, of tangential concern; at worst, a colossal waste of energy and talent spent on more direct efforts to study these important problems.

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PART 1

Introduction

Leadership is everything and nothing. Few topics in organizational behavior have inspired as much passion and polarization over the years. To many, leadership studies are indirectly connected to a number of important values, including national competitiveness in the global marketplace, political influence and military effectiveness, empowerment and humanity in the workplace, corporate ethics, morality, and social responsibility. For them, leadership is everything. But for others, the accumulated wisdom of literally thousands of studies on the topic is seen as irrelevant and uninteresting. For them, the study of leadership is, at best, of tangential concern; at worst, a colossal waste of energy and talent better spent on more direct efforts to study these important problems.

As it now stands, social psychologists whose research agendas focus on leadership run the risk of being defined as marginal participants in the mainstream of social psychology. This is somewhat ironic since leadership has had
a prominent place in the history of social psychology. Major figures in the
development of the field—including Lewin, Sherif and Sherif, Bogardus, Tan-
nenbaum, and many others—have made significant contributions to social
psychology via the study of leadership, particularly within the context of small
groups. Some, such as Hollander, have spent the greater parts of their careers
conducting significant, social psychological inquiries into the topic. I doubt that
very many newly minted PhDs in social psychology would even be aware of
this. The last revision of the Handbook of Social Psychology (Lindzey & Aronson,
1985) included a chapter on leadership, written by Hollander. It presented
readers with an overview of the area, particularly as it relates to power and in-
fluence. A reading of that chapter reflects a fall-off of leadership studies by social
psychologists in the 1970s and early 1980s. That trend has continued. In 1991,
the contribution of social psychologists to leadership studies is quite modest. A
part of that waning may reflect the general decline and interest in small group
research in social psychology. But for whatever reasons, the net result has been
a steady erosion of a social psychological perspective on leadership.

Fads come and go, interests wax and wane; and so do the intellectual heri-
tages that guide the assumptions and beliefs of new generations of research-
ers. Students of organizational behavior, who might arguably have the greatest
interest in the topic, are exposed to contemporary work that is largely being gen-
erated by researchers who collectively indulge in a narrow version of social psy-
chology. In fact, much of the work is quite antisocial psychological. For some,
this becomes the foundation and premise for their own work on the topic. For
many others, it is a source of alienation since few topics in the so-called organi-
zational sciences are as fruitfully explored from a social psychological perspec-
tive.

There are many avenues for developing a contemporary social psychology
of leadership. The particular approach explored in this chapter flows in part
from my earlier work on the “romance of leadership” notion. As the reader will
see, it pushes, sometimes to an extreme, for a radical, social psychological ap-
proach to the study of leadership, insofar as the current and conventional lead-
ership approaches are concerned. These approaches to leadership do not take
enough advantage of a social psychological perspective. Thus, I have deliber-
ately taken an anticonventional stance. Again, it is a lamentable irony that social
psychology can be considered in any sense “radical” to the status quo.

A radical approach

Social psychology attempts to understand and explain how individuals are in-
fluenced, in their thoughts and their actions, by the real or implied presence of
others (Allport, 1985). Too often, the meaning of a social psychological approach
is reduced to an interaction between persons and situations. In the most limiting
cases, the “interaction” implicates not a social process but simply a statistical in-
teraction in an analysis of variance (ANOVA) design or a multiplicative term in
a regression equation. Some of that comes from common knowledge associated
with Kurt Lewin’s celebrated dictum that \( B = f(P,S) \). But as Allport notes, al-
though social psychology invariably includes explicit or implicit theorizing about persons, that theorizing is strongly interested in the role of situational and contextual influences as perceived and interpreted by the persons involved. The Lewinian tradition attaches only secondary importance to personality and individual differences, being much more interested in situational effects. Thus, a strong social psychological lens on anything, including leadership, emphasizes situational, contextual influences above all else.

It is no accident that it was a social psychologist who discovered that when considering \( B = f(P, S) \), there is an almost irresistible emphasis placed on \( P \) over that of \( S \) (Ross, 1977). And this is what has happened in contemporary leadership studies. Without the continued participation of social psychologists, person variables and individual differences—the stock and trade of many who are now studying leadership—have dominated over situational variables.

Hollander (1978) has viewed the “locus of leadership” as residing at the juncture of the leader, the follower, and the context that embeds them. Although this view is often espoused, contexts and followers have been of limited theoretical interest among contemporary leadership researchers. Of course, there are exceptions, but the field of leadership studies, if it can be characterized by anything, seems to have succumbed to sins of the intuitive psychologist (Ross, 1977), unable to fully appreciate the contextual priorities of social psychology. I am in complete agreement with Weick (this volume): Social psychology truly has a comparative advantage, that, I would add, is in danger of being lost in the conventional wisdom on leadership.

Alternative approaches to leadership can differ meaningfully from each other in terms of who and what is studied (see Table 1). One can focus on either leaders or followers, and on person or situation factors. Conventional approaches tend to be located at the leader/person end of who/what. Anticonventional, social psychological approaches to leadership are rightfully located in

<table>
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<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>The Who and What of Leadership Studies</th>
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the follower/situation end of who/what. In this chapter I describe one such approach. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to engage in a brief tour of the leadership terrain over the last 2 decades—decades when leadership dropped from the intellectual domain and research agendas of most social psychologists.

