

JOHN P. DUGAN

LEADERSHIP THEORY

CULTIVATING CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

SECOND EDITION



JOSSEY-BASS™
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Leadership Theory

Second Edition

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Cultivating Critical Perspectives

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John P. Dugan

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To Kathleen Elizabeth Dugan & Timothy James Dugan

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Preface

Leadership. Few words simultaneously elicit such a wide range of conflicting understandings and feelings. It is a concept that both provokes and appeases. It is both desired and detested. Indeed, the concept of leadership is almost impossible to escape in our contemporary context. Across nearly every form of media the terms *leader* and *leadership* are bandied about, sometimes as a clarion call for what is most absent and needed in society and other times as a harbinger of the most compelling of social ills.

Despite being almost omnipresent in contemporary discourse, an insignificant amount of time is directed toward unpacking what is really meant by the terms *leader* and *leadership*. We default to the assumption of a shared understanding despite clear evidence that we may be operating from different conceptualizations altogether. In our relationships, our communities, our places of worship, our work environments—in nearly every aspect of our lives—the theme of leadership is at play. And yet . . . to what extent do we invest in examining our assumptions, comparing our perspectives, and converging around a shared meaning?

The purpose of this book is to foster dialogue about how we understand, experience, and enact leader roles and leadership processes through the exploration of leadership theory. A remarkable gap exists between the knowledge generated from the formal, academic study of leadership and its translation into everyday practice. This is at least in part attributable to the ways in which the formal, academic literature on leadership reflects a “story most often told” or dominant narrative that is frequently disconnected from and/or incongruent with people’s lived experiences. Thus, the focus of this book is not just on exploring the architecture that informs our understandings of leadership but also on cultivating the perspectives necessary to engage with theory as a critical learner.

WHAT THIS BOOK OFFERS

The marketplace for leadership education, training, and development is growing at an exponential rate. This is evidenced in the increasing number of academic programs, community seminars, and corporate training opportunities, many of which draw on a flourishing body of scholarship on leadership theory. Leadership theory represents a particularly important area for intervention given the foundations it provides for both research and practice.

There is no shortage of books distilling the content of leadership theory. This book, however, is unique in a number of compelling ways. It offers an alternative approach to learning leadership theory that is *developmental in nature* and grounded in *critical perspectives*.

That the book is developmental means its goal is not to expose readers to the most expansive breadth of theories possible or encourage rote memorization and regurgitation. Acquisition of knowledge on a broad range of theories is important, but the process of learning *how* to learn about leadership theory offers greater additive value. Therefore, the organization and content of the book focuses on building readers' capacities to meaningfully interpret, evaluate, and apply theory—a process that can then be replicated as new theories emerge as well as applied across bodies of knowledge beyond leadership.

Part of the developmental approach taken in this book involves the infusion of perspectives derived from critical social theory. Critical social theories are concerned with understanding the flow of power in society, how this contributes to social stratification, and ways in which we can create more democratic and equitable social arrangements. The use of critical perspectives is a direct response to scholarly calls for greater attention to issues of justice in leadership theory.

The developmental approach and integration of critical perspectives work in tandem to position readers as critical learners of leadership theory. Readers are situated as valid knowers in their own right and, through the deconstruction and reconstruction of theory, begin to craft their own theories of leadership. The goal is to build agency to transform and apply theory in ways that advance leadership that can make a meaningful difference in the world.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

Sometimes it is easiest to understand the purpose and goals of a project through the articulation of what it is *not*. No book can serve the needs of all readers or cover all possible content. In fact, there lies a danger in trying to be everything to everyone. Too often this

results in a watering down and oversimplification of content. As such, this book is guided by a number of delimitations that frame its design.

This Is Not an Exhaustive Examination of Leadership Theory

The goal of this book is to aid in building readers' capacities to engage with leadership theory as critical learners. To some degree, this means sacrificing breadth for depth in terms of coverage. Additionally, the book attempts to disrupt the "story most often told" in leadership theory. One of the ways in which this dominant narrative plays out is through the privileging of certain disciplines, content, and theories. Therefore, the metric for inclusion of theories in the book was the degree to which they shape or have the potential to shape formal and informal understandings of leadership across a wide array of disciplines. This means a number of well-known theories were omitted, including psychodynamic approaches, charismatic leadership, and Fiedler's contingency model. This is *not* a statement of their relative value but a conscious decision made to create space for theories traditionally left out of leadership texts. Given the developmental and critical approach employed in the book, readers are encouraged to apply lessons learned to the examination of theories not included.

This Is Not a Book on Critical Social Theory

It merits explicit statement that this is *not* a book on critical social theory. This is a book on leadership theory. Concepts derived from critical social theories are employed as an interpretive lens to deepen the understanding of and ability to apply leadership theories. Therefore, I have attempted to synthesize large swaths of literature into three meta-themes. However, significant debate, distinction, and unique perspectives across the varying strands of critical scholarship are lost in this process. Perhaps the best and safest framing is that the critical perspectives presented in this book should serve as nothing more than a catalyst to seek out the rich and expansive body of literature representing critical social theory.

This Is Not an Exhaustive Set of Critiques

Electing for depth over breadth means that an exhaustive set of critiques are not provided for each theory but general strengths and weaknesses instead. These critiques are varied to avoid redundancy as well as push readers to begin identifying strengths and weaknesses on

their own. Additionally, Chapter 2 introduces a variety of tools of deconstruction and reconstruction to support the application of critical perspectives. Each chapter offers insights associated with just a single tool of deconstruction and reconstruction. This does not mean, however, that the others do not apply. My hope is that you will consider on your own how *all* of the tools of deconstruction and reconstruction relate to each theory as well as craft your own tools to supplement the ones I provided. Indeed, one of the most exciting products of the first edition of this book are the complex, imaginative, and incredibly useful tools of deconstruction and reconstruction being created by readers across the country. They contribute to a burgeoning lexicon and tool kit to accelerate impact in leadership research and practice. Again, this book is ideally designed to stimulate your own agency and efficacy as a critical learner.

SUMMARY OF CONTENT

This book is organized into three sections. The first section sets the stage for learning leadership theory. Chapter 1 introduces the architecture of leadership—mapping the essential elements that constitute a theory and insights into how to delineate among theories. It provides the grounding on which the rest of the book is built. Chapter 2 introduces three meta-themes derived from critical social theory (i.e. stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location), along with a set of tools for deconstruction and reconstruction. The content of this chapter provides the interpretive lens for the rest of the book. Chapter 3 applies considerations from the architecture of leadership and critical perspectives to the “story most often told” in leadership theory. An alternative means for organizing theories is provided. Collectively, these three chapters are designed to begin developing readers’ efficacy and capacity to engage with leadership theory as critical learners.

The core content of the book appears in the second section, which provides syntheses and analyses of 20 theories embedded within seven theoretical clusters. Chapters 4–10 employ a standardized format with three segments to ease the learning process:

1. *Standard overview*: Each individual theory is introduced through an overview of its core premises along with how it defines leadership. This is followed by a discussion of how the theory can be translated to practice as well as how empirical research evolves our understanding of its substance and utility. Strengths and weaknesses are also provided.
2. *Application of critical perspectives*: The cluster of theories appearing in a chapter are analyzed using the tools of deconstruction and reconstruction. Reconstructions offer

multiple perspectives to build readers' comfort with the process and showcase varied ways to apply reconstructed theories to practice. For example, Chapter 5 reconstructs production-driven theories through the lens of supervision, while Chapter 7 reconstructs group-driven theories through the infusion of content related to inclusion.

3. *Counternarratives*: The final segment introduces a narrative that weaves together theory, critical perspectives, and translations to practice bringing to life the very human process of engaging in leadership. These stories challenge the "story most often told" and reflect critical life incidents and thinking from a brilliant group of intergenerational leaders from varied disciplines and sectors (e.g. health care, education, government, business, work, consulting).

The final chapter of the book outlines five key themes associated with the interpretation of leadership theory. These represent essential considerations for translating theory to practice. The chapter also introduces an integrated model for critical leadership development to provide a framework for readers' ongoing journey as critical learners.

A Note on Content

It is important to provide some context regarding how content in the book was generated. The product you see in front of you is the result of a significant amount of labor by multiple generations of community research teams and scholars. The first edition of the book was assembled through a comprehensive examination of 20 years of articles across five of the most influential academic journals in leadership studies. Content covered theory and research up to 2016 and was supplemented with original source materials, scholarly books, and additional articles from discipline-specific academic journals (e.g. nursing, business, psychology). The goal was to paint a clear picture of the origins of theories along with their evolution as a result of research. Additionally, our dedicated team engaged in a two-year empirical study using critical narrative inquiry to create the counter-stories that concluded each chapter.

This second edition of the book followed a similar approach expanding the comprehensive review of the literature to a broader set of academic journals on leadership from 2016 through 2023 led by Dr. William Southerland. His extensive literature review expanded the scope of disciplines and contexts represented. It also was supplemented with source materials, scholarly books, and policy papers. Dr. Southerland also conducted semi-structured, qualitative interviews using the tenets of critical narrative inquiry to cocreate

the additional counternarratives appearing in this edition. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Dr. Southerland for his incredible work as well as accompaniment on this journey toward a second edition.

I hope the above information makes clear the comprehensiveness and rigor that went into creating both editions of this book. We took seriously the importance of framing theory in ways that were accurate, highlighted innovations in research that extend our understandings, and approached the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction through an ethic of care. The use of narratives not only humanizes the theories but amplifies the voices of those whose stories are too often left untold in the leadership literature and yet are sources for inspiration and insight for everyone wishing to learn and engage in leadership.

A Note on Using the Book

Care was taken to write this book in a developmentally sequenced manner. Readers will note that the complexity of theoretical content increases as the chapters progress. So, too, does the depth of the application of critical perspectives. Therefore, maximizing the intended purpose of the book would involve a sequential reading of chapters. Of utmost importance is that ample time and attention be directed to Chapter 2 and building a base understanding of critical perspectives as these undergird the approach to learning theory through the rest of the book.

The book is also designed with the knowledge that not every reader will want to explore all of the theories or theoretical clusters presented. The organization of content easily allows for bypassing individual theories while still engaging with the deconstruction/reconstruction of a chapter. Beyond the first three chapters, a reader could pick and choose which theories they are interested in learning more about across the chapters and still have a sense of cohesion at the end of the book.

A Note on the Approach to Writing

As you explore the book you will likely note distinctive shifts from a more academic tone to a lighter, more personal, and sometimes humorous or even irreverent one as theory is interpreted, examined, and ultimately played with in service of its deconstruction/reconstruction and application to practice. I recognize that these shifts may be jarring for some who prefer a more straightforward academic text. For some, this may even appear to undermine credibility. However, I might argue that this alternative approach offers a

beneficial disruption to the dominant and prototypical ways that leadership theory is traditionally written about in academia.

A FEW CAVEATS

Let me share a few general notes that may be helpful in framing the content you are about to explore. Consider these points of information that invite you to pause and ponder the reactions you may have to the book and its content.

Reactions to Critical Social Theory

There is no doubt that critical social theory evokes strong reactions. The next time you are with family or friends, just casually drop the fact that you are “doing some light reading on leadership, racial injustice, and domination,” or “considering how Marx’s thoughts on commodification draw into question management and leadership in society.” Then wait for their reactions.

Some people immediately lean in; their excitement and intrigue is palpable. Many people, though, start to squirm or may even scrunch their face in disapproval. Some might express outright hostility toward these ideas. Here is the reality . . . in the United States we are socialized to have an almost immediate response to Marx as antithetical to democratic principles.

McLaren (1997) coined the term *Marxophobia* to capture how we are often acculturated to associate his work with the ideals of failed and dangerous totalitarian communism. McLaren reminds us, though, that “many if not most critical educators work outside the orthodox Marxian tradition and do not consider capitalism an irrevocable evil” (p. 172), while Brookfield (2005) stated firmly that “critical theory and democracy are not at odds” (p. 363). Marx is not the only target of fear and mis-associations; scholarships on feminism and critical race theory have also been demonized as fringe and dangerous and in some cases banned from use in educational contexts. To ban an idea, a concept, or a way of thinking raises the question about why it is so seemingly dangerous. Critical social theory by its own design invites critique of its ideas and welcomes dissent. This appears to be lost on those threatened by a way of thinking that does not align with their own.

If you find yourself shutting down or skeptical of these ideas, I would encourage you to think about why and from where this comes. Could it be part of how you have been socialized culturally and educationally? Does it trigger an internal reaction because of its

requirement to reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions about the world? Have you read critical social theories for yourself, or are your reactions built on assumptions about what they assert?

The critical perspectives covered in this book, along with the assertions leveraged in their use to deconstruct and reconstruct leadership theory, are all open to critique. What I present are not alternative “right” answers but tools for how to come to your own conclusions. Agger (2013) argued that “a book that purports to explain critical social theories itself needs to be explained, which is what will happen when teachers teach it and students study it” (p. 60). My hope is that this caveat is a relief for those who may worry that the use of critical social theory cannot itself be critiqued. In actuality, this is exactly what I want you to do.

My Positionality as Author

A central component of applying critical perspectives involves engaging continuously in critical self-reflection, which helps to identify and respond to one’s positionality within broader social systems. There is no doubt that my positionality as a White, cisgender, middle-aged gay man currently living an upper-middle class life shapes the lens through which this book is written. Any number of other social identities are also at play at varying levels of my consciousness yet still influencing content and how it is presented. Therefore, I think it is important to at least have some sense of my background so you can consider how it shapes the content of the book and its presentation.

I didn’t come to leadership as a true believer but from a place of skepticism and doubt. My socialization to the topic was negative at best and downright scary at worst. I perceived positional leaders as ambitious and typically self-serving, chasing popularity, profit, and power rather than attempting to make meaningful contributions. I witnessed abuses of power by authority figures that drew into question both their legitimacy and whether leaders and leadership even held the possibility of being positive. At the same time, I watched as the work of people and groups making enormous differences in their communities was written off as social activism rather than leadership. Throughout my education, leadership programs were only available to those who held positional roles. Leadership was the province of the elite of which I didn’t consider myself a part.

I eventually did make my way into the leadership “tent,” albeit initially out of a desire to see what it was really made of and with great hesitancy. This shift was the result of the generous patience of mentors and peers who challenged my presumption that leaders and

leadership could *only* be what I had seen so far. They questioned why I didn't consider the forms of service and activism in which I was involved as leadership. Why was I giving so much of my power away and allowing others to define what leadership was and was not? These wonderful voices cultivated my efficacy as a knower, pushed me to construct and legitimize my own understanding of leadership, and confronted me about ways in which my dismissal of the topic was safer and more convenient than struggling with and attempting to contribute to how it was understood.

As I became more comfortable with the topic of leadership, I simultaneously became less comfortable with how my identities interacted with it. Leadership became a prism reflecting back to me an image of myself I did not want to recognize. I became acutely aware of privileged aspects of my identity and how they shaped my understandings, experiences, and enactment of leadership. The more leadership theory I read and leadership development I engaged in, the harder it became to hold onto the mantra I believed so deeply: that leadership was the province of the elite *of which I wasn't a part*. I saw myself, and particularly my whiteness and maleness, everywhere. It permeated what was taught, who taught it, and who was typically learning it. For a long while, I rejected this reality and became defensive about the very topic I had once so strongly dismissed. Working my way back from this has been a process—one aided in large part through critical perspectives, compassionate colleagues and friends, brilliant students, and powerful journeys working in community.

And the journey continues. I realize now that it will be a lifelong one and that the uncertainty it brings with it is actually liberating. It feels like a release of pressure to know I will always have more questions than answers, more imperfect understandings than universal truths, more motivation to challenge my identities and their framing of how I make meaning in the world. If asked now, I would say I see so much possibility in the phenomenon of leadership. I see leadership in ways I did not see before sometimes because it was obscured by the “story most often told” and my own positionality. Other times, I feel almost blinded by its potential.

THE AUDIENCE

This book is written for anyone interested in augmenting their understanding of leadership theory. Its goal is to encourage students, educators, and practitioners of leadership to adopt more critical perspectives. The content and organization of the book serve these

goals, offering contextual reference points and narratives from a variety of disciplines and career levels.

- ✦ If you are a student in an undergraduate or graduate course in nursing, education, public policy, communications, business, or any other discipline, my hope is that you will find points of connection that deepen how you understand, experience, and enact leadership.
- ✦ If you identify as a leadership educator, my hope is that you will consider exposing those you teach to the content of the book. I also hope you will embrace the additive value of adopting critical perspectives as a primary pedagogy to facilitate leadership learning. Without these perspectives we run the risk of perpetuating the “story most often told” and dominant narratives that constrain our collective capacities to engage in leadership.
- ✦ If you are someone who cares about leadership and is focused on improving the various spheres of influence in which you operate—your company, your place of worship, your team—my hope is that you will see this book as an opportunity to invest in your own leadership development.

Acknowledgments

When this book was first conceived, I had no idea the extent to which it would shape my life in the years that would follow. I admire greatly those for whom the process of book writing unfurls in a marginally fluid manner. I am not one of those people. I have come to peace with this, though, and am deeply grateful for the learning opportunity crafting this book and its second edition presented. It has been painstaking but rewarding. My hope is that this edition will continue to contribute to a shift in thinking that centers critical perspectives as essential for teaching and learning leadership theory.

Words cannot quite capture the depth of gratitude I have for all those who provided support—championing, challenging, and reminding me there was a life and much more work to be done on the other side of this project. I’m appreciative of the team at Jossey-Bass who supported this process.

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The work contained in the first edition of this book and much of this second edition reflects the collective thinking and efforts of many. I am indebted to the “Book Club,” my academic research team that ran at Loyola University Chicago while I was on faculty there. They engaged in countless hours of discussion about the deconstruction, reconstruction, and application of leadership theories, contributing to the insights that appear here.

They also played a vital role in the qualitative research project that resulted in the counter-narratives appearing at the end of each chapter.

This brilliant team modeled collective leadership and the cocreation of knowledge in ways that inspire enormous hope for the future of leadership education. It's particularly meaningful to me that seven years after the release of the first edition, these folks continue to contribute in powerful ways to our shared work of leadership development. Our team included Lesley-Ann Brown-Henderson, Andrea De Leon, Emilane du Mérac, Tina Garcia, Willie Gore, Peter Limthongviratn, Kamaria Porter, Ally Schipma, Mark Anthony Torrez, and Natasha Turman.