A tour of the 1970s and 1980s

The 1970s and 1980s were turbulent decades for leadership studies. In the 1960s, contingency theories supplanted universalistic approaches. For example, the Managerial Grid program (Blake & Mouton, 1964), a practitioner-oriented, highly prescriptive elaboration of the earlier two-factor models that were empirically derived in the 1950s, waned as attention was drawn to the most popular contingency model of the day: Fiedler’s LPC, leader-match program (Fiedler, 1964, 1967). Although some interest in this model continued into the 1970s (e.g., Fiedler, Chemers, & Mahar, 1976), its appeal was lessened, due in part to an intense and drawn-out debate over the adequacy of LPC concepts and instrumentation (e.g., Evans & Dermer, 1977; Fiedler, 1977; Kabanoﬀ, 1981; Rice, 1978; Shiflett, 1973; Strube & Garcia, 1981; Vecchio, 1983). Other contingency models were proposed, such as Hersey and Blanchard’s (1969, 1977) life-cycle theory. Whereas Fiedler posited that the effectiveness of directive/task-oriented or non-directive/people-oriented styles depended on certain situational and relationship factors, Hersey and Blanchard viewed the “maturity” (later relabeled “readiness”) of followers—defined in terms of ability, motivation, and self-conﬁdence—as the chief contingency variable to which a leader’s style was to be matched, and overlaid it with a developmental philosophy. This model was widely marketed and used in many corporate training and development programs in the 1980s, despite a dearth of evidence regarding its scientiﬁc validity (e.g., Graef, 1983; Hambleton & Gumbert, 1982; Vecchio, 1987).

That kind of discontinuity between scientiﬁc and popular appeal was not uncommon, as a seemingly endless supply of leadership products was generated to service the needs of eager consumers. Indeed, during the 1980s the production and marketing of leadership development programs turned into a substantial industry in its own right. This was not surprising, given the sentiments expressed by many scholars and practitioners who considered leadership to be the most important topic in the kingdom of organizational behavior (Rahim, 1981). Specialized institutions, such as The Center for Creative Leadership, with its modest beginnings in the 1970s, boomed in the 1980s. It was during this decade that the “one minute manager” (e.g., Blanchard, 1989; Blanchard & Johnson, 1981; Blanchard & Lorber, 1984; Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 1985) became a wildly successful series of quick-ﬁx leadership tips that would capture corporate attention, rivaling the phenomenal success of Peters and Waterman’s (1982) “In Search of Excellence” programs.

As a part of the growth of the business press in general, celebrations of leadership blossomed: “Ten Toughest Boss” awards, “Most Admired CEO”
the follower/situation end of who/what. In this chapter I describe one such approach. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to engage in a brief tour of the leadership terrain over the last 2 decades—decades when leadership dropped from the intellectual domain and research agendas of most social psychologists.

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As a part of the growth of the business press in general, celebrations of leadership blossomed: "Ten Toughest Boss" awards, "Most Admired CEO"
contests, and the like were regularly featured in magazines such as Forbes, Fortune, and Business Week. A remarkable bouquet of popular writings on leadership adorned the shelves of local bookstores. These flowerings were many and varied: from descriptions and testimonies of the effectiveness and styles of CEOs (e.g., Horton, 1986; Potts & Behr, 1987; Shook, 1981; Steiner, 1983; Stiglitz, 1985) to the prescriptions of renowned writers and consultants (e.g., Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Bradford & Cohen, 1984; Peters & Austin, 1985) from the leadership secrets of Attila the Hun (Roberts, 1985) to the practices of ancient Chinese generals (Clery, 1988); from the leadership implications of Machiavelli (Buskirk, 1974) to the leadership philosophy reflected in Taoism (Heider, 1985; Wing, 1986). Biographies, autobiographies, and other beatific descriptions of the captains of business and industry were also part of the mix (e.g., Iacocca & Novak, 1984; Scully, 1987), being read by many an executive for their wisdom on matters of leadership as they hoped to move through corporate hierarchies.

By these standards, leadership was a huge success. But in many scholarly circles, the 1970s and early 1980s were plagued by serious reservations about the state of leadership research. A growing number of scholars were expressing disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the accumulation of knowledge in the area. Some even called for a moratorium on leadership research (e.g., Miner, 1975). Although research and theorizing did continue, on popular approaches such as path-goal theory (House, 1971; House & Mitchell, 1974; Indvik, 1986; Kelley, 1989) and the vertical dyad linkage (VDL) model (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976) doubters found support for their views in several papers that dealt severe blows to conventional leadership wisdom.

The first blow was delivered by Staw (1975). Many areas of organizational research rely on people’s reports of the objective behaviors of others and of organizational events, but leadership researchers had become particularly dependent on this methodology. Subordinates routinely reported on the occurrence and frequency of their supervisors’ leadership actions. Staw demonstrated that such ratings were highly susceptible to what has become known as the “performance-cue” effect (e.g., Binning & Lord, 1980; Binning, Zaba, & Whittam, 1986): Groups with knowledge of their performance levels reported “objective” leadership behaviors that were consistent with performance levels (i.e., good leadership behavior was reported when performance was good; poor performance led to less flattering ratings) independent of the actual behavior of the leader. Dozens of conventional studies were now suspect, and a flurry of research on “implicit leadership theories,” attributions, and performance cues ensued (e.g., DeNisi & Pritchard, 1978; Downey, Chacko, & McElroy, 1979; Eden & Levitan, 1975; Gioia & Sims, 1985; McElroy, 1982; McElroy & Downey, 1982; Staw & Ross, 1980).

Calder (1977) delivered a second blow, bringing leadership into the domain of naïve social psychology à la Heider (1958). Calder argued that the concept of leadership had more significance in the phenomenology of social actors and observers than it did as a scientific construct: Leadership was a part of social discourse, a way to talk about organizational events and processes. Leadership
thus became an attributional problem, which Calder outfitted with a modified version of the classic "acts-to-disposition" model by Jones and Davis (1965). At about the same time, Pfeffer (1977) agreed with Calder, but arguing from a more macro rationale. Whereas Calder focused on individual actors, Pfeffer's analysis was at the level of the firm. He discussed the results of several disturbing studies, including one by Lieberson and O'Connor (1972), which indicated that the effect size of leadership (as measured by the stewardships of different management teams) on organizational performance (as measured by several common accounting measures) was far smaller than most people had expected. The vast bulk of performance variation in a firm was linked to variations in industry and more general economic conditions. An argument was developed suggesting that leadership was a concept whose significance was largely symbolic (e.g., Pfeffer, 1981; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

A third blow came with Kerr and Jermier's concept of "leadership substitutes" (1978). They argued that many common prescriptions for effective leadership being offered by the conventional wisdom were misleading in that they lost sight of the idea that the principal function of leadership was the accomplishment of group purpose, and group purposes could be achieved through other means. Certain factors—organizational structures, task features, and subordinate's characteristics—allowed adequate task performance, and in their strong and full presence the exertion of leadership, along conventional lines, was redundant if not harmful and counterproductive.

These ideas were consolidated in one final blow in an article on the romance of leadership (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). We argued that conceptions of leadership were deeply rooted cultural expressions of a collective commitment toward understanding organizational performances in terms of the leaders. Studies showed that attributions to collective interests in leaders and leadership were especially pronounced when performances were extremely good and/or extremely bad. In this view, leadership was seen as a simplified, biased, and attractive way to understand organizational performance (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987).

The cumulative effect of these blows, serious as they were, appeared to have had little impact on conventional leadership studies. Many U.S. businesses and industries were simultaneously realizing that they were losing out to the Japanese, both in foreign and domestic markets. Leadership was first blamed for the erosion of U.S. competitive dominance and then credited with the hope of bringing about a more promising future. And it was in this era that leadership studies took an abrupt shift in emphasis.

About this time, Zaleznik (1977) wrote a controversial article in the Harvard Business Review in which he drew a distinction between real "leadership" and mere "management." The gist of this distinction was that managers and leaders operated on the basis of very different psychologies; that it was not surprising that most managers were not interested nor able to lead effectively. This caused quite an uproar, since one implication was that one could not be a good manager and a good leader at the same time. People actually fought, in print, over who
was or was not a real leader. Despite the initial flap, this distinction eventually became commonplace and foreshadowed the widespread use of similar distinctions.

During these years, there were many bemoanings of a "leadership gap" and a "leadership crisis," referring to an absence of adequate leadership skills and opportunities in both the public and private sectors (e.g., Bennis, 1977; Zaleznik, 1983). This gap, however, was soon to be measured against a new kind of leader/savior whose characteristics were connected to one of the oldest traditions in leadership studies: charisma.

This "special gift," divine grace view of leadership was prominent in Weber's (1921, 1947) analysis of organizational authority and was resurrected for mainstream leadership researchers by Burns (1978) and House (1977). Burns distinguished between transactional and transformational leadership, with the latter referring basically to charismatic leadership. House summarized the sporadic history of work on charismatic leadership and proposed a definition of charismatic leadership in terms of its effects on followers. Bass (1985a) refined and popularized Burris's (1978) distinction. Bass and his colleagues (e.g., Hater and Bass, 1988) operationalized the differences between transactional (TA) and transformational (TF) concepts in the form of a paper-and-pencil questionnaire that subordinates typically complete about their leader. They showed that subordinates who scored their leaders high, especially on the TF scales, are also the ones most likely to display charismatic effects, such as the exertion of extra effort and performance "beyond expectations."

By the late 1980s, issues of transformational leadership and charisma became the dominant objects of intellectual energy in leadership studies. Some writers focused on the connection between charisma and culture, and several case studies of prominent charismatic leaders were published (e.g., Trice & Beyer, 1986). Whereas charisma had in the past been thought to be a relatively rare occurrence in most organizational settings (Katz & Kahn, 1966) it was now considered potentially commonplace (e.g., Tichy & DeVanna, 1986). Various models and perspectives on charismatic and TF leadership were proliferated, many of them collected in a volume by Conger and Kanungo (1988).

A prominent theme running through much of the writing was an emphasis on the extraordinary endowments and/or behavioral displays of the charismatic leader (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). For example, in the study by House et al. (1991), variations in the charismatic appeal of U.S. presidents was shown to be the direct result of their personalities, represented by the strength of various motives, such as the need for power and achievement. Howell and Frost (1988), in the only lab study on charisma up until that time, focused on the expressive actions of the leader in producing the kinds of charismatic effects that House and others had identified. Their results suggested that it might be possible to train leaders to display certain behavioral mannerisms that will then be registered in subordinates as charismatically appealing. Elaborating on that suggestion, a book by Conger (1989) focused on the special behavioral repertoires of charismatic leaders, highlighting
the inspirational use of language and communication. New leadership training and development programs incorporating TF leadership were devised, such as the "Leadership Practices Inventory" (LPI) model (Kouzes & Posner, 1988). By the early 1990s, TF leadership had center stage. In fact, enough new work had been done to justify an updated version of House's 1976 theory of charismatic leadership (House et al., 1991).

Meanwhile, with all the noise about TF leadership, studies in the TA domain quietly continued. For example, earlier vertical dyad linkage (VDL) models of the 1970s were elaborated into more general and comprehensive leader-member exchange (LMX) models (e.g., Deinesch & Liden, 1986; Liden & Graen, 1980; Scandurra & Graen, 1984), and there was continued interest in contingent-reinforcement views of leadership (e.g., Klimoski & Hayes, 1980; Komaki, 1986; Podsakoff & Schreisheim, 1985). Paralleling the studies of charisma, the domain of TA leadership studies was characterized by a renewed interest in the special endowments of leaders. Fiedler's new cognitive resource theory (Fiedler, 1986; Fiedler & Garcia, 1987) and other work on the intellectual and creative abilities of leaders (e.g., Simonton, 1986, 1987, 1988) represent that trend. The long discredited "trait-based" approach to leadership began to make a comeback. Some reports suggested that earlier reviews were probably too pessimistic (Lord, DeVader, & Alliger, 1986).

So too, the "effect-size" of leadership debate that had been sparked by Pfeffer (1977), fueled by the external control models of organizations (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), and fanned by the attribution-oriented critiques (Calder, 1977; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985) dissipated. Several studies that had demonstrated no or small effect sizes were also criticized as overly pessimistic and as underestimating the real effect size, which was reestimated upward back into the comfort zones of most leadership researchers (Day & Lord, 1988; Smith, Carson, & Alexander, 1984; Weiner & Mahoney, 1981).