As I mentioned in the preface, the idea of crafting a second edition seemed unattainable after I shifted professional roles over the past seven years from full-time, tenured faculty to executive director of Youth Leadership Programs at the Aspen Institute, to cofounding and serving as the chief research & development officer at the Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity (CELO). It was made possible only because of two things. I am enormously grateful to Dr. William Southerland for agreeing to come onboard to help steward this process. From his adept skills in synthesizing literature to the compassion and insight that he brought to the process of revising the book, its structure, and content, I am eternally grateful. It would not have been possible without his contributions. Additionally, I need to thank the incredible staff team at CELO for creating the space for me to deliver against this process, the reminder that I still had something to say and that this work matters, and the opportunity to be part of a team that is truly dreaming and building toward a future where access to leadership opportunities are as abundant as the talent in our country. I extend a deep heartfelt thanks to Kristan Cilente Skendall, Sonny Garg, Sydney Patterson, Gabe Beaver, and Jasmine Adams as well as Scott Bush and Sherman Baldwin.

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There are a number of personal thank-yous that merit attention. To Sofonda and my trivia team—thank you for keeping me sane (and I fully acknowledge that is a relative term).

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About the Author

Dr. John Dugan spent 20+ years working at the intersections of research, program design, equity, and human development. John currently serves as the chief research and development officer and cofounder at the Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity (CELO). John previously served as executive director of Youth Leadership Programs at the Aspen Institute, where he oversaw a portfolio designed to (1) cultivate youth and educator capacities for values-based leadership, (2) improve pathways to degree completion, career readiness, and job placement, and (3) invest in local communities to transfer capital and enrich pipelines of talent across sectors. During John's tenure, Youth Leadership Programs more than doubled its financial footprint, maintained full operations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and generated \$20 million in capital through fundraising and the creation of revenue-generating lines of business.

John cofounded and is the principal investigator of the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), one of the world's largest international studies of leadership and human development. Launched in 2005, MSL adopts an entrepreneurial approach aligning the benefits of large-scale research datasets with organizational needs for assessment of learning and program design. To date, MSL data collection represents more than 600,000 participants from 20 countries representing 450+ nonprofit and educational organizations. The benefits of the MSL were recently adapted into CELO's Index as a means to understanding individual developmental trajectories, group talent, and program impact. You can learn more about the work of MSL and CELO at expandingleadership.org.

John is the author of more than 60 publications (e.g. refereed academic articles, books, and book chapters). His research is cited by over 7,000 scholars and his work honored for its contribution to knowledge in his field by ACPA: College Student Educators International.

John also reached the rank of tenured, full professor in the Higher Education graduate program at Loyola University Chicago, where he taught courses on leadership theory, human development, and social justice. Before that, he worked in leadership education at University of Maryland, College Park, and University of Nevada, Las Vegas. John earned his bachelor's degree from John Carroll University. He holds master's and doctoral degrees in Counseling and Personnel Services from the University of Maryland, College Park.

The Evolving Nature of Leadership

“We are the leaders we’ve been waiting for.”

—GRACE LEE BOGGS

You’d be hard-pressed to find someone who does not have an opinion about leadership. The media vacillates between showering praise on political leaders and deriding their incompetence and corruption. The business community is alternately framed as leaders in social innovation or criminals who abuse their leader roles. Contemporary social movements are lauded as examples of collective leadership while simultaneously chastised for lacking organization and a central leader. All the while social media provides a powerful vehicle for individuals to quickly voice and disseminate their opinions about leaders and leadership at all levels, from local to global, and across all sectors from industry to education. There is no shortage of opinion on the state of leadership, the success or failure of individual leaders, or the desperate need for more and better leadership—unless, of course, you talk to those who are often, for very good reason, exhausted with or feel alienated from leadership altogether.

Love it or hate it, the concepts of leaders and leadership are ubiquitous in contemporary society. This chapter begins with civil rights activist and feminist scholar Grace Lee Boggs’s reframing of a Hopi quote that captures a central theme of these reactions to and feelings about leadership: they often reflect an outward gaze. They illustrate the longing we have for someone else to make the social structures we navigate (e.g. work, community, society) function better and our deep disappointment when this does not happen. Our reactions to and feelings about leadership often reflect our deepest held beliefs about human nature. They stimulate hope in our collective abilities to care for one another and

shocking disappointment when we see self-interest trump the collective good. Sometimes they even capture the ways in which we feel marginalized from the concept of leadership as traditionally defined.

What would change if we turned our gaze inward? What if we came to realize our own potential, our collective power, and our shared place in cocreating the world in which we want to live? What if we positioned our family, our friends, our colleagues, and ourselves as the ones for whom we've been waiting? This book is built on these very assumptions and explores the role of leadership theory in providing the scaffolding to do just that.

WHY STUDY LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP?

Beyond the general fascination with the topic of leaders and leadership, what makes it worthy of study? Why create entire classes on the subject, generate volumes of scholarship, and direct so much attention? Our interest in leadership likely stems from the ways in which it evokes issues we care about deeply. Heifetz (1994) underscored this when he reminded us “the exercise and even the study of leadership stirs feelings because leadership engages our values” (p. 13). If I care about the new business I've started, I likely want to make it as successful as possible. If I'm concerned about the environment, perhaps I want to figure out ways to bring community members together to improve recycling efforts. If I acknowledge that my place of work is one in which I'll spend a great deal of time, maybe I want to contribute to a culture that is affirming and collegial. All of these examples force us to cross an implicit bridge that links the things we care about with leadership. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) extend this notion when they share that “exercising leadership is a way of giving meaning to your life by contributing to the lives of others. At its best, leadership is a labor of love” (p. 223).

More pragmatic rationales for the study of leadership exist as well. Bennis (2007) reminded us, “In the best of times, we tend to forget how urgent the study of leadership is. But leadership always matters” (p. 2). He goes on to share “the four most important threats facing the world today are: (a) a nuclear or biological catastrophe, whether deliberate or accidental; (b) a world-wide epidemic; (c) tribalism and its cruel offspring, assimilation; and finally, (d) the leadership of our human institutions” (p. 5).

Cut to today and many of Bennis's (2007) perceived threats have become reality. From the global COVID-19 pandemic and rise of authoritarianism to accelerating global conflicts and unraveling of social cohesion in local communities, we face a contemporary context that demand better from leaders and leadership (Allen et al. 2022; Dugan et al. 2023).

Combine this with rapid globalization, persistent domestic and international human rights violations, and growing resource scarcity, and we find ourselves in a perfect storm of leadership issues.

There is no doubt that today's challenges necessitate the study of leadership and how best to enact it. The truth, though, is that there are few times in history that are not characterized by a conflation of social, political, and scientific issues that require leadership. Bennis (2007) reminds us that individuals and groups have the power to leverage leadership as a vehicle to address complex problems. The degree to which we are adequately prepared to do so is tied to the degree to which leadership is studied and learned. Sadly, in the United States today, only 16% of youth will engage in a high-quality leadership development experience with a positive impact by age 25 (Dugan et al. 2023). It's no wonder we constantly hear about the "crisis of leadership."

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

That there is no shortage of *opinions* about leadership contributes at least in part to the vast number of *definitions* that exist. One could question, however, the degree to which these definitions actually add something meaningful to the knowledge base. Do they functionally alter the ways in which we think about or engage in leadership?

This book takes a bit of a different approach. No singular definition of leadership will be advanced. I most certainly will provide you with multiple definitions of leadership derived from a myriad of leadership theories. I will not, however, offer you my own definition nor posit a grand, unifying theory of leadership.

In a debate about leadership scholarship, Day and Drath (2012) offered the term "pizzled," defining it as "simultaneously pissed off and puzzled" (p. 227). I realize that for some readers this lack of a singular definition may result in feeling "pizzled" at this very moment. That's okay, as the learning of leadership *should* invoke alternating feelings of frustration and excitement if it is treated as the complex and deeply personal phenomenon that it is.

The choice *not* to provide a definition for leadership is a purposeful exercise in restraint to avoid adding yet another set of terms, another semantic differential to the pantheon of preexisting definitions. I will most certainly provide a means of bracketing the core components of leadership as well as encourage you to play with them, arranging and rearranging concepts in ways that are meaningful to your understanding of what leadership is and is not. I also want to be clear that this does not reflect indifference about definitional clarity. Definitional clarity is essential to understanding a particular theory and its

underpinnings as well as how we engage in leadership practice. We are simply embarking on a different approach that suggests learning leadership theory is less about the acquisition of terminology or prescriptive approaches and more about becoming a critical learner. It also repositions readers with the agency to author their own definitions of leadership that arise as an eclectic mix of components from various theories and their own life experiences.

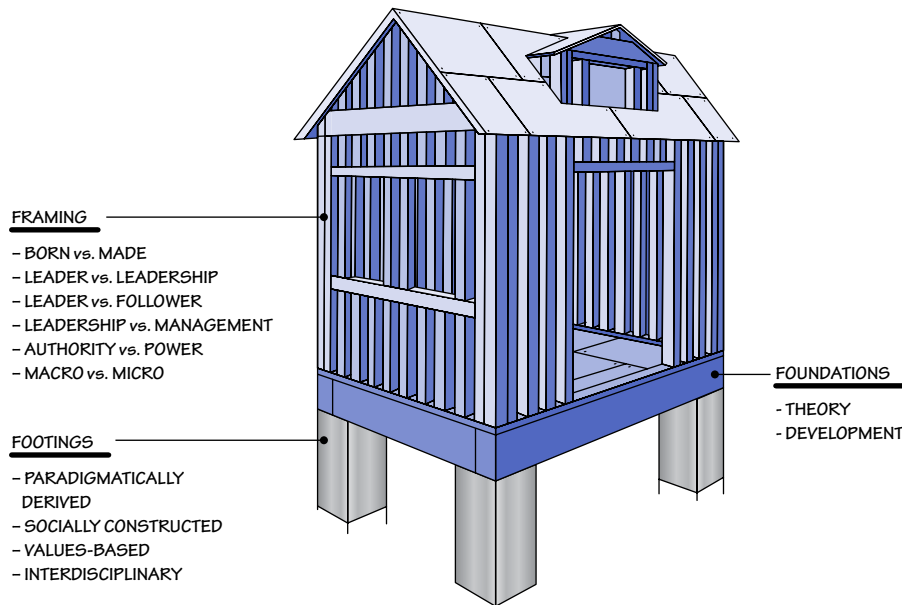
MAPPING THE DEFINITIONAL TERRAIN

Some of you may be ready to jump right into the leadership theory waters, but we aren't going to take a swim quite yet. My goal for you is to first begin developing the skills to be a critical learner. Simply being able to rattle off the names of important theories or theorists is not enough. It does not necessarily mean you know how to use theory or apply it to practice any more effectively. I want you to be able to examine a theory to deconstruct its assumptions, its areas of strength as well as limitations, and then take from it the most useful components that resonate with your own beliefs to apply in the unique contexts you are navigating. This is what a critical learner does. However, to approach theory this way means we have to take a few steps back and first explore some content *about* theory before looking at it directly.

Exploring the inner mechanics of a theory is essential. This includes unpacking key assumptions about its nature, clarification of terminology, and differentiation of core considerations among theories. Taken together these three elements could be considered the building blocks of understanding leadership. In fact, let's use the process of building a home as a metaphor here with assumptions, terminology, and core considerations representing key elements of a building's (or theory's) architecture (see Figure 1.1). Your goal is to assess the structure of the theory looking at how its architecture informs, constrains, or elevates the utility of the content it presents.

So what are the elements of the architecture of a home or a theory? *Assumptions* about the nature of leadership provide critical footings on which theory is built, undergirding and supporting ideas. When building a house, concrete footings are often taken for granted but bear the entire weight and structure of the home along with keeping it level. They serve as an essential grounding on which the foundation and the rest of the home are constructed.

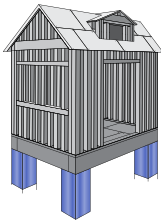
Key assumptions provide the footings for *terminology*, or the major concepts associated with understanding the nature of leadership. The terminology employed in a theory is essential as it is akin to the foundation of a home drawing on the strength of the footings to offer further support in bearing the weight of the structure. Foundations are also designed

FIGURE 1.1 The architecture of leadership theory.

to resist external threats such as moisture and cold by tailoring the design to fit its context. Similarly, terminology bolsters the parameters used to define leadership and adjust to the shifting contexts that influence it.

Finally, the differentiation of *core considerations* among theories could be likened to the framing of a house. Framing provides the skeleton of the building offering greater structure while demarcating unique spaces. In leadership theory, framing engages with a number of considerations that vary from theory to theory, shaping what it emphasizes in terms of content.

Assumptions about the Nature of Leadership



Let's start by exploring four core assumptions that provide critical footings for understanding leadership and its nature. By *nature*, I mean the essence that informs how we come to understand any definition of leadership regardless of its unique properties. A clear definition of leadership will anchor a theory and serve as the springboard from which its assumptions are derived. Note that different theories may stress each of these assumptions to varying degrees.

Leadership Is Paradigmatically Derived

The primary footing on which leadership theory rests reflects its paradigmatic assumptions. You might be wondering what the heck it means for something to be paradigmatically derived. A paradigm reflects the basic lens through which a person views the world and consists of concepts, assumptions, values, and practices.

Let's use an example to illustrate this. In the United States, if you were to refer to football, it would immediately call to mind a specific sport with clearly articulated rules. The paradigm through which we understand football is highly specific, so when the term is mentioned people immediately think of things such as team affiliations and particular types of equipment. However, if you were to mention the same term in most of the rest of the world, it would cue what we refer to in the United States as soccer, which has an entirely different set of rules and practices. Here is how a paradigm operates. If you were in the United States and told US friends to meet you at the football field and to bring equipment, the dominant paradigm for football would likely kick in for them. They would show up at the US football field, not the soccer field. They would likely bring a US football, not a soccer ball.

In his now classic albeit often contested work, Kuhn (1962) defined a paradigm in the scientific sense as a set of beliefs and agreements commonly shared about how best to understand and address problems. Paradigms serve as the lens through which research is conducted and the theory derived from it is understood. Understanding the significant impact of a research paradigm is essential because it helps us identify taken-for-granted assumptions that may be embedded in a theory. It also contributes to a more accurate perspective on strengths and limitations. As such, paradigms set boundaries around what is and is not valued along with the most "appropriate" ways in which leadership should be studied.

Table 1.1 offers definitions of four key research paradigms (i.e. positivism, constructivism, critical theory, and postmodernism). Every theory is born out of a paradigm that carries with it particular assumptions that shape perceptions about the nature of leadership. A critical learner must take these into account when considering how to interpret and use a theory.

Leadership Is Socially Constructed

With the exception of positivism, most research paradigms acknowledge that leadership is socially constructed. To suggest that something is socially constructed means that it does not naturally exist (i.e. it cannot be touched or explicitly seen) but is identified, named, and understood based on social interactions among people. It is cocreated in terms of meaning.

TABLE 1.1 Research paradigms and their influences on leadership

Paradigm	Meaning	Presumptions About Leadership
Positivism	Believes in the existence of objective and absolute/universal truths that can be discovered through confirmation and prediction using systematic scientific observation, reasoning, and measurement and elimination/reduction of bias in research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Universal truths exist about leadership. ♦ The goal of leadership research and theory is to provide prescriptive answers.
Constructivism	Positions reality as subjective and constructed through the experiences and perspectives of the individual; reality is uncovered only through interaction and interpretation and the acknowledgment that bias is inherent in research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ How leadership is understood is dependent on individuals' life experiences and can differ significantly based on one's culture and context. ♦ Leadership is relational, and as such, greater attention is paid to interactions between people in processes with one another.
Critical theory	Suggests multiple, constructed realities characterized by the interplay of power relations with the goal of identification and transformation of socially unjust structures; research as a vehicle to call into question values and assumptions as well as cocreated between researchers and participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Understanding power is central to leadership, which can be abused as a tool to maintain social stratification. ♦ Leadership often is defined by and reflects the values and beliefs of dominant groups.
Postmodernism	Views the world as complex, chaotic, ambiguous, and fragmented, with reality as transitional and constructed by how the social world is represented and meaning produced; stresses the importance of questioning anything framed as truth because objectivity and universality are impossibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ The concept of leadership, along with its relative value, are challenged as a means to disrupt the status quo. ♦ Leadership is understood as a phenomenon built on contradictory concepts that merit examination.

Furthermore, because social constructions represent often taken-for-granted beliefs they function as powerful framers of reality for people and can be difficult to change. An excellent example of a social construction is money. In and of itself, money has no real value; in most cultural contexts it is simply printed paper or metal coins. However, individuals are socialized to symbolically ascribe value to money. In the United States this is why we understand “the value of a dollar” can differentiate between types of currency and their relative value, and readily recognize that just because paper bills from a board game like Monopoly are also called money does not mean that they carry any inherent value.

The same assumptions of social construction apply to leadership. Leadership does not functionally exist. It represents an abstract set of concepts derived by people to explain and make meaning of observations from the world. The assumption that leadership is socially constructed is critical to understanding theory as it acknowledges the fluidity of the concept. It explains why each of us may have varying reactions to and interpretations of leadership.

Furthermore, social constructions are bound by time, context, and culture. Applying this to the example of money, we understand that the relative value of \$100 today is different than in, say, 1850. Similarly, you might find that what you can purchase with \$100 differs based on location (e.g. in a city versus a rural area). Finally, although the concept of money is generally transferable across cultural contexts, how it is named, the form it takes, and its relative value shifts enormously from country to country.

Again, when we apply these same assumptions to leadership we begin to recognize that what is deemed leadership is constantly evolving to keep pace with shifting norms in the sociopolitical systems in which we exist. How we understand leadership also becomes culturally contingent. That is, local, organizational, domestic, and global cultural differences will contribute to norms that in turn shape how leadership is understood, experienced, and enacted.

Leadership Is Inherently Values Based

If leadership is socially constructed, then *how* it is constructed represents the value norms that a particular group of people endorse at a given point in time whether good, bad, or somewhere along the continuum. However, this particular footing is one that is sometimes contested in fascinating ways.