Optimism now reigns in the field, as major reviews by House (1988), Bass (1990), Hollander and Offerman (1990), and Yukl (1989) are all upbeat. By now, however, it is evident that the conventional wisdom in the area is being forged without the forceful participation of social psychologists. The earlier critiques, mainly social psychological, were swept away by the burgeoning interest in transformational, charismatic leadership.

Social psychology did have some impact in both the TA and TF domains during these years. This was apparent in the TA domain by attributional analyses of leadership (e.g., Martinik & Gardner, 1987; McElroy, 1982; McElroy & Schrader, 1986). In one popular approach (Mitchell, Green, & Wood, 1981; Mitchell & Wood, 1980), the mutual influence of a superior and subordinate's behavior on one another is considered, and the causal attributions by each are inserted into the loop as mediational variables—a straightforward application of Kelley's cube (Kelley, 1967).

Transformational researchers also injected attributional notions into their models of charisma. For example, Boal and Bryson (1988) put forth a model whereby the phenomenology of the follower intervenes between displays of
charismatic behaviors by the leader and the subsequent displays of charismatic effects by the follower. Attributions of "charisma" are a part of that phenomenology.

Leadership studies became increasingly interested in the inferential processes associated with leadership phenomena (e.g., Ashour, 1982), and social psychology found some applications therein. This research was strongly influenced by the cognitive processing models that had become so important to mainstream social psychology (e.g., Foti, Fraser, & Lord, 1982; Lord, 1985; Lord & Alliger, 1985; Phillips & Lord, 1981). While influential in some respects, the impact of social psychology was circumscribed. Nowadays, social psychological perspectives on leadership are no longer broadly pervasive. The small group studies of leadership that social psychology had initiated decades earlier have all but vanished from the scene. The few that continue to be produced find audiences in secondary or highly specialized journals, where they are routinely ignored by both mainstream social psychologists and the producers of conventional leadership wisdom. Young scholars interested in organizational behavior who graduate from business and management programs have learned to see leadership through mostly nonsocial psychological lenses, manufactured by a recent intellectual heritage that has been impoverished by its disappearance.

The relevance of the romance of leadership

Since publishing our first piece on the romance of leadership, I have acquired the reputation of being somewhat of a naysayer regarding leadership; that I consider leadership to be unimportant (e.g., Yukl, 1989). In truth, though, I have never believed this, and the romance of leadership studies need not be taken to mean that leadership is trivial. The last edition of Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership (Bass, 1990) contained over 8,000 references. How can the sheer volume of such work be ignored? On the "central importance of leadership," as Hollander (1986) put it, I can agree with the established order. Where we part is on the objects of study and what objects are more significant than others. The romance of leadership calls into question the conventional approaches to the study of leadership. It suggests that current conceptualizations and modes of thought are probably providing a too narrow account of leadership's real significance. The romance of leadership studies established the prominence of leadership concepts in the way social actors address organizational problems. That is the significance of leadership, and that is one starting point for introducing a more radical, social psychological approach. A key to understanding and conceptualizing leadership must be built on the foundations of a naive psychological perspective. How leadership is constructed by both naive organizational actors and by sophisticated researchers should constitute the study of leadership. For it is those very constructions on which the effects of leadership, defined in conventional terms, are likely to depend. The romance of leadership defines leadership as an experience undergone by followers. In this view, the received wisdom is analyzed, in a sense, more for its expressive and symbolic content and less for its
substantive truth about leadership. The initial work on the romance of leadership was a consciousness-raising endeavor. Some interpreted it as research on leadership research, not on leadership per se. I say it is the same thing.

All of the foregoing has been by way of introduction. The rest of this chapter outlines some ideas, speculations, and bits of research that may be useful to the development of an alternative approach to leadership. In keeping with a radical social psychological perspective, I try to answer the following kinds of questions: What if a view of leadership was not so directly dependent on the personas and behaviors of the leader? Could a more follower-centered approach be constructed? What sort of research agenda would it imply? What would such an approach teach us about leadership?

PART II

The importance of emergent leadership

Consistent with their situational/contextual bent, social psychologists have long understood that whether the position of leadership is bestowed on an incumbent by virtue of appointment or by election—top down versus bottom up—can create very different environments for leader–follower relations (e.g., Hollander, 1964; Hollander, Fallon, & Edwards, 1977; Hollander & Julian, 1970). In most organizational contexts the designations of supervisory and subordinate role are formally defined, and thus, appointment is a constant denominator. But appointment is simply a context from which leadership may or may not emerge. Leadership is not a given by virtue of the occupancy of hierarchical roles. It is a mistake to confuse the formal role designations with the emergence of leadership and the influence that might be attributed to one or the other aspect of the relationship that might develop between social actors. Leaders and followers are creations that, for the most part, describe the informal aspects of their relationship; subordination describes their formal aspects. Leadership is an overlay that followers place onto an otherwise formally defined hierarchical relationship with the supervisor. The emergence of leadership, then, implies more than subordination: It represents an enrichment in the conceptualization of the relationship. This can be understood in conventional terms by the kind or depth of social influence (e.g., Kelman, 1958) that occurs when followership develops beyond simple subordination (see Table 2).

| Table 2  Leadership as Influence |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| **CONCEPTUAL RELATIONSHIP** | **SOCIAL INFLUENCE** |
| Insubordination            | Noncompliance            |
| Subordination              | Compliance               |
| Leadership (transactional) | Internalization          |
| Leadership (transformational) | Identification          |
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This is why social psychological analyses of emergent leadership, and the
types of leaderless group discussions, are vital to the study of leadership. To-
day, studies of this type are relatively rare in comparison to more mainstream
topics in leadership, in part because of the mistaken view that they are not ap-
propriate to understanding leadership in organizational contexts, where so-
called leaders are appointed via their positions of legitimate authority within
the hierarchical structure. The implication is that leadership does not have to
emerge because it is already there. Of course, nothing could be further from the
truth.