Some argue that leadership is value free or neutral and simply about effectiveness and/or goal achievement. Classic examples of these arguments typically focus on horrific leaders such as Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot, or Joseph Stalin, using their effectiveness in achieving goals as examples of how leadership can be absent of values. Others suggest a danger in this thinking, instead explicitly infusing concepts such as ethics, morals, and justice into the theory as a means to segment out those who engage in leadership that harms others. This essentially redefines leadership as intrinsically good and positive.

What appears to be lost on both sides of the argument is the reality that leaders and leadership that cause harm hardly reflect the absence or neutrality of values. Quite the opposite is true. They bring to the forefront values that many simply find abhorrent, but

they are values nonetheless. Failing to acknowledge this is a dangerous false dichotomy. Perhaps Kellerman (2004) said it best when she asserted that “because leadership makes a difference, sometimes even a big difference, those of us who desire to make the world a better place must . . . come to grips with leadership as two contradictory things: good and bad” (p. 14). But this assumption runs just a bit deeper. Because of social construction, leadership theory isn’t just inherently values based. It also communicates which values are acknowledged, prioritized, and deemed important.

Leadership Is Interdisciplinary

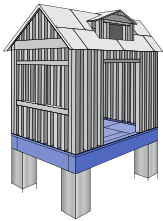
A final footing that informs any understanding of leadership addresses its interdisciplinary nature. The field of leadership studies is often described as a young or emergent area that draws on writing from across multiple disciplines ranging from political science and communications to psychology and business. This leads to a body of literature that is at times both complementary and contradictory as different disciplines naturally emphasize unique dimensions. This multidisciplinary approach differs from an interdisciplinary one that explicitly puts disciplines in conversation with one another, expanding boundaries in the process. While multidisciplinary approaches are additive, interdisciplinary approaches are integrative and synergistic.

Consider the following as an example of leadership’s interdisciplinary nature. It would be difficult to think about leadership without considering the ways in which groups manage strategic processes (business, management) in complex organizations (organizational/ industrial psychology) nested in varying social and cultural contexts (sociology, social psychology, political science, history) that require learning new skills (education, human development, communication) that advance collective work for social change (philosophy, public policy). Unfortunately, though, learners are typically exposed solely to disciplinary or multidisciplinary perspectives requiring them to adopt interdisciplinary perspectives on their own. Evaluating theory effectively, then, must involve questioning the degree to which interdisciplinary perspectives are present in content.

Collectively, these four assumptions regarding the nature of leadership provide the footings on which theories are built. They situate research paradigms, social construction, values, and interdisciplinarity as central features. Each of these footings anchors the notion that leadership is derived from social meaning. This reinforces the earlier point that there can exist no single, universal definition of leadership given the infinite number of influences that shape each person’s understanding of the concept. Ultimately, *leadership is the sense that we make of it.*

Making Connections

- What limitations might a theory have based on the paradigm from which it is derived?
- What values do you hold related to leadership, and what informs them?



Clarification of Leadership Terminology

Building on footings is a foundation that requires the clarification of terminology. Here we will examine what constitutes theory in general and leadership theory in particular. We will also explore what leadership development entails and its component parts.

Leadership Theory

Lewin (1952) suggested, “There is nothing more practical than a good theory” (p. 161), and about this he is correct. Theory strings together often-abstract propositions and hypotheses in an attempt to make meaning or explain complex phenomena. Theory becomes a tool of daily life that allows us to make sense of the infinite amount of information we are required to process. Despite its importance to sense making, what constitutes theory can have different interpretations. It is perhaps easiest to divide theory into two varieties: formal and informal.

Formal theory represents what is traditionally seen as scientific or academic theory. It is derived over time through hypotheses that are empirically studied to generate relationships among concepts attempting to describe and explain a greater whole. Key factors essential to formal theory are its ability to explain complex phenomena in comprehensive yet parsimonious ways, its practicality and ability to be operationalized, and its empirical validity or transferability (Patterson 1980).

When someone states, “I have a theory about that,” they typically mean an unconfirmed opinion or idea. This is an example of an informal theory. *Informal theories* represent individuals’ often subconscious thinking about the way the world or particular phenomena operate. They are developed over time through personal experiences and observations, and they undergo a continuous process of vetting and renegotiation. However, informal theories lack empirical substantiation. They are also delimited by the worldview of the person employing them. Therefore, their accuracy is influenced by taken-for-granted assumptions. Nevertheless, informal theories are powerful tools from which to make meaning when they are consciously constructed. In fact, a goal of this book is for readers to develop their own

informal theories of leadership that integrate elements of formal theories and their own lived experiences.

Bass (2008) argued that the role of leadership theory was to “explain its emergence or its nature and consequences” (p. 46). Leadership theory, then, becomes an attempt to explain the nature of leaders and leadership as social phenomena. Remember that key assumptions (footings) influence terminology (foundations). This contributes at least in part to the volume of opinions about leaders and leadership, which in essence are proxies for informal theories. It also contributes to the large numbers of formal leadership theories that exist.

Although the broader scientific and academic literature makes clear distinctions between what constitutes a formal theory, the leadership studies literature often fails to do so. Table 1.2 provides definitions for a variety of classifications (i.e. models, taxonomies, frameworks) frequently used interchangeably with the term *theory* but that carry distinct meanings. Sometimes leadership “theories” misrepresent their actual nature, and Bass (2008) was quick to remind us that pretty pictures, simple lists with references, and conjecture coupled with diagrams are not theories. Despite this, models can still be helpful as they draw attention to relationships among ideas. However, problems arise if we presume that models are actually empirically validated theories when they may never have been tested or, even worse, cannot be operationalized in practice. Similarly, it is important to avoid conflating taxonomies, which provide useful heuristics or mental shortcuts for categorization, with theories that go beyond categorization to describe and explain processes.

Critical learners must avoid taking an author’s label of something as a “theory” at face value and examine the ways in which it may or may not have been empirically validated,

TABLE 1.2 Differentiating between theories, models, taxonomies, and frameworks

Classifications	Definition
Informal theory	Untested personal propositions about the nature of a phenomenon; frequently subconscious; delimited to one’s worldview
Formal theory	Empirically tested propositions that offer explanatory and descriptive insights into a phenomenon
Models	Descriptive representation, often visual, of a phenomenon; frequently derived from or seen as the application of theory; may or may not be empirically tested
Taxonomies	System of classification offering a useful organizational heuristic; may or may not be empirically derived
Frameworks	Abstract representation of ideas, frequently conceptual or philosophical; have typically not been empirically tested

created for description and/or explanation, or even be transferable to practice. All of these have a direct impact on the utility of a theory.

Leadership Development

The second foundational element requiring clarification of terminology addresses leadership development. You may be wondering how leadership development serves as a foundation for leadership theory. This is an astute question, and indeed the final chapter of this book explores this topic in more detail.

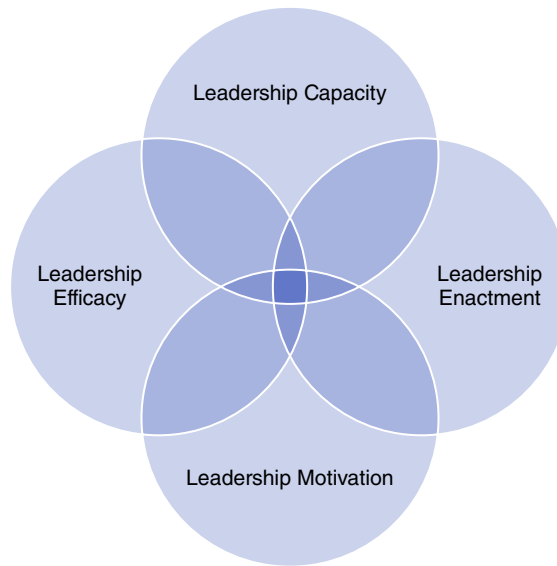
The reality is that theory and development are inextricably intertwined. How people approach the development of leadership is a function of their formal and informal theoretical understandings of the construct. Ironically, how people understand formal leadership theory is a function of their leadership development. Heifetz (2010) argued that “the theory of leadership one uses has an impact on leadership development. It influences the assumptions and choice of values one makes to develop further for oneself the self-image and ability to practice leadership” (p. 25). This necessitates the exploration of leadership development, not solely as a function of theory to be unpacked once theory is understood but as something that simultaneously informs and shapes theory as well.

So what is leadership development? Day (2011) argued that understanding the concept starts with distinguishing between leader and leadership development. *Leader* development involves “the expansion of a person’s capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes” (Van Velsor and McCauley 2004, 2). The much more difficult and often neglected process of *leadership* development entails “enhancing the capacity of teams and organizations to engage successfully in leadership tasks” (Day, Harrison, and Halpin 2009, 299). These may sound synonymous, but leader development is largely concerned with building human capital (i.e. development of individually beneficial knowledge and abilities), whereas leadership development cultivates both human and social capital (i.e. development of social relationships beneficial for both individuals and groups). Notably, Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2009) asserted the importance of both processes and that leader development often precedes leadership development.

Let’s look at four specific domains that are related to both leader and leadership development operating on both individual and group levels (see Figure 1.2). As a critical learner you will want to consider how each of these is more or less represented in formal theory.

Leadership Capacity

Enhancing capacity tends to be the goal for leader and leadership development. But what does this entail exactly? Capacity reflects an individual or a group’s overarching knowledge,

FIGURE 1.2 Domains of leadership development

skills, and abilities related to the leader role or the group's leadership process (Day, Harrison, and Halpin 2009; Dugan 2011). Note, however, that the form leadership capacity takes is highly contingent on the formal theory being employed. As you will see in later chapters, different formal theories emphasize different sets of knowledge, skills, and abilities that may or may not be transferable among one another. In other words, an individual or group may have high leadership capacity for one formal theory but little capacity to engage effectively based on the assumptions of another theory.

Furthermore, most people are never even exposed to formal leadership theories and instead operate off informal theories. This is where the footings, or key assumptions about the nature of leadership, take hold and shape which leadership capacities are perceived to be of value. There is another essential element to consider here. Leadership capacity reflects whether someone *can* do something. In other words, does the individual have the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities? Just because someone *can* do something does not mean that the person *will* actually do it. Leadership capacity does not necessarily translate into leadership action.

Leadership Enactment

Enactment is when capacity is put into action, or the functional practice of leadership. It is the behaviors of an individual or group as they engage in leader roles or leadership

processes. Once again, the form that leadership enactment takes is a function of the formal or informal theories driving it. Additionally, leadership enactment may reflect a particular theory, but that does not necessarily guarantee that it will be successful. The relative effectiveness of leadership enactment is dependent on the level of leadership capacity of the individual or group and its ability to be matched to group and contextual needs. Explicitly distinguishing between capacity and enactment is important as many people presume they are synonymous. It is critical to keep in mind that just because someone does not enact leadership does not necessarily mean that the individual lacks leadership capacity. Conversely, those who enact leadership may not actually possess the necessary capacities.

Leadership Motivation

Gaps between leadership capacity and leadership enactment can be at least partially explained by motivation to lead. Motivation to lead is “an individual differences construct that affects a leader or leader-to-be’s decisions to attend leadership training, roles, and responsibilities and that affect their intensity of effort at leading and persistence as a leader” (Chan and Drasgow 2001, 482). In other words, it plays an enormous role in shaping who enacts leader roles and leadership processes regardless of their levels of leadership capacity.

Scholars classify motivation to lead into three forms (Chan and Drasgow 2001; Kark and Van Dijk 2007). Those motivated based on *affective-identity* enjoy leading, and doing so is tied to their sense of personal identity. Remember, this does not necessarily mean that they possess any more or less leadership capacity than others; they are just more likely to engage in leadership enactments simply because of how they are motivated. *Non-calculative* motivation stems from a lack of fully examining the costs/benefits associated with leading either out of naivete or because it is unimportant as a motivational factor. Finally, *social normative* motivations reflect a sense of duty or greater obligation. Motivation to lead contributes to increased motivation to learn about and eventually apply leadership concepts, enhanced leadership capacity and efficacy, and growth across a range of leadership-related concepts situating it as a powerful developmental domain (Avolio, Avey, and Quisenberry 2010; Badura et al. 2020; Correia-Harker and Dugan 2020; Correia-Harker and Satterwhite 2023; Rosch, Collier, and Thompson 2015).

Leadership Efficacy

Efficacy also helps to explain why there can be significant gaps between capacity and enactment. Stemming from Bandura’s (1997) groundbreaking work on social cognitive theory, efficacy reflects an individual or group’s internal beliefs regarding their likelihood of success

with a particular task. Bandura argued that efficacy is domain specific and individuals or groups may have differing levels of efficacy depending on the task at hand. For example, I may have high efficacy for driving a car but low efficacy for swimming.

Efficacy serves as a critical determinant of whether or not individuals and groups actually enact behaviors. If I have low efficacy for swimming, I'm not only unlikely to jump into the deep end of a pool, but I may even be hesitant to go to the pool in the first place. Bandura (1997) also made critical distinctions between efficacy and other constructs such as self-esteem and confidence. *Self-esteem* reflects an overall sense of self-worth or personal value rather than domain-specific internal beliefs about success. Bandura frames *confidence* as both non-theoretical and imprecise. I typically think of confidence as one's outward projection of beliefs, which may or may not align with internal beliefs. People low in efficacy for swimming, but with high confidence, might go to a pool, but they are still unlikely to jump in the water . . . or if they do, they may find themselves in serious trouble.

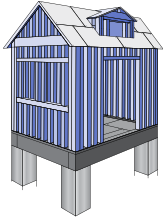
It is also important to note two nuances associated with efficacy. First, scholars distinguish between leader and leadership efficacy (Hannah et al. 2008). These differences parallel those articulated by Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2009) related to leader and leadership development. *Leader efficacy* is tied to internal beliefs about serving in a formal or positional role, whereas *leadership efficacy* addresses beliefs associated with group processes that extend beyond specific roles. Second, like capacity and enactment, efficacy varies based on the formal or informal theories driving an individual or group's understanding of leadership. For example, I might have high leader efficacy when leaders' roles are defined by democratic processes and shared relationships but low leader efficacy when defined by command and control.

The collective foundations explored here bring attention to the ways in which terminology provides a basis for the examination of leadership theory. A critical learner must have an understanding of what theory is and is not as well as how this shapes content. Finally, recognizing how leadership theory and development are mutually reinforcing becomes essential.

Making Connections

- What benefits and/or dangers might arise from reliance on informal theories alone?
- Can you think of clear examples of leader versus leadership development and when each might be most important?

Core Considerations of Leadership



Just as framing provides the skeleton of a building mapping out unique spaces in the interior, core considerations provide structure to a theory and help distinguish among theories. An entire book could be written on core considerations, so those covered here are by no means exhaustive. I have selected key points of departure that stand out across theories, each of which is framed as a dichotomy given formal theories frequently align with one side of a consideration or the other. These choices lead to substantive differences between theories. They are also enormously problematic in their presentation of false binaries.

Born versus Made

That there is even a need to address a consideration about whether leaders are born or made in this day and age is mind-numbingly frustrating. Ample empirical research illustrates that leadership is unequivocally learnable when defined according to most contemporary theoretical parameters. That the myth persists is due to a number of influences.

Many of the earliest formal leadership theories were built on the assumption that leaders were born based on heredity (e.g. monarchies and dynasties) or some type of fixed trait that one either did or did not possess (i.e. winning the genetic lottery). This eventually shifted to a perception that effective leaders and leadership were a function of possessing specific attributes, many of which could be learned. This interpretation of traits as learnable is often lost on many as the idea of born leaders is frequently reified. Across media platforms heroic leader archetypes are everywhere. Books are written on powerful individuals. Success or failure is attributed to individual actions. This stems at least in part from the highly individualistic cultural orientation of the United States (and many other countries for that matter), which emphasizes competition and achievement (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010).

The reification of heroic leaders may also reflect psychological responses to issues of power and authority inherently embedded in leadership that reinforce our *need* for infallible leaders or to be one ourselves. They calm our anxieties in the face of threat increasing a sense of security while simultaneously displacing responsibility (Heifetz 2010; Kellerman 2004; Lipman-Blumen 2005; Schweiger et al. 2020). In other words, if leaders are born rather than made, we get let off the hook. We get to turn the gaze outward rather than inward, as the quote from the start of the chapter so beautifully challenged us to do. As much as we may not want to admit it, that can be enticing.

Ultimately, formal leadership theories that explicitly or implicitly argue for leadership as an innate quality still exist and wield influence. Their assumptions can be bolstered when combined with informal theories of leadership that may be built on heroic archetypes or psychological needs. Thus, a key aspect of leadership development becomes helping learners to move beyond a false dichotomy to see that leaders are rarely born and often made. Critical learners of theory must attend to these considerations and how they are addressed.

Leader versus Leadership

By now you have likely noticed the clear distinction between the terms *leader* and *leadership*. *Leader* refers to an individual and is often, but not always, tied to the enactment of a particular role. This role typically flows from formal or informal authority (e.g. a supervisor, teacher, coach). When not tied to a particular role, the term *leader* reflects individual actions within a larger group, the process of individual leader development, or individual enactments attempting to leverage movement on an issue or goal.

Leadership, on the other hand, reflects a focus on collective processes of people working together toward common goals or collective leadership development efforts. Note that leadership does not presume that individuals lack formal roles or authority. It simply looks beyond those individuals alone and at the overarching process. Formal theories will vacillate in their emphases on leaders, their roles, and their development versus leadership as a process, how it unfolds, and collective development.

Kellerman (2004) argued the differentiation between leader and leadership is a semantic differential that is very difficult to understand, particularly among those without any experience studying it. She is correct in this assertion. If you ask most people what leadership means, they will typically begin by describing characteristics of an individual leader (e.g. “Leadership is a person who . . .”). Other scholars suggest the differentiation between leader and leadership, though difficult to make, is essential to advancing leadership development (Day, Harrison, and Halpin 2009; Guthrie et al. 2013; Hannah et al. 2008). As a critical learner, differentiating leader and leadership is essential for connecting concepts to practice.

Leader versus Follower

The conflation of leader and leadership makes it easier to create an additional false dichotomy around the terms *leader* and *follower*. Most often, *leader* is interpreted as a person with some form of positional authority and followers as those subject to that authority.

Heifetz (2010) expressed frustration that “the term follower is an archaic throwback rooted in our yearning for charismatic authorities who will ‘know the way,’ particularly in times of crisis and distress” (p. 20). He also expressed concern that rigid leader/follower distinctions can contribute to perceptions of dependency among “followers” who may begin to see the two roles as mutually exclusive. You either are the leader or the follower.

Frustration with the “follower” label has led to the use of all sorts of alternative words in formal leadership theories such as *subordinate* (gosh, doesn’t that feel better?) and *associate* (what does that even mean?). The problem here is that these words are typically just as frustrating while missing the point entirely of needing to better name the power and authority dynamics that underlie leader/follower relationships. Perhaps a better framing involves asking about the multiple roles that actors play in a leadership process. Let’s put this into context. If we look at a complex organization such as Facebook or Apple, people would likely label the CEO as *the* leader given the person’s role and the majority of employees as “followers.” Perhaps some higher-level executives might earn the label *leader* as well with subsets of their own followers. The label of *leader/follower*, then, is tied solely to positional authority rather than the contributions of individuals within the organization. If we flip the example to one from social movements, I often see an interesting shift in labeling. In the civil rights movement in the United States there are multiple identified leaders (e.g. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, James Baldwin) along with many followers. However, the followers are often concurrently characterized as being leaders in their own right in the process. In social movements it seems we are more willing to simultaneously extend labels of leader and follower to a person. The examination of any formal leadership theory, then, requires the exploration of how leader/follower relationships are explained . . . if at all.

Leadership versus Management

Also tied up in leader/leadership and leader/follower dichotomies are arguments about whether leadership and management represent the same or unique phenomena. Once again, the role of authority gets tied up in the understanding of this. Many scholars define management as bound to authority and focused on efficiency, maintenance of the status quo, and tactics for goal accomplishment. An exceptional manager keeps systems functioning through the social coordination of people and tasks. Leadership, on the other hand, is less concerned with the status quo and more attentive to issues of growth, change, and adaptation.

It would be fair to say that management is a necessary but insufficient tool for addressing the complex social, political, and scientific issues that require leadership in society. However, in sharing this, it becomes important not to dismiss the significance of management to leadership. Yukl (2013) reminds us, “The empirical research does not support the assumption that people can be sorted neatly into these two extreme stereotypes” (p. 6), and Rost (1991) expressed grave concern over the denigration of management as if it were the antithesis of leadership.

Some leaders are good managers and some managers are also fine leaders. A critical learner will see the shifting sands of how scholars treat leadership/management in formal theories, moving from almost an entirely management emphasis to contemporary perspectives that seem to forget the need for good management.

Authority versus Power

Nearly every core consideration up to this point included some mention of authority. This is an evocative statement about how authority is intimately tied, whether we want to admit it or not, to our understanding of leadership. Indeed, power and authority become core considerations in most leadership theories but ones that typically exist just below the surface. Issues of power and authority are often presumed, unnamed, and left open to interpretation. Indeed, empirical research on formal leadership theory typically does a better job at examining power and authority dynamics than the theories themselves.

So what are power and authority, and why are they alternately positioned as synonymous or opposing concepts? *Authority* is framed as the *right* to direct others in the pursuit of a specified, and typically shared, outcome and is often tied to management or a positional role (Vecchio 2007). *Power* represents a broader concept that can—but does not have to be—associated with authority, reflecting the *ability* to shape others’ behaviors. The concept of influence merits attention here as well given its frequent use in formal leadership theories. *Influence* is traditionally viewed as a softer version of power that is “weaker and less reliable” (Vecchio 2007, 69).

French and Raven (1968) offered a classification system examining five types of power, described in Table 1.3. Referent and expert power are commonly referred to as informal and less likely to be tied directly to authority, whereas legitimate, coercive, and reward power are more formal and associated with authority roles. A person “can possess each of the five sources of power to varying degrees, and their use of one power base can affect the strength of the other” (Vecchio 2007, 73).

TABLE 1.3 Types of power

Type of Power	How It Operates
Legitimate	Derived from the perception of authority or the right to make a request and an obligation to comply
Coercive	Derived from the ability to punish or through the threat of punishment
Reward	Derived from the ability to provide a desirable form of compensation
Referent	Derived from admiration or identification and a desire for acceptance and affiliation
Expert	Derived from the perception of specialized or superior knowledge

Adapted from French and Raven (1968).

Informal power has the potential to be more potent but also more fragile than formal power. Think of it this way . . . if managers lose credibility, they still have the authority to compel employees to complete tasks as defined in their job descriptions. Alternatively, when thought leaders (e.g. those in social movements or politics) do something that jeopardizes referent or expert power there is less to fall back on in attempting to shape others' behaviors.

Formal leadership theories often struggle with how best to address individual and collective power along with the ways in which authority plays out in leadership. Some theorists argue for the complete decoupling of authority from leadership, whereas others suggest this is impossible. A critical learner attends to the power and authority dynamics that play out in formal theories regardless of whether they are explicitly stated.

Macro versus Micro

A final consideration addresses macro versus micro levels of focus that appear in formal leadership theories. This is perhaps most tangible through a theory's examination of context as well as intended impact.

The study of *context* in shaping leaders and leadership is expansive and important given the footings and foundations already discussed in this chapter. We know that organizational, domestic, and global cultural contexts can radically shape the ways in which individuals and groups understand, experience, and enact leader roles and leadership processes. The degree to which this is represented in theory, however, varies enormously.

Many theories seem to leave context out entirely, presuming that the social behaviors associated with leadership occur in a vacuum. This leaves it up to the reader to make assumptions about how and why context might matter. Other theories explore context very narrowly looking at specific influences in isolation such as one-on-one relationships. Still other theories take a macro approach, looking only at context broadly such as influences associated with cultural considerations. This makes it difficult to attribute specific elements of the context to particular influences on leadership.

A similar concern arises regarding how formal theories address the intended spheres of influence for those engaging in leadership. *Spheres of influence* reflect the target of leadership impact and may range from personal or local levels to systemic or global levels. They also reflect the boundaries of potential influence that a person holds in a given context. We all have multiple spheres of influence operating simultaneously.

The absence of a stated sphere of influence in a theory can cause significant confusion about the target of leader and leadership efforts. When learning a theory you might say, “Well, I can see how this would work in my project team, but how would this ever work in a complex organization or in attempts to scale change?” Similar effects can occur with theories adopting micro-level approaches potentially conflating leadership with management or reducing leadership to a series of minor task achievements. Conversely, many contemporary theories target systemic levels as the sphere of intended influence, such as the transformation of political systems or the ending of major social injustices. Although these are important aspirational goals, these theories can have unintended negative consequences if they oversimplify complex issues. Additionally, those involved in leadership may be more likely to dismiss incremental gains or lose hope in long-term processes. No formal theory will ever be able to take into account the full range of micro and macro influences associated with contextual factors or intended spheres of influence. However, the degree to which they adequately address these issues is important to note as a critical learner.

Core considerations, or the framing of leadership theory, assist in mapping differences that emerge among theories. They pose a series of false dichotomies that contribute to how theoretical content takes shape. In some cases, formal theories omit these considerations altogether, attempting to avoid polemic issues. A critical learner recognizes that no formal theory will ever be able to account for the full range of considerations presented here, nor are there any magic bullets for resolving long-standing debates in the literature. They will, however, understand that naming these considerations and the ways in which they influence the application of a theory is essential.

Making Connections

- To what extent do you view leadership and management as mutually exclusive, one and the same, or something else entirely? How will this affect how you learn leadership theory?
- What contextual factors do you believe to be influential in leader roles and leadership processes? To what extent do those factors represent both macro and micro levels?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This first chapter makes a case for the importance of leaders and leadership to advancing social, political, and scientific goals. It also begins the process of mapping how leadership comes to be defined in particular theories.

Let's revisit the home-building metaphor one last time. Footings, foundations, and framing provide the basic architecture of leadership, bringing to life the specific content of a formal theory. However, theories are meant to be adapted. It would be odd to buy a home and move in expecting all of the previous owner's possessions, decorating choices, and placement of furniture to stay the same. The approach to using theory in this book reflects this. *You* have the authority to adapt and integrate elements of formal theories into your informal theories of leadership, drawing on personal experiences and the contexts you are navigating. Doing this, though, requires you integrate the skills associated with being a critical learner to closely examine the footings, foundations, and framing that shape formal leadership theories. Understanding theory is essential as it "provides the overarching sense-making frame for experience. Without a theoretical framework to connect and integrate experiences there is no sense-making, and thus there can be no learning" (Day, Harrison, and Halpin 2009, 7).

I've asked you to first take a step back and consider the architecture of leadership theory with the hope that this will build our collective capacities for critical learning. To aid in the process, each chapter in the book will end with a personal narrative. Scholars assert the power of storytelling in shaping how we come to understand leadership (Armstrong and McCain 2021; Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012). Narratives weave together the often abstract nature of theory with reality, bringing to life the very human process of engaging in leadership. They also provide a lens that challenges theory drawing into question the degree to which it may be operating from taken-for-granted assumptions.

Felice Gorordo is the World Bank Group alternate executive director for the United States. Felice cofounded Roots of Hope, Inc., a national nonprofit focused on youth empowerment in Cuba and served in the White House under Presidents Bush and Obama. He brings two decades of leadership experience in management and governance, serving as CEO of three venture-backed technology companies, investor and advisor at two venture capital funds with global mandates in health care and infrastructure, and board member on several for-profit and nonprofit boards.

An acquaintance once made an interesting observation about the work I do. She described me as someone who could take both insider and outsider approaches. Any skills I have around this have been developed over time and are a function of my belief that being able to influence power dynamics requires work from all sides. This stems directly from my upbringing and experiences that forced me to reconcile how power could be both good and bad.

I was born into a working-middle-class family of socially active, Cuban educators. At the onset of the Cuban revolution, there was an anti-clerical element to it—many Catholics were repressed, harassed, imprisoned, and expelled for their beliefs. Because our family was Catholic, they were subjected to a great deal of harassment and repression. Although my grandmother wasn't politically involved, she became a casualty of the violence of the revolution and paid with her life in a suspicious car accident. My grandmother's death ultimately drove my family to send my father to the United States through a program called "Operation Pedro Pan." The program sponsored orphaned children, as well as those from families that didn't want their children to become indoctrinated, placing them in foster homes and orphanages across the United States until their parents were able to flee Cuba.

The exile experience and real suffering my family endured colored my early understandings of power. It's no surprise that I initially saw power as something that when concentrated was used for evil. At an early age, though, I learned through both my faith and school that you could find a way to use power for good and direct the influence you amass toward making the world a better place. This motivated me to get involved. My initial understanding of power shifted to working "within systems" versus rallying against them or shunning them altogether. I'd eventually find out that this understanding could be equally as naive.

In college my understanding of power shifted again. I had a bit of an identity crisis and didn't know if I was "Cuban," "Cuban American," or what either of those really even meant. I decided to take a class on Cuba where an advisor told me that if I thought I was going to get to know Cuba through a book, then I was strongly mistaken. She explained that from afar Cuba looked very black and white, but once you got close to her, she turned into 10,000 shades of gray. The only way to know her was by going

(continued)

there. This inspired my personal pilgrimage to discover my roots, which my parents were totally against. I realize that my family experienced real trauma there—like scars carved into their backs that couldn't be removed. The trauma I inherited from them, though, came in the form of a “backpack” of sorts. I could choose whether to keep it on or take it off. So much of my understanding of the world and how it operated was a function of that “backpack.” I knew that if I ever wanted to effectuate change, I had to learn how to take it off—to see and feel and understand for myself.

When I returned from my pilgrimage, I told people, “I think we've actually got it all wrong. The paradigm of the Cuban American community cannot be one of exile—trying to exert influence from abroad or afar.” Instead, I thought we needed to empower the real agents of change on the island to take ownership of their lives. My goal was to flip the paradigm on its head and focus on impact at the person-to-person level and improving the lives of our counterparts—young Cubans—empowering them through material moral support to become the authors of their own futures on the island, instead of feeling like their only hope was leaving. I thought working within existing power structures to do this was a lost cause. So we started organizing campus-by-campus with Cuban American student associations, prompting reflection and discussion around these issues. After working with many leaders one-on-one, we united at a national conference and dialogue called “Raíces de Esperanza” (Roots of Hope). We wanted to promote greater people-to-people exchanges on both sides, both in Cuba and the United States, and we wanted to do it in a sustainable way.

Our work with Roots of Hope came to a tipping point in 2009 when a 20-time Grammy Award winner by the name of Juanes came across us. He was a Colombian singer, kind of like a Latin Bono, and he wanted to do a peace concert in Cuba. Everyone in the exile community thought he was crazy, but we thought he was on to something! When we met with him, it was clear that he had no idea what he was getting himself into and no real understanding of the Cuban context, so we offered our support. Navigating those waters was difficult and dangerous. We had to start working both within the system in Cuba as well as keep the pressure on outside of it. We had to find ways to garner trust and political support, and do so quickly enough to be able to logistically pull off the concert. As we moved forward, many of us received threats to our families on and off the island. Despite the severity of the situation and reality that we were operating within an authoritarian, totalitarian regime, my family encouraged me to stay the course. We ended up bringing together about one million young people in the largest congregation point on the island, singing songs of freedom and peace and reconciliation. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed that it could happen.

These evolving understandings of how power operates deeply shape how I approach leadership. They seem contradictory, but being exposed to power in all its shapes and forms led me to better understand its complexity as well as how to

navigate it. This exposure to what it means to work both within and outside systems has influenced my career as well. While working in government I was asked to staff a presidential commission on Cuba. I shared my feelings on US policy and how I was against the embargo, yet one of my supervisors said it was fine. He essentially gave me permission to work on the parts with which I agreed so I didn't divorce myself from the opportunity to make a difference because I wasn't 100% in agreement. I know that if I hadn't developed an ability to deal with that perceived "moral ambiguity," there probably wouldn't have been a voice of dissent at the table at all. Having an understanding of how government works from the inside later gave me the ability to influence it effectively from the outside.

I guess at the end of the day I've come to understand that success cannot be measured as a zero-sum game. The perfect should not be the enemy of the good. It's about moving the pendulum forward. I realize that sometimes taking an overtly activist approach runs the risk of falling into the trap of moral absolutes that even in ideal scenarios are very difficult to accomplish. But there is also a role and a place for activism because you can use it to push in powerful ways and to hold people accountable to deeper moral obligations. I've learned how to navigate my role from both these vantage points.



Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does Felice's story both reflect and challenge the content of the chapter? How does it reflect and challenge *your* understanding of leaders and leadership? What can be learned from this?
2. Felice's narrative captures the ways in which power, authority, and leadership are intertwined. Where have you witnessed this in your own life, and how does it shape your understanding of leaders and leadership?
3. Felice addresses the need to break through false binaries related to leadership (e.g. power as good *or* bad, working inside *or* outside systems) and his narrative addresses how his ability to do this developed over time. With which leadership binaries do you struggle, and how might you envision nurturing your own development based on insights from Felice's story?

Critical Perspectives as Interpretative Frameworks

“The fact that we live at the bottom of a deep gravity well, on the surface of a gas covered planet going around a nuclear fireball 90 million miles away and think this to be normal is obviously some indication of how skewed our perspective tends to be.”

—DOUGLAS ADAMS

If leadership is the sense that we make of it, then perception is a powerful arbiter of the reality we construct. This positions our understandings of, experiences with, and enactments of leadership as necessarily delimited by the perspectives we hold. These perspectives often represent informal theories we carry with us that frame what is defined as “normal.” They also reflect broader socialization systems that teach us from an early age implicitly and explicitly about how the world is “supposed” to work. As referenced in the admittedly cheeky quote that opens this chapter, what we accept as “normal” can be frighteningly skewed when contextualized or given greater perspective. In fact, it can contribute to the proliferation of a singular perspective and a “story most often told” regarding what leadership is and is not.

This chapter builds on what it means to be a critical learner of leadership by diving more deeply into how one comes to define what is and is not “normal,” along with our relationships with broader social systems. The chapter introduces critical social theory as a tool for adopting critical perspectives that offer more complex lenses for interpreting leadership theory. In essence, the critical perspectives covered in this chapter set up the rest of the book. They will be used to deconstruct the architecture of leadership as well as serve as a tool to reconstruct leadership theories in more personally congruent, socially

just, and meaningful ways. This shifts scholars and theorists from serving as the architects of knowledge to *you* taking on that role.

LETTING GO OF THEORETICAL CERTAINTY

I'm accustomed to several responses to positioning students as architects of theory over my years of teaching. Some express frustration, wondering why we are learning theory in the first place if it's so flawed. If critical learning is necessary, aren't these perhaps the *wrong* theories to be studying? Others express fair frustration and anger for having to engage with theories that do not reflect their lived experiences. They question whether we should get rid of theory altogether since no theory can speak to everyone's experiences as well as the diversity of contexts in which leadership unfolds. These reactions are fair. I wonder, though, is theory being situated as authoritative? Do we have an expectation for theory to serve as all things to all people? Must theory provide easy answers or guaranteed resolutions for ill-structured problems?

I would contend that our "pizzled" reactions often reflect our own disappointment with or desire to displace responsibility for using theory on the theories themselves or the scholars who created them. If we turn our gaze inward, perhaps our reactions to theory reflect how we have been socialized to engage in educational processes. So much of our education is predicated on the simple acquisition and regurgitation of knowledge instead of challenging and integrating what we learn with who we are. All too frequently we are taught that knowledge is truth and learning is coupled with requirements for blind acceptance of theory as reality. Thus, when theory fails us, does not reflect us, or requires us to take ownership of its interpretation and application, it may be easier to simply reject it wholesale.

The reality, though, is that theory is not some intractable truth but one of many potentialities—mutable in essence and born of imperfect understandings of an imperfect world. Theory serves less as an outpost and more as a guidepost. Indeed, Brown (2009) reminds us that "as a meaning-making enterprise, theory depicts a world that does not quite exist, that is not quite the world we inhabit. But this is theory's incomparable value, not its failure. Theory does not simply decipher the meanings of the world but recodes and rearranges them in order to reveal something about the meanings and incoherencies we live with . . . Thus, theory is never accurate or wrong; it is only more or less illuminating, more or less provocative, more or less of an incitement to thought" (p. 80).