Leadership as ideology: an inside-out view

The current convention in leadership studies paints a portrait of leadership in
terms of a process that the leader ultimately controls. Although mutual influence
processes between leaders and followers are recognized (e.g., Crouch, 1987;
Hollander, 1978; Zahn & Wolfe, 1981), leadership is mostly conceptualized as
something seized on, and exerted, by the leader. It is something to be performed
by the leader; it is dispensed to, and used on, followers to influence and control
them. Such views naturally feed a leader-centered research agenda: what behav-
iors by the leader constitute good or bad leadership, and what personality traits
and other endowments are conducive to the skillful exertion and effective appli-
cation of leadership behaviors. The emergence of leadership, according to this
view, is heavily dependent on who the leader is and what the leader does. Fol-
lowers and subordinates are the ultimate targets of conventional leadership stud-
ies, but leaders are most definitely the objects of their study.

As an alternative to this convention, it is possible to define followers as the
objects and leaders as the targets. In this view, the emergence of leadership de-
pends heavily on the followers. Leadership then represents the emergence
among followers of a state of mind, an experience they undergo. Leadership
emerges in the minds of followers. Without the experience, without being in a
state of leadership, followership does not exist, and hence leadership cannot be
said to have emerged. Leaders are important only insofar as they may eventu-
ally become the targets of the followers’ thought systems. This is an “inside-out”
definition of leadership relative to conventional approaches. Thus, when I refer
to the emergence of leadership, I am highlighting the development in group
members of a particular way of thinking about their relationships to one another
and to their tasks. In short, leadership is the emergence of an ideology. Its birth
is not signaled by the exertions of the leader, but by the exertions of followership
that accompany this ideology. The popular distinctions between TA and TF
leadership domains have their meaning as two alternative forms of the emer-
gence of leadership in the thought systems of group members. The task of lead-
ership studies, then, becomes one of understanding the causes and implications
of this ideology for organizational actors, systems, and structures.

Whereas early emergent leadership studies (e.g., Bass, 1954; Bass, Mc-
Gehee, Hawkins, Young, & Gebel, 1953; Bavelas, Hastorf, Gross, & Kite, 1965;
Morris & Hackman, 1969; Strodtbeck & Mann, 1956) and more recent ones (e.g., Sorrentino, 1973; Sorrentino & Field, 1986; Stein, 1975, 1977; Zaccarro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991) have been concerned with understanding who emerges as leaders, dedicated to an understanding of how certain activities by individuals allowed them to emerge as leaders, the agenda should be revised. Instead, the ascension of a particular person as a leader can now be seen as a derivative consequence of the emergence of leadership. What is important is understanding if and when leadership emerges in the way group members think about themselves and each other. This focuses the issue at the very beginning of the process and provides a new focal point for emergent leadership research.

Process versus outcome measures of leadership

Conventional leadership approaches place considerable weight on the behavioral displays of the leader. Some evidence does suggest that social actors have formed implicit theories and cognitive prototypes of what is effective and ineffective leadership, defined in behavioral terms. When behavioral displays approximate, or perhaps activate, the prototypes held by observers, a definition of leader/leadership is more or less likely.

The relative strength of prototype matching and/or activation processes for the emergence of leadership must compete with contextual features that are likely to have their own effect. Here a distinction can be drawn between process and outcome measures of leadership effectiveness, defined in conventional terms. The behavioral displays of the leader are essentially “process” measures of effective leadership: They are not outcomes of value in and of themselves, but valuable in terms of their intended or likely impact on group productivity and the satisfactions of members. As process measures, leadership behaviors are less relevant for the emergence of leadership than outcome measures. A good example of an outcome measure is group performance. As I have already discussed, performance cues have been known to alter group members’ reports of leadership factors. I view this as symptomatic of the emergence of leadership as a way of thinking on the part of group members. I would also submit that the behavioral displays of fellow group members, from the point of view of any focal member, can also be considered as significant “outcome” measures of leadership. Although the expressive reactions of other followers have not received much research attention in leadership studies, they are an important aspect of the social psychological context in which group members operate. One might speculate that just as leadership prototypes exist in the minds of group members (L-types), so too do prototypical images about the behavioral implications of followership (F-types). When the two images clash, I believe F-types will often win out, since L-types are process measures and naturally more subordinate to outcome measures. Thus, the L-prototype notions of conventional approaches suggest that when group members encounter its features, leadership will automatically emerge. Such an approach obviously overlooks the strength of social
information in providing members with a sense of the meaning to be attached to their relations with the leader. Leader–follower relations are the property and domain of the group, and, as such, fellow group members carry much weight in how they are defined. These ideas are what underlie the social contagion view of charismatic leadership (Meindl, 1990).

Contagion and charismatic leadership

Charismatic leadership can be understood as a social contagion process (i.e., a phenomenon of the spontaneous spread of affective and/or behavioral reactions among the members of a group or social collective). Social contagion highlights the interpersonal processes and group dynamics that can plausibly account for the widespread dissemination of charismatic effects among followers and subordinates. Social contagion is characterized by a shared sense of arousal (e.g., stress, tension); some behavioral expressions of arousal; a definition of these expressions (symptoms) as being from some external source; and the acceptance of this definition and the dissemination of the symptoms in the group (Wheeler, 1966).

**Leadership is like catching a cold.** Unlike approaches that emphasize the expressive behaviors of the leader, this analysis focuses on the expressive actions of followers. The core idea is that charismatic experiences are not newly and independently created in each follower as a function of dyadic interactions with the leader. Rather, any experience may be strongly dependent on the experiences of other individuals in the group. Charismatic leadership is possible because charismatic effects are re-created and transmitted among followers within the group.