For me, few things are more empowering than the reminder that theory is malleable and meant to be taken apart and reconstituted with our own insights and lived experiences.

Hooks (1994) shared: “I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing” (p. 59). She also shared, though, that “theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so” (p. 61). That means we, as critical learners, have a responsibility to position ourselves as architects centering our experiences in the interpretation of theory for it to reach its liberatory potential. This chapter provides a lens to do just that.

WHAT IS CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY?

In Chapter 1 we introduced various paradigms of research, one of which was critical theory. The body of literature constituting critical social theory reflects an eclectic and interdisciplinary set of concepts attempting to offer more explicit analysis of the social world for the purposes of advancing social justice (Agger 2013; Anyon 2009; Brookfield 2005; Levinson et al. 2011; Malott 2011). Because the literature is so diverse, there exists neither a singular definition nor agreement on the precise theories that constitute it. However, the focus of critical social theory is on placing “criticism at the center of its knowledge production . . . pushing ideas and frameworks to their limits . . . [it] functions to cultivate students’ ability to question, deconstruct, and then reconstruct knowledge” (Leonardo 2004, 12). Thus, critical social theory can serve as a powerful vehicle for both learning and applying formal theory.

Let’s start by defining critical social theory and its key tenets as well as differentiating it from other terms. *Critical social theories* “offer conceptual accounts of the social world that attempt to understand and explain the causes of structural domination and inequality in order to facilitate human emancipation and equity” (Levinson 2011, 2). In other words, critical social theories are concerned with understanding the flow of power in society, how this contributes to social stratification, and ways in which we can create more democratic and just social arrangements. Additionally, a number of central tenets associated with critical social theories can be distilled through scholars’ works (Agger 2013; Brookfield 2005; Kincheloe 2008; Levinson et al. 2011; McLaren 1997):

1. *Critical social theories are a direct rejection of positivism.* Recall from Chapter 1 that positivism is a research paradigm that suggests there exists valid knowledge, or truth, that can be scientifically uncovered. Critical social theories argue the opposite, suggesting research is inherently biased because those who engage in it, whether they are aware

of it or not, always operate from a set of assumptions about the world that influences their processes.

2. *Critical social theories presume structural inequality.* Critical social theories challenge the assumption that inequality is rare. Rather, they argue “that apparently open, Western democracies are actually highly unequal societies in which economic inequality, racism, and class discrimination are empirical realities” (Brookfield 2005, viii). To suggest that these inequalities are structural means that they are influenced by and a function of larger social institutions and systems (e.g. government, economics, culture).
3. *Critical social theories disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions.* Critical social theories address issues of structural inequality by attempting to make the implicit explicit. Through processes of consciousness-raising, taken-for-granted assumptions are surfaced and challenged. The goal is to disrupt structures of domination as “knowledge of structure can help people change social conditions” (Agger 2013, 6.)
4. *Critical social theories envision agency within structure.* Some have argued that critical social theories are unnecessarily pessimistic about the human condition. This overlooks the fact that these theories see agency, or “a person’s ability to shape and control their own lives” (Kincheloe 2008, 2), as still present within structure. Critical social theory “holds people responsible for their own liberation and admonishes them not to oppress others in the name of distant future liberation” (Agger 2013, 6).
5. *Critical social theories advance social change.* At the heart of critical social theories is progress toward social justice. It is a body of theory that refuses to be just “academic,” instead inextricably intertwining action that advances social justice as part of its fabric. The process of identifying taken-for-granted assumptions, disrupting them, and building individual and collective agency are all “to demonstrate the possibility of a qualitatively different future” (Agger 2013, 5).

The above definition and tenets provide us with an overarching umbrella or organizing framework for understanding what a critical social theory is and what it ought to do. They clarify the “what” of critical social theory.

Related to critical social theory is the concept of *critical pedagogy*, which reflects the application of these theories to learning experiences. The focus of critical pedagogy is on both examining the educational process as well as structuring it so that it scrutinizes how power operates, situates learners as knowers in their own right, and unmask

hidden dimensions in education that reinforce imbalanced social systems (Freire 2000; Giroux 2001; Kincheloe 2008; Leonardo 2004; Malott 2011). All of this is in service of cultivating agency and advancing a more just society. Critical pedagogy can be thought of as the “how” in terms of applying critical social theory to the learning process.

CENTRAL THEMES OF CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

A full review of the history of critical social theory is beyond the scope of this book (see Agger 2013; Levinson et al. 2011), but a number of central themes do emerge. Three meta-themes were selected particularly because of the ways in which their consideration enhances our understanding of leadership. I provide a brief summary of each, including what they entail, how they operate, and illustrative examples.

Stocks of Knowledge

The first theme is drawn from Schütz’s (1962, 1964) work in micro-sociology. He believed that although looking at broader structures and institutions was important, these systems of power operate because of the people embedded within them. He theorized the *lifeworld*, which reflects the taken-for-granted assumptions of the social world as experienced by everyday people living ordinary lives (Schütz and Luckmann 1989). The lifeworld helps individuals to efficiently negotiate the infinite information they encounter through social interactions. A helpful way to think of the lifeworld is as shorthand or CliffsNotes. It provides a more digestible means to consume large amounts of information quickly and efficiently.

The lifeworld operates through the use of *stocks of knowledge*, which are common-sense assumptions or rules that govern how individuals view, interpret, and experience the world. In many ways, stocks of knowledge are not unlike the subconscious informal theories discussed in Chapter 1. Stocks of knowledge are characterized by five key features (Schütz 1962, 1964, 1967; Schütz and Luckmann 1989):

- They are rarely scrutinized for accuracy because they are so familiar to us.
- They serve a functional purpose easing navigation of the world but are not necessarily accurate.
- They are shaped by lived experience but largely inherited through socialization.

- They are altered only through novel situations that bring them to consciousness and call into question their accuracy and/or utility.
- They are socially distributed and vary based on identity dimensions (e.g. race, gender, nationality), although no two people possess the exact same stocks of knowledge.

Thus, stocks of knowledge serve as our socially constructed and often-fallible assumptions about how the world should operate.

The effective use of stocks of knowledge is dependent on what Schütz and Luckmann (1989) called “*typifications*,” or general classifications of people, roles, and things based on broadly accepted, preconceived understandings of what they “should” do and be rather than their unique properties. Schütz used the metaphor of recipes to explain how typifications provide us with a predetermined and ordered understanding of how to produce a desired outcome, and that this “recipe” is usually only altered when it fails to produce the desired result. Interestingly, Schütz also argued that we make assumptions about our assumptions through the belief that others will hold the same typifications that we do.

Let’s walk through an example that highlights how stocks of knowledge function. I used to teach a graduate course annually in Rome, Italy. At our pre-departure meeting I prepared students to have their lifeworld jolted as they encounter novel situations that challenge their existing stocks of knowledge. One of the most basic ways this occurs is through the rules that govern dining. For example, dinner is considered an extended affair and highly relational in Rome. When one goes to a restaurant, stocks of knowledge contribute to an assumption that the restaurant may only flip the table once in an entire evening. This is the inverse of what one might experience in the United States, where norms dictate that tables should turn over multiple times. This is why servers in the United States ask if a table is ready for their check or diners may feel compelled to wrap up quickly if the restaurant is busy. Essentially, our stocks of knowledge set the stage for how we experience dining.

Similarly, we hold typifications about the role of a server and what that person ought to do. In the United States the person is expected to be attentive, move the meal along at a brisk pace, and bring the check as soon as the meal is complete. Our typifications suggest that a “good” server will initiate interactions, and we should rarely have to wave them down or ask for things such as refills on drinks. In Roman culture the same typifications simply do not hold. Roman servers often need to be flagged down, especially when one wants the bill. They wouldn’t dream of being so rude as to give someone the check unsolicited as it would suggest they wanted them to leave. This would be the height of disrespect for the

relational process of eating. When our students encounter these novel exchanges without prior warning, they often default to typifications about the role of a server in the United States and believe they are receiving bad service, when in fact there is simply a misalignment between stocks of knowledge about how to engage in a dining experience.

Stocks of knowledge and typifications associated with the lifeworld represent the ways in which socially inherited and individually adapted assumptions deeply inform how we process interactions. This contributes to implicit rules about how the world works, the roles people adopt, and how we negotiate relationships. Because our stocks of knowledge are not always accurate or can be misaligned with a particular context, it becomes imperative to bring to consciousness how they are constructed and shape our sense of the world. Hopefully what is becoming clear is that we have to realize (1) when we encounter novel situations, our own stocks of knowledge may be inaccurate versus assuming the ones we encounter deviate from the norm, and (2) we must discern when to adapt to new contexts that require us to perform alternative stocks of knowledge versus asking others to change, resisting, or disassociating altogether.

Making Connections

- What “recipes” do you have about leaders and leadership? How might you challenge the stocks of knowledge that contribute to these recipes when learning leadership theory?
- How might you identify and question the stocks of knowledge that are present in a particular theory? Are there particular things you would look for?

Ideology and Hegemony

If stocks of knowledge are largely socially transmitted, then what influences them? The second major theme explores two of the most significant influences, which represent opposite sides of a single coin: ideology and hegemony. Brookfield (2005) defined *ideology* “as the broadly accepted set of values, beliefs, myths, explanations, and justifications that appears self-evidently true, empirically accurate, personally relevant, and morally desirable to a majority of the populace. The function . . . is to maintain an unjust social and political order. Ideology does this by convincing people that existing social arrangements are naturally ordained and obviously work for the good of all” (p. 41). *Hegemony*, on the other hand,

is often described as a subtler form of social control. Whereas ideology typically functions through coercion and fear of punishment, hegemony is a result of individuals' consent or silent acceptance of a dominant group (Gross 2011).

Alinsky (1971) explained "the prerequisite for an ideology is possession of a basic truth" (p. 10), which frequently involves the elimination of anything that does not fall within the parameters of said truth. The appeal of these absolute truths, along with ways in which ideological control is manifest, is explained well by Pope Francis of the Catholic Church. He suggested that "those who today always look for disciplinarian solutions, those who long for an exaggerated doctrinal 'security,' those who stubbornly try to recover a past that no longer exists—they have a static and inward-directed view of things" (Spadaro 2013, 32).

It is relatively easy to point to an organization, political party, or religious group and articulate their ideological principles. These are not necessarily bad. However, when beliefs are taken to extremes and positioned as absolute truths they become dangerous and frequently in service of social oppression of the many to benefit the few. History is rife with examples such as fascism and totalitarianism. Alinsky (1971) cautioned that all ideologies may not lead to horrific results, but they do contribute to assumptions about how the world operates and particularly assumptions that maintain social stratification. Hopefully, you can see here how the tenets of positivism discussed in Chapter 1 would support rigid ideological beliefs, whereas critical perspectives naturally call them into question.

Hegemony works in a much more indirect manner in which "people learn to embrace as common sense wisdom certain beliefs and political conditions that work against their interest and serve those of the powerful" (Brookfield 2005, 43). Gramsci positioned *common sense* as a tool for perpetuating unequal power relations in favor of the status quo, but by convincing people to enact them on themselves rather than using more direct and coercive ideological force (Hoare and Nowell Smith 1971). The concept of hegemony is perhaps so powerful because of the depths of consciousness at which it operates as well as the ways in which social systems reinforce it. It is a function of everyday life but one that we rarely see and almost never name.

Let me provide a quick, albeit crude, example of hegemony. A few years back I was with friends in New Orleans, Louisiana. Two of us entered a bar, ordered drinks, and sat down only to look out the window and realize our friends were across the street at another bar. In most US cities it is illegal to have open containers of alcohol in the street. So I suggested we just ditch the drinks and eat the cost so we could go meet our friends right away. My buddy was less inclined to waste money but also wanted to go. It wasn't until several

minutes later that we both realized people outside were walking in the street *with* drinks. How had we not noticed this before? Yet, we still didn't go and meet our group of friends. Nope, despite the evidence in front of us, we discussed whether or not it was legal and Googled it just to be sure. With new knowledge in hand, we still asked permission from the employee at the door before leaving. In the street we both commented about how "weird" it felt—like we were breaking the law—and practically ran to the next bar, actually apologizing as we entered, saying we would order another drink from their establishment right away. Note that not only did we constrain our own agency per socialized prescriptions, but we also apologized for our actions in the process!

Gramsci used the term *common sense* to capture how totally normalized one becomes to enacting the dominant social order. He also suggested, though, that there exists a contradictory consciousness through which people can recognize the ways in which common sense does not reflect their lived experiences and is not in service of their best interests (Hoare and Nowell Smith 1971). Development of a contradictory consciousness on its own, however, is insufficient as all too often people still fail to see how they can act to disrupt common sense. This is at least in part because hegemony is constantly in a state of negotiation that allows the system to accommodate and adapt to suggest change but reinforce dominant ideals.

Brookfield (2005) suggested that hegemony permits "just enough challenge to the system to convince people that they live in a truly open society, while still maintaining structural inequality. This tolerance of challenge and diversity functions as a kind of pressure cooker letting off enough steam to prevent the whole pot from boiling over" (p. 211). Thus, part of the power of hegemony is its ability to define what is "acceptable" dissent as well as adjust to accommodate shifting contradictory stances over time without actually altering structures of dominance. It could be described as a tool of pacification.

Educational systems offer an excellent example of how ideology and hegemony function in tandem. In the United States, the educational process and its content reproduce our cultural ideology. This typically reflects democratic and capitalistic assumptions that when individuals succeed we collectively succeed. This is reinforced coercively by making certain levels of education mandatory, using standardized testing, and setting curriculum standards at state and national levels. Many of us would argue that not all of these are bad! Of course we want kids to go to school and learn! However, hegemonic consent is also apparent in education through the hidden curriculum or lessons that are learned over time that reinforce social roles, rules, and norms (Freire 2000; Giroux 2001). For example, students learn powerful lessons about authority-compliance relationships from how teachers

manage their classrooms, they may adopt unhealthy gender roles based on who is called on and who is not, or they may internalize self-worth based on who is and is not represented in terms of social identity in what they read and/or from whom they learn. Believe me when I tell you that education is not alone in the reproduction of ideology and hegemony. Powerful examples exist across every sector from health care to business.

Ideology and hegemony are powerful framers of social reality. They are effective in that they do not completely denounce individual betterment; they just suggest that it must occur within the confines of the existing system, which typically ensures that betterment is both difficult to achieve and restricted to very few (Agger 2013). Thus, any exploration of theory must necessarily name the ideological principles that inform it as well as unpack the hegemonic norms it perpetuates. The goal is to recognize how ideology and hegemony influence not just the creation of theory but our interpretations of it as well.

Making Connections

- How might the ideological influences of a culture, organization, or group you are a part of manifest for good or for bad in how leadership is understood?
- What might you have learned about the nature of leadership based on “hidden curricula” in your education that reinforce hegemony? What about in other contexts?

Social Location

The third theme examines how ideology and hegemony dynamically interact with social location to reinforce one another. Sociologists define *social location* as the position one holds in society based on a variety of social identities (e.g. race, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographic location, occupation) that are considered important to and in turn frame how the world is experienced. Levinson (2011) argued that “one’s social position and social possibilities are strongly shaped, even determined, by the sense of who we are in relation to others (identity), by what we know about ourselves and the world (knowledge), and by what we are capable of doing with ourselves and others in the world (power)” (p. 14).

I remember vividly learning about the power of social location as a 20-year-old interning for the US Department of State in Guyana, South America. I spent considerable

time volunteering at the St. John Bosco Orphanage, where I met Fernando, a 14-year-old orphan. To say Fernando was brilliant does not capture the depth of his intelligence. He absorbed and integrated knowledge like a sponge. On one occasion I watched him take apart the handset of an old-school, rotary phone he found, connect the wiring to a metal fence, and convert the broken phone into a working radio. One night as he waited with me at the front gates, he shared that he would soon “time out” and be forced to leave the orphanage. When I asked what he thought he would do, all he shared was “It’s not fair that I was born here.” He didn’t mean the orphanage. In that moment I had a powerful realization about social location. As a White man born in the United States I had infinite possibilities, and the world was ultimately stacked in my favor. Fernando was most certainly smarter than I ever will be; yet because of the social location into which he was born, his opportunities were constrained. Over time, I came to realize that I didn’t have to leave the United States to see similar patterns of how social location influences all of our lives.

The above example illustrates a basic understanding of social location, but it does not necessarily unpack the ways in which identity, knowledge, and power are influenced profoundly by ideology and hegemony and in turn play a role in shaping people’s stocks of knowledge. In the first chapter we defined power as potentially, but not necessarily, connected to authority and reflecting the ability to shape others’ behaviors through formal and informal means. Sources of power are usually derived from varying degrees of legal, economic, or social status, which are unequally distributed in society (Levinson et al. 2011).

The unequal manner in which power operates might lead one to believe that it flows in a unidirectional, top-down manner. Foucault (1988), however, framed power as omnipresent flowing through all interactions, not just top-down. He argued that “every human relation is to some degree a power relation. . . . Every power relation is not bad in itself, but it is a fact that always involves danger” (p. 168). He suggested that traditional authoritative power had largely been “replaced by disciplinary power; that is, power that is exercised by people on themselves in the specific day-to-day practices of their lives” (Brookfield 2005, 120). This makes the flow of power in society more covert, operating much like hegemony. From this understanding, power is replicated by people, self-enforced, and in the process maintains a dominant system.

Dominant systems are not just a function of power, though. They reflect the dynamic interaction between power and knowledge. Foucault (1977) saw knowledge as inherently connected to power, arguing “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (p. 27). Thus, those with power shape knowledge, and knowledge

reinforces and shapes power, often contributing to a dominant narrative that “comprises a particular language and a distinctive worldview in which some things are regarded as inherently more important or true than others. . . . Dominant discourses inevitably reflect and support existing power structures and are vital to them” (Brookfield 2005, 138).

Just as power and knowledge are intertwined and contribute to a dominant system, identity also interacts with both power and knowledge. People’s embeddedness in their social locations frames what and how they know as well as shapes the relationships they have with others. This plays out in a variety of ways.

Bourdieu (1980, 1984, 1994) wrote about “habitus” as a form of social norms that guide thinking and behavior. Derived from habitus are multiple forms of capital that explicitly link identity and power as well as influence social mobility and stratification. Capital is traditionally thought of in economic terms as accrued assets that can be invested. Bourdieu introduced alternative sources of capital linked to socioeconomic status, including social (i.e. assets based on relationships and connections) and cultural (i.e. assets based on knowledge, language, skills, dispositions, and education).

Bourdieu (1980, 1984, 1994) referred to cultural capital as the degree to which an individual understands and can enact the specific cultural capital of the upper class or dominant society. Knowing someone who knows someone and gets you an interview for a job is a good example of social capital, while replicating particular types of dress, patterns of speech, and/or mannerisms deemed as acceptable and of value by the upper class is an example of cultural capital. These forms of capital can be exchanged through relationships for actual economic capital, situating them as incredibly important. However, they are not equally distributed in society and in fact contribute to the maintenance of social stratification. Yosso (2005) conceived of an alternative to this building on the cultural wealth found in communities of color in the United States. Rather than accepting forms of capital that require acquisition of or assimilation into dominant systems, she proposed aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital as vehicles to disrupt social stratification.

We can also examine the interaction of knowledge, identity, and power through the lenses of multiple feminisms, critical race theory, and intersectionality, all of which center identity dimensions beyond just social class in the constitution of knowledge and power. Collins (2005) noted the importance of theories that “view race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age, among others, as mutually constructing systems of power. Because these systems permeate all social relations, untangling their effects in any given situation or for any given population remains difficult” (p. 11). Furthermore, these theories suggest that ideological and hegemonic norms in the United States situate masculinity and whiteness,

which are ultimately nothing more than social constructions, as deeply privileged characteristics and so engrained in social norms that racism, sexism, and genderism are ordinary and normal conditions. Acknowledging this becomes essential, then, to effectively disrupting it.

Social location is a critical determinant of how one navigates systems and is dynamically constituted through power, knowledge, and identity. Levinson (2011) argued that it is the role of critical social theory “to understand the unique ways that modern institutions employ ‘knowledge’ to manipulate ‘identity’ in the service of ‘power’” (p. 15). Examining these considerations in how theory is developed and applied is crucial.

Making Connections

- In what ways, if any, do you see dimensions of your social location influencing how you understand leaders and leadership?
- How have you seen power, knowledge, and identity connected to or absent from the concepts of leaders and leadership?

USING CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AS INTERPRETATIVE TOOLS

The themes of stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location reflect critical perspectives that call into question the nature of what we define as “normal” as well as how the world and social relations operate. They also serve as powerful vehicles for the deep examination of bodies of theory such as leadership. This occurs through the joint processes of deconstruction and reconstruction.

So what exactly is deconstruction? Derrida (1977) is often credited with its contemporary understanding, which is concerned with the surfacing and disruption of false dichotomies (e.g. beginning/end, good/bad, love/loss). Hopefully, you are thinking back to the dichotomies associated with core considerations in leadership (i.e. born versus made, leader versus follower, leader versus leadership) that were presented in Chapter 1. Derrida was interested in how these seemingly oppositional concepts are actually relationally intertwined with one another. Channeling Derrida’s beliefs, my grandmother, for example, would always ask us whether it was possible to ever really experience love if you hadn’t

experienced loss. Derrida was also fascinated with how one side of these dichotomies was often positioned as inherently better or preferred. For example, I think most of us would certainly prefer love over loss in our lives.

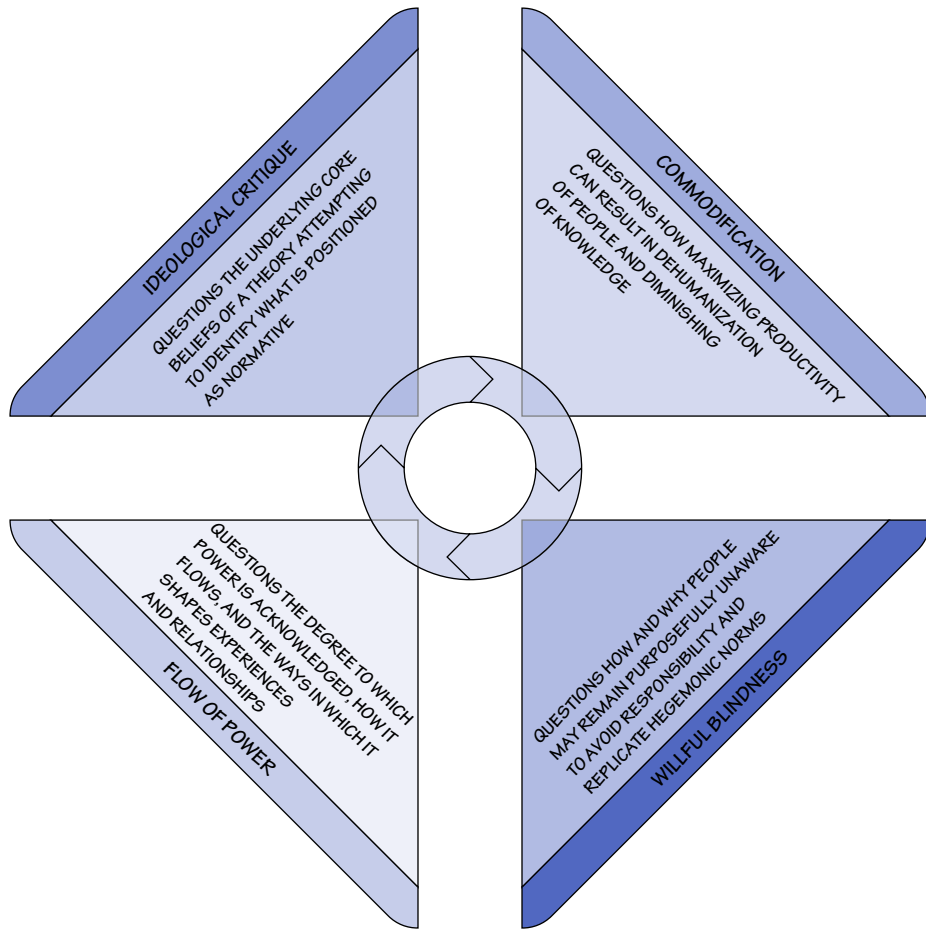
Derrida's (1977) use of deconstruction was as a tool to challenge binaries and surface false assumptions. Our approach will draw on his conceptions but also broaden them. Let's think of deconstruction as the process of deeply examining taken-for-granted assumptions related to stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location in leadership theory. It reflects a movement beyond the identification of generic weaknesses to the deep consideration of theoretical constraints associated with critical perspectives. The process of deconstruction offers a powerful lens through which to question leadership theories and how they are applied.

Deconstruction does not exist on its own but is coupled with reconstruction. Leonardo (2004) argued, "a Pedagogy centered only on critique becomes a discourse of bankruptcy, a language devoid of resistance or agency" (p. 16). This is echoed by other scholars who clearly differentiate deconstruction from mere critique or dismissal, instead situating it as a vehicle to advance critical social theory's goals related to social justice (hooks 1994; Martin and Te Riele 2011). Thus, reconstruction becomes an essential, albeit often overlooked, part of adopting critical perspectives. I cannot stress this point enough. To engage in critical perspectives necessitates reconstruction as a vehicle for agency, critical hope, and legitimate change to occur. To be candid, it's much easier to stay in a place of constant critique than to leverage critique in service of possibilities, which is what reconstruction attempts to do.

Okay, so how do we functionally engage in the process of deconstruction and reconstruction? One way would be to directly analyze leadership theories using the themes of stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location. What questions and gaps emerge if we take into consideration critical perspectives? How might you alter theory to better address them? You've already been doing this with the prompt questions that followed each of the themes.

Tools of Deconstruction

The concepts of stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location are broad, and as such can be difficult to wrap our minds around, let alone apply to leadership theories that may also be new for you. For that reason, I'm sharing four specific tools of deconstruction and four tools of reconstruction derived from these perspectives (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). The tools provide more specific types of questions to ask and are tailored for

FIGURE 2.1 Tools of deconstruction.

particular use when examining leadership theories. These, of course, are not meant to be exhaustive but simply serve as a learning device to help you become comfortable with the process of deconstruction and reconstruction. My hope is that you will develop your own tools as well.

Ideological Critique

Ideological critique is exactly what it sounds like: an attempt to question the underlying beliefs that fundamentally inform a theory. It is particularly

concerned with interrogating “the givens of everyday reality to reveal the inequality and oppression that lurk beneath” (Brookfield 2005, 42). The process starts by asking what a theory presumes as normative. For example, does a theory operate based on “recipes” that make assumptions about what leaders should look like and how they should act? Are leaders and leadership presented as inherently good and positive concepts? Does a theory presume that the contexts in which leadership unfold are inherently democratic and people can candidly and respectfully share their thoughts and opinions without reprisal? Engaging in ideological critique involves identifying assumptions as well as how they establish the rules of the game, recipes for enacting social roles and relationships, and maintenance of a preferred status quo.

Commodification

Of central concern to most critical social theorists is the role that capitalism plays ideologically. Capitalism is typically defined as an economic and political system characterized by free trade and private enterprise versus state control of production and consumption. Marx (1988) was particularly interested in the ways in which capitalism contributed to forms of structural domination through alienation. Alienation is the process of dehumanization that occurs when work is not a collaborative process but an antagonistic one in which workers are commoditized and divorced from the actual products of their labor. This commodification of people, along with an emphasis on increasing production and consumption at all costs, can have dangerous effects on our ability to demonstrate agency as well as think critically. The examination of theory, then, needs to take into consideration how it may perpetuate this. For example, are theories adapted over time as research and practice provide evidence that component parts work or do not work, or are theories treated as static so that they can be bought and sold in more simplistic and consumable ways? To what extent are opportunities for leadership development commoditized in ways that enable or constrain access? How are people labeled as “followers” treated by theories? Are they simply commodities to be manipulated in service of increased production or treated in humanistic ways?

Willful Blindness

Willful blindness is a legal term that describes when a person purposefully remains unaware or ignorant of information so that they do not assume liability for something that is illegal. Heffernan (2011) translated the term to the arena

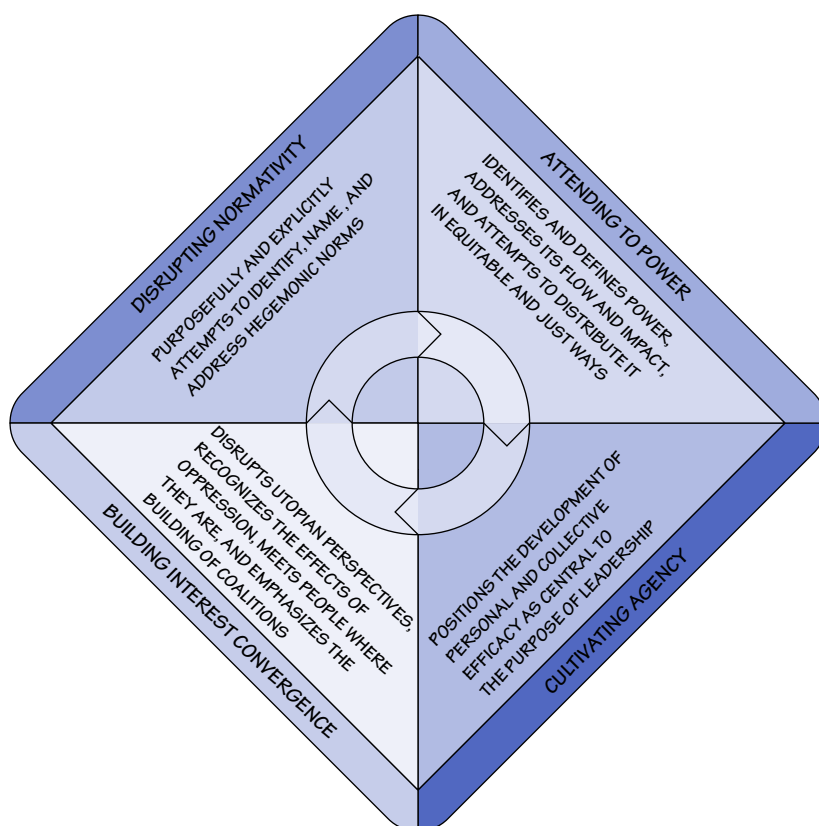
of social life, suggesting it occurs when “we could know, and should know, but don’t know because it makes us feel better not to know” (p. 246). Willful blindness reflects complicity with hegemonic systems and a retreat from responsibility. Examining leadership theories for willful blindness means considering how they may purposefully avoid addressing ill-structured problems for the convenience of simplicity. For example, does the theory acknowledge how context matters and different contexts may privilege certain types of leadership or embrace leadership only from those with particular social identities? Does the theory suggest the importance of democratic processes but then avoid building them into how leadership unfolds? Ultimately, Heffernan reminds us, “You cannot fix a problem that you refuse to acknowledge” (p. 94).

Flow of Power

The study of power is at the center of just about any critical social theory. However, the mere mention of the word can elicit strong reactions. Alinsky (1971) argued that power “has become an evil word, with overtones and undertones that suggest the sinister, the unhealthy, the Machiavellian. . . . Power, in our minds, has become almost synonymous with corruption and immorality” (p. 50). As such, discussions of power often get situated as negative or are omitted entirely from leadership theories. If we fail to understand what power is and how it operates, we have little chance of navigating it effectively. It can also cause us to default to relationships characterized by authority compliance, ignore how power contributes to social stratifications in society, or limit our own sense of agentic power. Any critical analysis of leadership theory must examine how power is treated. For example, is there an explicit acknowledgment of power beyond basic authority relationships? Does the theory address how power flows around and through organizations influencing leadership? Is power situated as inherently good, inherently bad, or conveniently absent from the theory altogether?

Tools of Reconstruction

The process of reconstruction operates much in the same way as deconstruction. It asks individuals to lean into the discomfort of theoretical fallibility and draw on personal power, knowledge, and identity to alter, adjust, adapt, or otherwise rebuild theory in ways that contribute to a more just world. I would caution you, though, that reconstruction does *not* mean completely “fixing” theories or generating perfect solutions. It also does not begin

FIGURE 2.2 Tools of reconstruction.

after “completing” an exhaustive deconstruction process. Rather, reconstruction flows with the process of deconstruction. Reconstruction is the process of making incremental gains through the adaptation and alteration of theory, moving its understanding and application in the direction of social justice.

Disrupting Normativity

Perhaps the most powerful way to address issues that arise from ideological critique and willful blindness is by disrupting normativity. This is just a fancy way of framing an approach to reconstruction that purposefully and explicitly attempts to identify, name, and redress hegemonic norms. When we engage in disrupting normativity, we actively call into question what is labeled and accepted as “normal.” One might take a broad approach to using this tool that supplements the theory by including an

explicit statement of the need to disrupt normativity or integrating prompt questions that accomplish this. Alternatively, one might use a more specific approach, rebuilding a model entirely to better identify and disrupt hegemonic assumptions.

Attending to Power

Attending to power involves the identification of how a theory defines power, addresses its flow and impact, and attempts to distribute it in equitable and just ways. Of course this presumes that a theory even names power in the first place. Use of this tool means you may have to explicitly insert conceptions of power or articulate how a component of a theory may function differently, depending on how power flows within an organization, culture, or context. You might infuse a purposeful discussion of power relations and how sources of power differ based on social stratification, altering how a person enacts elements of a leadership theory. You could also add new components to a model that capture how leaders can better distribute and share power, moving from a stance of power *over* or *through* to power *with* others.

Cultivating Agency

This tool of reconstruction elevates the importance of individual and collective agency pushing theory to position their development as more than a convenient by-product of leadership but central to its purpose. Brookfield (2005) reminds us that “a sense of possessing power—or having the energy, intelligence, resources, and opportunity to act on the world—is a precondition of intentional social change” (p. 47). Reconstructing theory with this tool could involve re-centering decision making, responsibility, and control with those involved in an activity versus those with positional authority. Another approach might be to explicitly acknowledge authority relationships and include content that reduces the likelihood that paternalistic or authority compliance dynamics will emerge. A theory could also be adapted by directing greater attention to fostering collective agency rather than just individual agency.

Building Interest Convergence

Alinsky (1971) argued that we cannot wait for people to engage in the work of social change out of altruistic intentions but must appeal to reciprocal benefits if that is what will lead to action. Bell (1980) echoed this sentiment in his work in critical race theory, introducing the phrase *interest convergence* to explain how in the United States White people will often only support issues associated with racial justice when they see some form of mutual or shared benefit. As a tool of reconstruction, building interest convergence acknowledges the difficulty of engaging others in the work of

leadership for social change. It advocates recognizing the negative effects of oppression (not solely on minoritized individuals but on those from the majority as well), meeting people where they are, and building coalitions. Using this tool to reconstruct a theory might involve challenging utopian presumptions that people will engage in socially just forms of leadership because it is simply “the right thing to do” in favor of more realistic approaches. It might also involve adding elements to a leadership model that explicitly address ways to build coalitions across differences in social location.

ESSENTIAL PREPARATION FOR APPLYING CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

This chapter covers critical perspectives broadly, along with possible tools for their use in analyzing leadership theory. If at this point you are not quite seeing how this will work, don't worry. The rest of the book is an exercise in learning to engage with theory using these perspectives. The assumption is *not* that you are now an expert or that you should understand the concepts fully.

I'd like you to see the use of critical perspectives as a process that will continually evolve. In many ways, using critical perspectives parallels the process of physically exercising. At the start, it can be overwhelming and exhausting. We are left sore the next day, and we are more likely to quit in the early phases. However, if we stick with it, the process becomes more rewarding, and we reap a multitude of benefits. I like to equate getting comfortable using critical perspectives to muscle memory. The more we train, the more natural it becomes.

Getting comfortable in using critical perspectives does, however, require us to work on a number of fundamental skills. I'm introducing these at the end of the chapter because when I personally get stuck in attempts to see critical perspectives or the process of deconstruction and reconstruction, I revisit these skills. They serve as powerful catalysts for thinking about and using critical perspectives.