This approach calls for examinations of the patterns and routes that charismatic attributions and charismatic effects follow within social networks. In short, charisma, as an emergent leadership phenomenon is treated as an epidemiological problem. One testable hypothesis is that the charismatic appeal of leaders and attributions of charismatic qualities are distributed along sociometric channels, being predicted by social network positions and parameters. This sort of hypothesis could be tested by examining the association, if any, between the charismatic appeal to followers of their leaders and their standing in the social network. Existing instrumentation (e.g., Bass, 1985a) could be adapted to assess charismatic appeal. Similarly, adaptations of social-network analysis (e.g., Bradley, 1987) and block modeling could examine the distribution and strength of the charismatic appeal of an organization’s leaders and its correspondence with the sociometric locations of followers/subordinates, controlling for the frequency of direct interaction/contact with the target leaders. This kind of study would turn on the assumption that such distributions can be taken as the residue of a contagion process. It represents the logical precursor to a longitudinal study that would monitor charismatic appeal as it unfolds.
LEADERSHIP IS IN THE LAUGH TRACK. Experiments could also examine the micro processes that would support a contagion model of emergent charismatic leadership. The main task would be to demonstrate that the charismatic appeal of a leader to followers is socially anchored by the expressive actions of other peers and co-workers who function as models. Charismatic reactions are contaminated from such models. This idea is like the "laugh track" typical of U.S. television comedies, where something is apparently funny when we hear the "audience" laughing. One could examine if the charismatic appeal of a leader is more or less susceptible to social influence than other, more transactionally oriented aspects of leadership. This could be tested in a design where subjects are exposed to leadership stimuli and to an independent manipulation of expressiveness by other group members or observers.

Another approach might be to conduct a variation of the classical misattribution studies. The affect or arousal levels experienced by subjects at the time they are exposed to a leader may encourage the emergence of charismatic leadership as a way of thinking. For example, the general excitement and energy associated with large gatherings of people that involve a visibly salient leader (e.g., a political convention) may produce enough free-floating, unlabeled arousal to allow for misattributions of the type that would support charismatic contagion. Arousal might increase the likelihood that leaders will be evaluated in terms of their charismatic appeal, and would combine with the expressiveness levels among other group members or social models to produce charismatic appeal.

Crisis as context for the emergence of charismatic leadership

Most conventional approaches to charismatic leadership emphasize the personal endowments and activities of the leader to induce followership. A more social psychological approach would seek to understand the emergence of charismatic leadership as a result of the group members' context.

A part of the problem is that conceptions of personality are more highly developed than conceptions of the situational/contextual factors that might plausibly effect the emergence of leadership, a point that I discuss later. One of the few contexts that has been recognized as important is the existence of a crisis. Weber and others have talked about it, but almost no systematic data regarding the effects of crises on charismatic leadership exists. Furthermore, there is little to guide a researcher on what exactly is a crisis, or on what kind of crisis is likely to affect the emergence of leadership.

Many writings on the effects of crisis suggest a process whereby latent charismatic attributes and characteristics become manifested during the crisis, enabling the person to exercise control. Indeed, one reason that organizational researchers have turned to charismatic leadership is because of the promise that such leaders hold for the accomplishment of major organizational turnarounds. In the conventional approach, leaders are saviors who, as a result of their special endowments, rescue their organizations from disaster.
One of the most widely touted organizational examples of charismatic leadership is Lee Iacocca, whose dramatic and successful interventions to save Chrysler Inc. from bankruptcy were widely attributed to his strategic vision and charismatic (transformational) leadership. Such leadership, according to conventional wisdom, is the process of achieving major changes in the organization by affecting the attitudes and assumptions of the followers through the vision, inspiration, and charismatic displays of the transforming leader. Accordingly, extraordinary effects are thought to be achieved by the exertion of exceptional leadership.

In the anticonventional view, crisis affects followership, not as a result of the exertions of a leader but more directly through the emergence of leadership as a state of mind, which independently heightens the charismatic appeal of a leader and increases the probabilities of charismatic experiences developing within the group. In either case, though, the suggestion is that crises, and the emotional experiences associated with them, are potentially important precursors to the onset of charismatic leadership. Two recent studies (Pillai & Meindl, 1991a, 1991b) explored crisis as an aspect of the contextual features from which thoughts about charismatic leadership might arise in observers and group members. These studies appear to be the first to specifically test the idea that crisis events cause charisma to emerge.

Study 1

Research on TA leadership has consistently demonstrated that ratings of leadership behaviors are susceptible to the effects of performance cues. Pillai and Meindl (1991b) extended the performance-cue effect to the domain of charismatic leadership, considering the sorts of radical performance changes that are observed in the fortunes of some organizations. They introduced evidence of a "crisis" in addition to simple performance cues to examine the hypothesis that a crisis followed by good performance (i.e., turnaround) would heighten ratings of charismatic leadership more than just good performance alone.

In this study, subjects read different versions of a case about a fast food company, describing the industry, performance of the company over the last 10 years, and a profile of the CEO. Descriptions varied only in terms of information on company performance patterns, which were manipulated by crossing two factors: positive or negative growth and the presence or absence of a crisis. As a comparative baseline, a fifth scenario included no performance. In all versions, a constant profile of the CEO was included.

The results (see Figure 1) provided evidence that inferences regarding the charismatic appeal of a leader are influenced by performance and crisis cues. In the case of a performance turnaround (a crisis followed by recovery), perceptions of charismatic leadership appear to peak, whereas in the case of crisis followed by continued decline, perceptions of charismatic leadership seem to reach a nadir. The linear trend of this predicted ordering was statistically significant. This pattern suggests that a crisis combined with good performance (a turn-
around) can add to a leader's stature; whereas a crisis combined with poor performance (no turnaround) may diminish it.

Study 2

Study 1 included rather distant observers who formed inferences about leadership after seeing summarized information about a CEO and his firm. Study 2 included more involved subjects whose ratings were made within the context of ongoing tasks and performances. We were interested in generating something akin to a crisis, specifically the mental state associated with a crisis, to demonstrate its effects on emergence of charismatic leadership.