Metacognition

Metacognition involves thinking about how we think. It goes beyond knowledge acquisition (i.e. knowing a piece of information) and basic cognition (i.e. how one comes to know or make meaning of information) to explore our awareness of the learning process itself. An example of metacognition would be knowing that learning in particular domains (e.g. math, statistics) is more difficult for you, along with being able to identify particular experiences

that might make you shut down or open up to the learning process. Metacognition is an essential skill for applying critical perspectives because it allows us to explore not just *what* we know or *how* we know, but also the ways these are informed by stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location. As Anyon (2009) so beautifully states, “We do not want to rely on theory—even critical theory—to do our thinking for us” (p. 5).

Critical Self-Reflection

All learning is personal, but critical perspectives push the boundaries of sense-making to examine often-unchallenged assumptions, thus requiring vulnerability, suspension of ego, and increased comfort with personal fallibility. Levinson (2011) argued that “the process of reflecting critically on one’s position in society relative to broader social structures (such as religion, culture, and the state) is the means through which hegemony is made visible” (p. 56). This means that critical self-reflection *must* focus on one’s own positionality and not just the privileges or struggles of others or social issues in general. Boggs and Kurashige (2012) remind us that “self-transformation and structural transformation must go hand in hand” (p. 15). This situates the use of critical perspectives as inherently personal and necessitating deep, ongoing self-exploration.

Social Perspective-Taking

Social perspective-taking is the ability to adopt another person’s point of view and accurately infer their thoughts and feelings. Heffernan (2011) warned that “people are about twice as likely to seek information that supports their own point of view as they are to consider an opposing idea” (p. 19), which showcases the power that stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location wield over our thinking and capacity for understanding and empathizing with others. Central to working with critical perspectives is fostering one’s ability to engage in social perspective-taking. This begins with seeking to understand others’ beliefs rather than immediately evaluating their merit as well as empathizing with their feelings rather than dismissing them.

Dialectical Thinking

Tied directly to the process of deconstruction, dialectical thinking requires us to engage in the process of holding two seemingly contradictory concepts in unison. Can we see how they are mutually constitutive and allow them to coexist? For example, let’s say you have a

supervisor who has provided substantive mentoring, but who can also act at times like a controlling parent. Do you frame the person as good or bad? Are they effective or ineffective? Or are you able to both appreciate what they have done for you as well as acknowledge their limitations? As a cognitive process, this is exceptionally difficult. F. Scott Fitzgerald famously said that “the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” Unpacking our own struggles with dialectical thinking is an important skill for employing critical perspectives.

Critical Hope

A central tenet of critical social theory is movement toward a more just world. Envisioning that possibility necessitates a sense of critical hope, which Preskill and Brookfield (2009) described as “sober and thoughtful. . . . It also comprehends at a profound level how complex and multifaceted is the fight for social justice. . . . Hope is born of the unyielding day-to-day work that ordinary people do to make their communities better” (p. 171). Martin and Te Riele (2011) argued that “nothing debases concepts such as hope and change quite as much as watching them being thrown around like confetti—as though they suggest easy or simple solutions and practices” (p. 44). Thus, critical hope is derived from the realistic appraisal of conditions, a sense of personal and collective resilience, and the ability to envision a better future. Cultivating critical hope can provide a powerful sense of direction and purpose for using critical perspectives while simultaneously acknowledging that the struggle is real.

Whenever you find yourself getting stuck, frustrated, or conflicted with the use of critical perspectives, it may be helpful to step away from the content itself and instead explore the above fundamental skills. They provide pathways for both staying in the process and pushing forward.

BENEFITS OF USING CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Engaging with and challenging our perspectives about leadership are essential to the process of learning about formal leadership theory. This can be both humbling and painful as we question how we came to believe what we did or overlooked what we now see. Expanding our perspectives can also be liberating—validating otherwise unacknowledged realities and affording a greater sense of self-determination and agency. So at this point you may be wondering what specific benefits are accrued from the use of critical perspectives to examine leadership theory.

Calhoun (1991) suggested that “critical social theory helps practical actors deal with social change by helping them see beyond the immediacy of what is at any particular moment to conceptualize something of what could be” (p. 9). Leonardo (2004) concurs, offering that much of the power of adopting a critical perspective is because it “does not ask students to wait until answers to difficult social problems are available before they critique them, as if a person cannot point out a fire because she cannot extinguish it” (p. 13). So if we believe in contributing to social change and bettering our world, then critical perspectives offer insights into how to do just that particularly in the real world where leadership theories are manifest.

Let’s go back to the quote that opened this chapter. It affords a powerful reminder that what we come to accept as “normal” can actually be quite terrifying. Whether through a process of socialization or willful blindness, we may accept certain ideas that operate on faulty assumptions or have adverse effects on ourselves or others. In discussing the evolving nature of leadership scholarship, Grint (2011) argued, “What we think leadership is, is necessarily related to the cultural mores that prevail at the time. Thus, what appears ‘normal’ at the time . . . can often appear extraordinarily naive when considered retrospectively. The problem, of course, is that we cannot step outside our own milieu to reflect upon ourselves as disembodied and disinterested scholars” (p. 13). He isn’t wrong in this statement, as it is exceptionally difficult to leverage the critical self-reflection and social perspective-taking necessary to “step outside our own milieu.” However, critical perspectives give us the tools to do just that.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced critical perspectives as a framework to interpret leadership theory and deepen the ability to engage with content as a critical learner. Central tenets were covered along with three major themes: stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location. These meta-themes from critical social theory serve as powerful framers of social reality and shape how we come to see what is “normal” in the world. The chapter also introduced tools for applying critical perspectives to the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. Finally, the chapter ended with recommendations for how to cultivate fundamental skills associated with the application of critical perspectives. The rest of this book will serve as a vehicle for you to both learn the content of leadership theory and cultivate your skills in using critical perspectives as interpretive tools.

Eboo Patel is founder and president of Interfaith America, the leading interfaith organization in the United States. Eboo served on President Obama's Inaugural Faith Council and has written five books, including *We Need to Build: Field Notes for Diverse Democracy*. He is an Ashoka Fellow and holds a doctorate in the sociology of religion from Oxford University, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar.

I grew up as a Brown kid in the White suburbs of Chicago, which of course influenced how I viewed myself and the world around me. When I think about my experiences and evolution as a person of color, I parallel them to this idea of taking pills—each time it was like I was consuming a very specific perspective and allowing it to shape how I saw the world.

When I was seven years old, I swallowed whole a pill representing White cultural norms. I desperately wanted to fit in with the White culture I saw all around me; I really thought this was what “normal” life looked like. And it didn't help that a popular cartoon TV show at the time featured a stereotypical Indian character as a running punch line, which ripened school bullies to push me around at recess. I mean, I would watch the show and think to myself, “Man, I'm going to go to school and get it tomorrow.” As a kid from a Brown family, I experienced everything from wanting to change my name, the clothes my mother wore, and even the food that was on the kitchen table every night. Those thoughts were very much a part of my life from the get-go; that was the experience of being a Brown kid in White suburban America.

When I got to college, one of my first memories was walking into the gym and seeing that there were three different basketball games going on: a Black game, an Asian game, and a White game. Without hesitation I found my legs automatically going toward the White game. I remember pausing, looking around, and thinking to myself, “Why isn't everybody walking toward the White game?” I genuinely believed that everyone wanted to be a part of the “White game,” so to speak. But, it was also at that point that my classes exposed me to critical perspectives related to power, privilege, and oppression, and I finally realized that for most of my life I had considered whiteness as the standard.

So, at the age of 17 I swallowed a second pill: the pill of Cornel West and Michel Foucault, two influential critical theorists. My first reaction was, “I've grown up thinking I'm ugly, but I'm *not* ugly. I've just been judging myself against a skewed standard.” That was a really, really powerful realization. The power, privilege, and oppression framework helped me realize I had grown up with an implicit prototype of what beauty was, and it was directly linked to whiteness. It defined beauty for me, which meant that I had internalized Brown as ugly. In that moment, I realized that I had been walking toward the White game not just on the basketball court, but in every aspect of my life.

I graduated college with a strong desire to use my newly developed critical perspectives to make a difference. So, my first job was teaching urban minority high school dropouts at a social service center in Chicago. The center was based in a tough part of the city with a large Latinx and Black population. At the time, I was working with 17-, 18-, and 19-year-old kids, and for the first six months, the only conversation I had with them

was about how oppressed they were. I wanted them to see the world as I saw it. I thought I would be helping them by feeding them the same second pill that I had swallowed. Well, one day the math teacher, a Mexican American dude, literally threw me up against the wall and said, “You’re talking to them in ways that make *you* feel good. Teach them how to read! Stop teaching them about Paulo Freire when they can’t even read *Cat in the Hat*!”

You see, I had spent so much time working with them to deconstruct their worlds to see the systems of oppression that surrounded them that I had completely neglected exploring how it could be reconstructed; I was just leaving them with unassembled pieces of a broken worldview. Looking back, I think I was so impressed with my power, privilege, and oppression framework—and that I actually had kids who I saw fitting into that framework in the room with me—that I just couldn’t help superimposing it onto them. That’s when it occurred to me that these kids had agency in their own right, and I could help them to grow and develop more. Instead, I was doing profound damage because they weren’t ready, and I was suggesting that they had less agency than they really did. But that epiphany literally took a dude throwing me up against a wall and saying, “You know what helping the oppressed looks like? It looks like giving them the same tools that your middle-class upbringing gave *you*.” That was my third and final pill: a new focus on acknowledging privilege as well as recognizing and building agency rather than eroding it by shaping people’s mindsets into that of “the oppressed.”

Although I couldn’t see it while I was living it, there has absolutely been a developmental nature to these experiences. Sometimes I wonder if I could have gotten here a different way—if I could have perhaps skipped some of the struggles or gotten here quicker if I hadn’t been influenced into those different ways of thinking. But, at least for me, I think I had to work through each to see the different parts of the oppression, power, and privilege framework, and come out emphasizing the importance of strengthening agency. I think going through this is the only way I could have gotten to where I am today.

Reflection Questions

1. Eboo provides multiple “moments of clarity” that altered his perspectives. Can you recall any aha moments in your life that challenged your stocks of knowledge or ideology? What served as the catalysts for this learning?
2. When you think about the metaphor of taking a pill, what “pills” have you taken that shape who you are? How might social location influence this along with your worldview and what you see as normative?
3. Eboo shares how he focused so much on deconstruction that he lost sight of the process of reconstruction and the agency it cultivates. Are there times in your life where you’ve done the same? What helped move you into the process of reconstruction? What lessons might you translate from this to the process of learning about leadership?

Interpreting Leadership Theory Using Critical Perspectives

“The greatest gift is not to be afraid to question.”

—RUBY DEE

If you’re wondering when this book is actually going to get to the leadership theories it’s supposed to cover, the wait is almost over. The first chapter set up the essential architecture of leadership while the second introduced critical perspectives. The quote that opens this chapter from actress, poet, and activist Ruby Dee frames the importance, privilege, and power of using these areas of knowledge to question not only what we attend to in leadership theory but also how we interpret and enact it.

This chapter presents an overview of the “story most often told” about how leadership theory has evolved, setting up the opportunity to see if the way *you* look at things changes through the application of the architecture of leadership and critical perspectives. It also introduces the leadership challenge model to demonstrate the deconstruction and reconstruction processes. This will be our first time to “play” with theory together. Ultimately, the chapter sets the stage for the remainder of the book and pushes you to begin employing critical perspectives.

CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY AND LEADERSHIP

Despite decades of calls from scholars stating the benefits of using critical perspectives in the study of leadership, there remain too few examples (Beatty and Guthrie 2021; Carroll, Ford, and Taylor 2022; Chunoo and Guthrie 2023; Dugan and Henderson 2021;

Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin 2006; Ospina and Foldy 2009; Preskill and Brookfield 2009; Western 2019). This is disappointing given the increased attention to issues of social justice in contemporary theories, which seemingly align beautifully with the values and premises of critical social theory. The limited literature that does exist can be found in critical leadership studies, which examines “the patterns of power and domination associated with leadership and relating these patterns to broader ideological and institutional conditions” (Alvesson and Spicer 2014, 45). Think of critical leadership studies as the integration of the architecture of leadership (Chapter 1) with critical perspectives (Chapter 2).

Several themes arise in the critical leadership studies literature (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, 2014; Collinson 2011, 2014, 2018, 2020; Ladkin and Patrick 2022). These themes offer areas for attention when deconstructing and reconstructing leadership theory and include de-romanticizing leadership as inherently good and positive, examining how leadership may reinforce domination and control, and affording greater attention to social location. The themes also serve as a powerful reminder that when left unquestioned, the concept of leadership can default to serving as a tool for ideology and hegemony versus a vehicle for social change and democratic principles.

EVOLUTION OF FORMAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

Let’s start by examining the evolution of formal leadership theory, or as I like to refer to it, the “story most often told.” My choice of language here is purposeful and meant to cue that this is not the *only* story of how leadership has evolved. It just happens to be the one typically privileged in academic literature. If you think back to the previous chapter’s discussion of social location, we introduced the concept of a dominant narrative, which this story embodies.

Some may be wondering why we would bother studying something identified as a dominant narrative in the first place. Remember, the point of using critical perspectives is not to dismiss but to deconstruct and then reconstruct in more democratic and just ways. Even critical social theories themselves contain dominant elements and are evolved through the process of continual deconstruction and reconstruction. Scholars remind us of the importance of understanding dominant narratives in the process of dismantling them and that they serve as important sites of resistance and reclamation (Hooks 1994; Ospina et al. 2012).

The “Story Most Often Told”

Mapping the vast amount of leadership theory that exists is no small feat. Any synthesis carries the dual responsibilities of determining *what* is included and *how* it is organized. *What* to include is a selection process often reflecting that which is positioned as valuable by those with power in a social system. *How* best to organize the theories selected for inclusion is conceptualized in a variety of ways. Most frameworks position time as the central dimension, moving chronologically through theoretical advancements. Not surprisingly, this showcases evolving research paradigms and how newer modes of inquiry alter what theory attends to in its content. Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) provided a helpful chronological framework illustrating theoretical progression over time (see Table 3.1). By default, the selection, representation, and reproduction of theories identified as significant to the knowledge base contributes to the creation and proliferation of the “story most often told.”

The “story most often told” typically includes the articulation of a powerful paradigm shift in how leadership is understood. Returning to our discussion of research paradigms from Chapter 1, Kuhn (1962) argued that scientific inquiry rarely proceeds in a rigidly linear fashion but through fits and starts as well as the occasional paradigm shift. Remember, a *paradigm* represents the shared and often taken-for-granted lens through which the world is interpreted. A *paradigm shift*, then, reflects an abrupt change that alters the framework through which meaning is made and the world understood. It represents a fundamental adjustment in perception that influences how a person navigates the world.

For example, the COVID-19 pandemic created multiple paradigm shifts on a global scale. With more than 100 million reported cases of the virus and over 1 million deaths in the United States (World Health Organization n.d.), the pandemic did the unthinkable in shutting down much of society. It altered how people interacted, how we mitigated health risks, how we engaged with everything from technology to entertainment, and much more. Think about the rapidity with which education shifted almost entirely to virtual delivery—a proposition perhaps thought impossible to scale so rapidly. Similarly, the very structure of the workforce changed with remote work being normalized (if begrudgingly so) and entire industries being shuttered. The ramifications of this paradigm shift are still felt today via the fundamental differences in how we navigate the post-pandemic world.

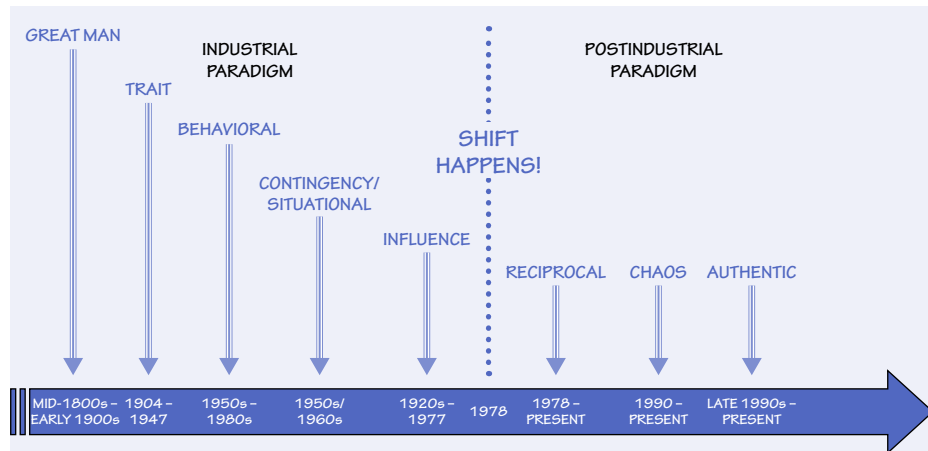
Attempting to define and organize Western leadership literature, Rost (1991) argued that a paradigm shift divided theories into industrial and post-industrial perspectives. Industrial leadership was “management oriented, personalistic in focusing only on

TABLE 3.1 Clusters of formal leadership theories over time

Approach	Time Period	Major Assumptions
Great man	Mid-1800s to early 1900s	Leadership development is based on Darwinistic principles; leaders are born, not made; leaders have natural abilities of power and influence.
Trait	1904 to 1947	A leader has superior or endowed qualities; certain individuals possess a natural ability to lead; leaders have traits that differentiate them from followers.
Behavioral	1950s to early 1980s	There is one best way to lead; leaders who express high concern for both people and tasks will be effective.
Situational/ contingency	1950s to 1960s	Leaders act differently, depending on the situation; the situation determines who emerges as a leader; different leadership behaviors are required for different situations.
Influence	Mid-1920s to 1977	Leadership is an influence or social exchange process.
Reciprocal	1978 to present	Leadership is a relational and shared process; emphasis is on followership; leadership is the result of participants' and/or leaders' interactions on a common agenda or change initiative; the outcome of leadership is social change.
Chaos or systems	1990 to present	Leadership occurs within the context of a complex, rapidly changing world; leadership is a relational process; control is not possible; leadership is an influence relationship; it is important to understand the systems in which leadership occurs.
Authentic leadership approaches	Late 1990s to present	Leadership is genuine and transparent; authenticity emerges among leaders' and participants' interactions and develops over time; leadership is grounded in positive psychological behaviors and traits; leadership is values- and purpose-driven, with an explicit moral dimension.