We employed a classical emergent leadership paradigm. Student participants were assigned to groups and given an opportunity to interact with each other, without the appointment of formal leadership roles. Immediately prior to working together on a scheduled group activity, group members received bogus feedback about the results of a test they had taken a few days before. Crisis groups received low scores; no-crisis groups received high scores. Subsequently, group members made leadership nominations and ratings on a shortened version of Bass's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), focusing on charismatic (TF) and more mundane (TA) forms of leadership. Individuals also rated the overall effectiveness of the leader they had chosen.
The group activity involved a business case analysis. The group members played the roles of Board members whose twin tasks were (1) to first select a Chairman of the Board after 20 minutes of discussion since the current chairman had resigned at the last meeting, and (2) to arrive at a consensus decision under the guidance of the new chairman following a further 30 minutes of discussion. They were led to believe that group performance would be evaluated on the extent of agreement between the group’s decision and the actual decision and the quality of interaction among the members. The test score and the group activity counted for more than a third of their grade for the course.

The data indicated that crisis had a strong direct influence on the ratings of charisma, which in turn influenced global evaluations of leader effectiveness (see Figure 2). Furthermore, ratings of TA leadership were also affected by the crisis, but such ratings were not important influences on ratings of leadership effectiveness.

These results again suggest that conditions of crisis facilitate the emergence of charismatic leadership. Moreover, crisis appears to induce the use of charismatic appeal as a way to evaluate the effectiveness of leaders. One question that has not been answered is whether group members select someone who possesses inherently charismatic qualities or, alternatively, simply perceive any emergent leader as more charismatic. The present research is a beginning. But it also raises a number of additional issues as to the precise nature of the crisis and how crisis leads to the emergence of leadership in the minds of followers. Such questions and answers are not likely to emerge from conventional leadership studies. Some speculations along these lines follow.

**FIGURE 2** Path Analysis of Crisis, Leadership, and Effectiveness

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Charismatic Leadership

Crisis --> Emergence of Charismatic Leadership --> Leader Effectiveness

Transactional Leadership

Crisis --> Emergence of Transactional Leadership --> Leader Effectiveness

*Significant path*
*Non-significant path*
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From Pillai & Meindl, 1991a
Leadership as aspirin: a palliative view of leadership

The role of stress in the workplace has received considerable research attention because of its implications for employee performance and productivity. Work-related stress as it is commonly understood involves the arousal of disturbing emotional states in response to an external stimulus that places special physical psychological demands on the individual. These stimuli interact with an individual's personality to determine behavioral responses. Coping mechanisms, both individual and organizational, play an important role in controlling the strength of the response and its negative effects on the mental and physical health of the employee. The principal effect of a crisis on group members may be the stresses it creates for them. The conventional wisdom suggests that certain kinds of leadership may facilitate stress reduction by functioning as a powerful coping mechanism. Previous research has demonstrated that groups with leaders are better equipped to cope with stress than groups without leaders (Bass, 1990). Indeed, in certain contexts, behaviors by the supervisor may themselves be the cause of the stress and the crisis.

Although not explicitly discussed as such, at least two different views address the effects of leadership on the health and well-being of groups and individuals. In one, leadership creates the conditions that promote productivity, health, and well-being. An alternative view suggests that leaders buffer subordinates, protecting them from the effects of otherwise harmful organizational arrangements and difficult task environments. The former views leadership as a force that corrects environmental impediments to productive and satisfying work behavior; the latter views leadership as a way to alleviate the negative consequences of potentially destructive environments, providing symptomatic relief.

Both views imply that the exertions of leadership by the leader help subordinates cope. In the anticonventional approach, such exertions are of only indirect interest. When leadership is defined as a state of mind—as a thought system or ideology—it is possible to then search for the functions such ideologies serve; that is, how they are useful to actors, in the same way that social psychologists used to talk about the "functions" of attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Katz, 1960).

A palliative view is completely consistent with our present approach: The emergence of charismatic leadership may be a functional reaction; a sort of mental inoculation or at least a way of obtaining systematic relief from the otherwise unpleasant experiences associated with stressful events and circumstances. One can speak of leadership "agents" in a way that is analogous to the chemical agents found in medicinal drugs. These agents are not actors but are the beliefs and concepts that comprise the ideology of leadership. They ameliorate stress responses to the trials and tribulations of routine as well as crisis conditions. The task of the researcher becomes one of trying to understand the relative effectiveness of various leadership agents as they are represented in the emergent ideo-
logical system, and how such agents operate and interact with other factors, to relieve group members from the stresses and strains in their environments.

Given that TF leadership agents appear in contexts of crises or external threats, it seems plausible that they may be potent palliatives for reducing the experience of stress and strain. The emergence of leadership, insofar as it implies the development of various TA and TF agents, may be quite functional to followers, protecting them from the harmful effects of stressors, particularly during times of crisis. This protection would not be available to subordinates who, for some reason, have not developed such agents as a part of their thought systems.

**Images of leadership**

As Ross (1977) discovered, most of us are, at some level, closet personologists: We are inclined to think in terms of personality traits and characteristics, especially when it comes to processing information regarding symbolically meaningful figures such as those who occupy positions of power. The perspective in this chapter attempts to highlight the prospects for an alternative to the personological approach to the analysis of leadership in general, and charisma in particular. One can learn quite a bit about the occurrence of charismatic leadership in a system without much knowledge of the personality endowments of the leader. It is possible to examine charisma from the experience of followers and the social processes that occur among them.

If personality has a significant role in the phenomenon of charismatic leadership, then it is probably reflected in the personal attributes and characteristics of followers. They create the possibility for the emergence of leaders and ultimately surrender themselves to their creations (Katz & Kahn, 1978). If there is a psychology that is of singular importance to charismatic leadership, it is not to be found in the minds of leaders but in the minds of the followers. The charismatic relationship that develops between a leader and follower is symptomatic of larger social forces and system needs, which become integrated in the psychology and personalities of followers, transmitted, and amplified by the social interactions that take place among them. The personas of our leaders, and their relevance to the emergence of charismatic leadership, are simply one derivative component in a complex, integrated circuit-like system of social and psychological forces that create and sustain followership.

Although I have, to this point in the chapter, focused on the emergence of leadership within the context of groups, nowhere is the relevance of an alternative to the personological approach more apt than when it comes to understanding high-level targets in the public and private sectors, such as corporate CEOs and political party leaders. The endowments of a leader, as reflected in the force of personality on followership, are growing increasingly irrelevant. In many sectors, social/organizational life is changing in a way that undermines and erodes the conditions that enable the force of a leader’s personality to have any bearing on how we respond as followers and subjects. I suspect that ‘personality sig-
nals,” if they were strong in the past, are getting weaker. Sustained, repeated face-to-face interactions highlighted by the spontaneous behavioral expressions of a leader’s own personality are being replaced with cursory, fragmented, mediated, and highly encumbered interactions. This is especially true in large organizations and in high offices where the behavior of the leader is often designed and constructed with a variety of constituents, interests, and purposes in mind. It is not just that such interactions are becoming more strategic; it is that the expressions and appearances of a leader are less under the control of the independent proclivities of a leader’s own personality and increasingly under the influence and control of a differentiated social subsystem dedicated to certain production ends, irrespective of, in spite of, or even because of, the personal attributes of the leader. Their interest is more in a final product (some constructed image) than in the raw material (underlying personality). Thus, what remains increasingly in our exposure to and interactions with our leaders is less a connection with their personalities and, instead, more contact with the “strategic personality,” if you will, of the social subsystem in which both leaders and followers are imbedded. I do not want to imply that such images are discounted and hence less effective in generating a sense of followership. On the contrary, such images can be carefully crafted so as to be extremely appealing (e.g., Keenan & Hadley, 1986).

Think of P as the personality of the leader. Think of B as the behavioral expressions of personality. Think of I as the image of leaders that is conveyed to followers, created by P through B, and that might foster charismatic followership. Perhaps under some circumstances the flow looks like this:

\[ P \rightarrow B \rightarrow I \rightarrow \text{charismatic effects} \]

Here the image projected to followers is a direct result of the expressive behaviors of the leader, reflecting his or her personality and psychology. One could argue, however, for an alternative concept, \( P' \) (P prime), and a flow that looks like this:

\[ I \rightarrow B \rightarrow P' \rightarrow \text{charismatic effects} \]

\( P' \) results from the social subsystem—the media, the image consultant, the political advisor, the strategist, the PR Department—who care about what \( I \) is presented and what behaviors must be performed to create that image. These behaviors are expressive of \( P' \), not of \( P \). My contentions are as follows: (1) that often \( P \) and \( P' \) are not as congruent as they once were; and (2) that over time \( P' \), given highly mediated, encumbered interactions, is more powerfully transmitted and ascending in importance relative to \( P \) (see Figure 3).

It is not just the media, it is other forces as well. Systems have an interest in having leaders with visibly apparent endowments and attributes. They have an interest in circumventing, augmenting, producing, and symbolizing the qualities of a leader, whether or not such attributes truly express the leader’s actual personality. At work is a process similar to that which gives rise to the exaggera-
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tion of physical (i.e., sexual) attributes of male and female rock idols. Indeed, many leaders respond and seek to fulfill the preferred images of their constituent followers. A part of the dynamics may be similar to that of the self-monitoring concept (Snyder, 1974, 1979), a concept that is now beginning to be examined within the domain of emergent leadership (Ellis, 1988; Ellis, Adamson, Deszca, & Cawsey, 1988; Garland & Beard, 1979; Zaccaro et al., 1991). The larger point here is that we ought to be examining the attributes and processes associated with $P'$, instead of looking at $P$. We should be examining the conditions that encumber transmissions and convert $P$ to $P'$. Studies along these lines are extremely rare (see, for example, Chen & Meindl, 1991) and will not easily grow out of more conventional approaches.

CONCLUSION

This chapter represents a call for more social psychological perspectives on leadership. The comparative advantage of social psychology, with respect to leadership studies, lies in its potential to generate theory and research that is juxtaposed against prevailing conceptions. Conventional approaches tend to study leadership in terms of leaders and their personal characteristics. A radical social psychological approach to leadership would emphasize followers as they are affected by their social contexts. I have presented some ideas along these lines, which stem from a consideration of the romance of leadership notion. In the particular anticonventional approach outlined, the focus has been on leadership as conceptualized by group members. In this approach, the social context and network of relations within the group will be important to understand, and these ought to be more fully explored. Such interfollower processes and dynamics are not easily appreciated within the confines of conventional conceptualizations of leadership.

Other social psychological perspectives on leadership can also be fashioned. Radical, anticonventional approaches might be inspired by the emphasis on followership in several older definitions of leadership (e.g., Bernard, 1927;
Bogardus, 1929; Dupuy & Dupuy, 1959; Jennings, 1944; Knickerbocker, 1948; Newcomb, Turner, & Converse, 1965; Redl, 1942) and in several analyses that deal with followers and their "propensity" to become involved in charismatic relationships (e.g., Madsen & Snow, 1983; Shils, 1965). In fact, some aspects of followership are implicit in a number of mainstream writings as well (e.g., Crockett, 1981; Gardner, 1987; Heller & Van Til, 1982; Kelly, 1988; Nolan & Harty, 1984; Zierdan, 1980); but the trick is to use them as a way to pursue a path of exploration that is unimpeded by conventional biases and assumptions. A few signs of this are now beginning to appear (e.g., Hollander, in press).

Some advances can be made by simply drawing on the wealth of theory and research in basic social psychology and applying it to issues of leadership. There are some signs of this occurring. And for those with little formal training in social psychology, that may be a reasonable way to make a contribution. Whatever the particular avenue explored, however, I suspect that the greatest contributions are likely to come from those who will treat leadership as a basic social psychological phenomenon and not an applied derivative of other, more legitimate or mainstream social psychological topics. Either of these options is preferable to the status quo. There are enough researchers, working within conventional mindsets, conducting leadership studies. What we now need are researchers, with or without formal training in social psychology, who are willing to break with convention. Of course, this presupposes that one is willing to endure whatever risks are associated with doing so. But, as some of my more investment-minded, MBA students are quick to point out, risk and return are often correlated.

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