Adapted with permission from Komives et al. (2013). Copyright © 2013 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reprinted with permission from Wiley.

the leader, goal-achievement dominated, self-interested and individualistic in outlook, male-oriented, utilitarian and materialistic in ethical perspective” (Rost 1991, 27). Conversely, postindustrial leadership is characterized by influence relationships between leaders and followers grounded in mutual development as they engage collaboratively in the pursuit of substantive change. Rost (1991) framed this shift as reflecting a broader societal movement away from the industrial and credited Burns’s (1978) now classic book, *Leadership*, as ushering in a new era in how leadership was understood, experienced, and

FIGURE 3.1 The evolution of formal leadership theory.

enacted—a grand paradigm shift that continues to reverberate in how leadership theory is conceived today.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the clustering of theories over time in the “story most often told.” Note that arrows representing theory clusters point down to the time line. This is an indication that although specific theoretical perspectives may have dominated at one point in time, they still retain influence today. Rather than disappearing altogether, these ideas continue to shape both formal and informal leadership theories as well as the application of theories to practice. The figure also captures the dramatic shift in paradigms between industrial and postindustrial perspectives, which carries significant academic and pragmatic cache and is often used as a quick means of explaining how best to make meaning of and organize the leadership literature.

Making Connections

- How does the “story most often told” align with your stocks of knowledge related to leadership? Are there points of congruence and divergence?
- How might consideration of social location cause you to question what is included and omitted from the “story most often told” about leadership?

Deconstructing the “Story Most Often Told”

Let’s take some time and deconstruct the “story most often told” using the architecture of leadership and tools of deconstruction.

Interdisciplinarity

The architectural footing of interdisciplinarity states the importance of understanding how disciplinary knowledge across content areas interacts dynamically to shape our understanding of leadership theory. Yet, the “usual suspects” of theories typically show up in the evolution of formal leadership theory across just about every classification system. These theories sometimes represent interdisciplinary thinking, but often emerge from a singular disciplinary perspective, drawing into question how readily adaptable they are across contexts. There is often greater representation of theories from some disciplines (e.g. business, psychology) than others, diminishing the overall quality and representativeness of scholarship. The reality is that the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach is almost always aspirational with our goal to push theory in this direction. When this is not done or avoided, however, it becomes problematic. What is lost when theories from education or public policy, for example, are completely absent from the story of how leadership theory has evolved?

Ideological Critique

The deconstruction tool of ideological critique, which questions how ideology and hegemony contribute to normative assumptions perpetuating dominant narratives, offers insights into what is included and omitted in the “story most often told.” A brief story may assist here.

I had the opportunity to facilitate leadership training programs in Cuba working with people engaging in the equivalent of nonprofit work. This work (e.g. building local libraries, advancing microfinance and enterprise, providing for needs of specific populations) was actually illegal, and our participants were at great risk for attending the training. The program was constructed around learning needs that the Cubans identified, and leadership was at the top of their list.

In every city I encountered the same reaction to a presentation of the evolution of leadership theories: uncomfortable laughter. Participants would explain that in the cultural context of Cuba, the understanding of leadership had barely moved beyond great man theory. The other strands of leadership theory simply were not part of their reality.

That there could exist other conceptions of leadership or even the differentiation of the terms *leader* and *leadership* were both exciting and painful ideas.

Participants expressed a simultaneous longing to learn about these alternative approaches as well as frustration that it was not already present in the limited literature to which they had access. Interestingly, when a mirror was held up to their efforts organizing in the community to effect significant social change, participants began to recognize that their *informal* leadership theories reflected the content of *formal*, postindustrial theories that they thought might be impossible to enact in their cultural context. They also began to realize that their informal leadership theories were often *more* sophisticated than formal leadership theories and could contribute to theoretical knowledge. They didn't need formal theory from an external cultural context to validate what they were already doing as legitimate. Formal theory certainly provided language for something that was implicitly understood and assisted in shaping their thinking, but they had been engaging in postindustrial approaches to leadership all along.

This story illustrates how perceptions of leadership are built on social constructions derived from one's cultural context and influenced by ideology and hegemony. Ideological critique helps examine how dominant narratives emerge and are positioned as normative. For example, the "story most often told" clearly reflects a US bias, with not a single theory originating from outside the United States. Furthermore, as evidenced in the Cuban example, the evolution of leadership theory as described in the United States may not reflect that of other cultural contexts. The US perspective isn't necessarily bad, but it must be named and deconstructed versus presumed to be accurate, situated as the version against which all others should be compared, or imposed on other contexts.

Ideology and hegemony also operate domestically in the United States. Eagly and Chin (2010) argued that the leadership literature "infrequently addressed the diversity of leaders and followers in terms of culture, gender, race and ethnicity, or sexual orientation. This omission has weakened the ability of research and theory to address some of the most provocative aspects of contemporary leadership" (p. 216). More than a decade later, there remains a drought of leadership literature addressing social location in sophisticated ways.

This omission contributes to minimal representation of theories written by and about or even contextualized to reflect women; people of color; members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities (LGBTQIA+); and other minoritized populations. This in turn has a well-documented, significant, and negative effect contributing to a dominant narrative that shapes how theory is interpreted and translated to practice, systematically telling the stories of some and omitting those of others (Ayman and

Korabik 2010; Beatty and Guthrie 2021; Chin and Trimble 2015; Fassinger, Shullman, and Stevenson 2010; Ladkin and Patrick 2022; Ospina and Foldy 2009).

Owen (2020), however, gives a sense of critical hope articulating an emergent, powerful shift in leadership scholarship. Reconstructing Lord et al.'s (2017) work identifying three distinct "waves" of leadership scholarship in the literature, Owen identified a "fourth wave" focused on "conversations about ideology, hegemony, social location, power, and agency" (p. 21). Her approach renders visible the critical perspectives on leadership scholarship that may not appear as frequently in prestigious academic journals but nonetheless exists and informs how theories are created, studied, and enacted in practice. Even more importantly, Owen frames this "fourth wave" of leadership scholarship less as a distinctive paradigm shift but as actual waves that ebb and flow depending on social context. This is a liberatory concept as it restores our agency as critical learners of leadership to advocate and influence the future of scholarship. Evidence of this increases each year in the leadership scholarship with deeper explorations of critical perspectives.

Commodification

Recall that commodification focuses on examining the negative effects that can occur when production and consumption are pursued regardless of costs. This provides a useful tool for questioning how individual leadership theories retain influence over time and sometimes long beyond their point of utility. This is a fascinating phenomenon given the rapidity of organizational and cultural changes in society. To be fair, the survival of older theories could be justified as a function of how richly descriptive they are. It could also be that scholars have systematically adapted the work based on findings from research and shifting social norms, modifying and allowing older theories to evolve over time.

However, I worry that some theories avoid integrating substantive changes as a means to maximize their ability to be sold in the marketplace. It becomes imperative to closely examine whether "adaptations" to theories reflect legitimate modifications based on empirical research or convenient retrofitting to maintain the ability to sell a product. Take, for example, the behavioral theories in Table 3.1, which are concerned with identifying the one "right" way to lead. This is in stark contrast to successive theories, which articulate the importance of context as well as how complex and chaotic systems decrease the viability of a universal approach to leadership. Are these merely differing theoretical arguments between scholars, or is there enough substantive evidence to suggest some behavioral theories fail to fully articulate the complexity of leadership? Important questions emerge about

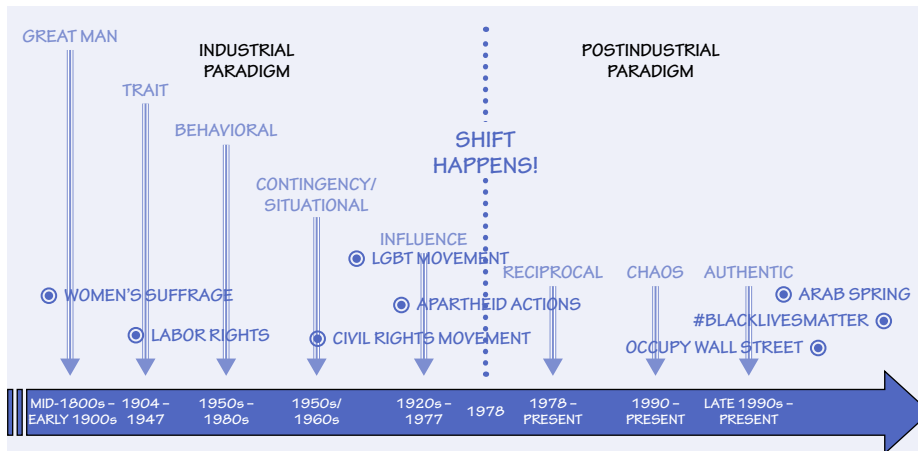
who gains from the continued influence of a theory as well as the impact this has on how people learn and apply leadership in practice.

Flow of Power

Flow of power addresses the mutually constituting relationship between knowledge and power, offering useful insights for examining Rost's (1991) articulation of a paradigm shift from industrial to postindustrial perspectives. This shift was attributed to Burns's 1978 publication, which Rost argued served as a catalyst for postindustrial ways of thinking about and practicing leadership. He was also unequivocal about the pervasiveness of the paradigm shift, writing that "leadership is one of the concepts and practices that will be transformed as Western societies move from an industrial to a postindustrial paradigm. . . . But leaders and followers are not up to that job unless leadership scholars and practitioners begin to move now toward [a] model of leadership that is attuned to the postindustrial era. What our organizations and communities need are leadership relationships based on a postindustrial model of leadership. . . . But they will not become widespread until scholars and practitioners build a new school of leadership" (p. 127). His assertion of the near-total absence of postindustrial approaches to leadership until the publication of Burns's book is troubling. The idea that approaches emphasizing shared relationships, non-coercion, collaboration, process orientations, and pursuit of the common good did not exist until 1978 simply does not square with history.

Figure 3.2 reconstructs the visual representation of the evolution of leadership theory presented earlier by overlaying dates associated with a variety of social movements. These movements are characterized by approaches to leadership that align beautifully with the tenets of postindustrial leadership. Certainly, events such as the Arab Spring and #BlackLivesMatter occurred *after* Burns's book was published, but the suffrage, civil rights, and labor movements in the United States and early anti-apartheid actions in South Africa occurred well *before* this date—and those are just a few examples. This raises the question as to how one could argue that postindustrial leadership did not exist prior to Burns's writing.

Women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, and members of many non-Western cultures have long engaged in practices associated with postindustrial leadership (Komives and Dugan 2010; Owen 2020). Additionally, social movements provide direct insight into the enactment of postindustrial leadership practices. If this is the case, then it calls into question the veracity of the purported paradigm shift in leadership theory. Most certainly

FIGURE 3.2 Reconsidering the evolution of formal leadership theory.

the shift was not of the magnitude suggested and at best may have reflected no more than a shift among those with the power to shape knowledge in society.

It very well could be that for those operating from a place of societal privilege (i.e. high socioeconomic, well-educated, cisgender, White men) Burns's (1978) work offered exposure to new perspectives. I could also imagine how postindustrial leadership might be perceived as a significant paradigm shift for those entrenched in understandings of leadership associated with production, power, and control. However, for the vast majority of people, postindustrial ways of engaging in leadership already existed. They were already living these approaches. This suggests the presence of powerful hegemonic norms shaping what constitutes "legitimate" leadership theory as dictated by those with the power to influence academic discourse.

Willful Blindness

The deconstruction tool of willful blindness is helpful in understanding why the "story most often told" persists. Recall that willful blindness addresses the ways in which we become complicit in maintaining inequitable systems by failing to acknowledge or act when something is harmful. As previously stated, all too frequently the experiences of women, people of color, and other minoritized groups are omitted from leadership theory, along with potentially powerful lessons from social movements. When they do appear, content is often narrowly compartmentalized to showcase issues of diversity or framed as interesting

but ultimately unsustainable forms of social activism versus leadership. Perpetuating the myth of the paradigm shift exacerbates this and represents at best a desire to stay unaware and at worst an attempt to maintain an inequitable status quo.

The misattribution of postindustrial ways of understanding leadership renders invisible all those who wrote about and practiced leadership from these perspectives well before 1978. So deep is this misattribution that in a chapter synthesizing transformational leadership, Antonakis (2012) pondered that “it provided leadership researchers the ‘ah-ha’ moment for which they had been waiting for many years; it is almost ironic to observe that in terms of its messianic explanations, the theory was to leadership research what charismatic leaders are to followers. That is, it delivered leadership researchers from their plight at a time where there was pessimism and no direction” (p. 257). Yikes. This effectively co-opts relational and collaborative approaches to leadership from the communities and movements that cultivated them. History is rewritten, enshrining postindustrial theories as extensions of the evolving history of leadership theory and a natural progression from preceding work.

The effect of co-optation is that women, people of color, and other minoritized groups are disassociated from the dominant narrative about leadership. Their stories are obscured, their contributions delegitimized or decentered, and in the process leadership becomes associated with the dominant majority. When examples of women, people of color, and other minoritized groups *are* connected to leadership, it is typically framed as an exception to the rule. This can have powerfully negative effects on leadership efficacy and motivation, which in turn constrains leadership enactment. What better way to maintain the status quo than to convince those who might challenge it to opt out on their own?

Furthermore, social movements and activism represent attempts to disrupt the status quo. Their disassociation from the “story most often told” and leadership theory in general has a powerful effect in labeling these efforts as episodic and unsustainable. It also makes it easier to divorce discussions of power from leadership. This conveniently reinforces leadership as inherently positive and nondisruptive, strengthening existing power structures.

Reconstructing the Evolution of Leadership Theory

At this point I sometimes see students begin to struggle. In some cases, they are hesitant to own their thinking about how to alter a theory. What can *I* possibly offer to the discussion? Who am *I* to challenge the expertise of scholars? However, the application of critical perspectives necessitates that you do just that. In fact, it counts on you to do it as a tool for

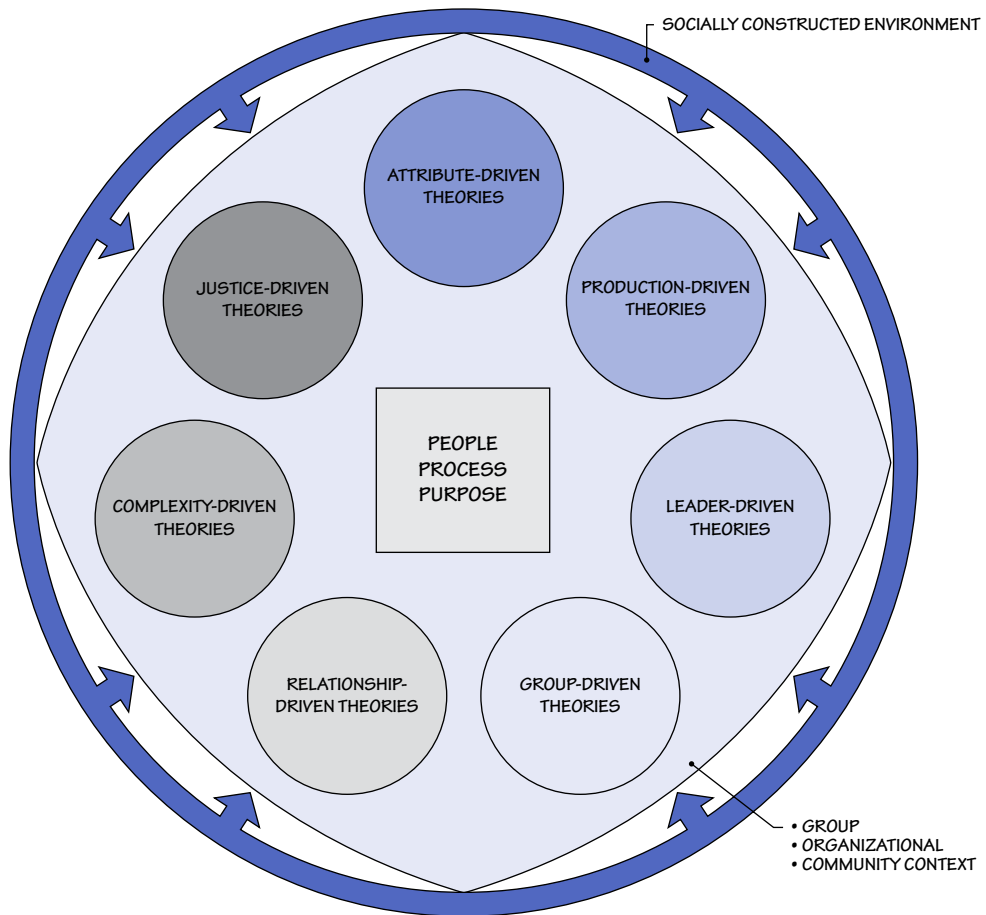
advancing the complexity and quality of our knowledge base as well as infusing more just and democratic practices into leadership.

I also see people get stuck when they are unable to generate the perfect solution in the reconstruction process. Or someone may find themselves falling into a deep gravity well of information overload searching and reading endlessly out of fear of missing a keen insight. Here it becomes important to remember that the point of reconstruction is less about resolving issues and more about engaging with them in ways that contribute to incremental advancement. Indeed, the reconstructions I offer here address some of the issues raised above, neglect others, and may even create new concerns. In fact, I hope you will deconstruct my reconstructions!

Let's approach the reconstruction of the evolution of leadership theory using the tool of *disrupting normativity*. Recall that it involves purposefully identifying, examining, and attempting to redress hegemonic norms that reinforce the status quo. We can couple this with the tool of *attending to power*, which identifies how power flows and redirects it toward more equitable ends. To achieve this, let me propose a reconstructed model of how to organize leadership theory that suggests a constant state of dynamic evolution more responsive to influences from the broader social context (see Figure 3.3).

Social Context

How a theory is created, interpreted, and enacted is dependent on social context as it informs the architecture of leadership. However, all too often social context is only implicitly alluded to without any substantive explication. It is even more common for social context to be absent entirely, as if to suggest that leadership occurs in a vacuum. To disrupt normativity, any consideration of leadership theory must account for social context, which operates at multiple levels simultaneously (e.g. organizational, cultural, societal). When social context is accounted for, it invites us into a deeper understanding of how leadership theory evolves as more than a function of just time but also social conditions and relationships that characterize a point in time. Given leadership is socially constructed, the social context exerts pressure on how leadership theories are created, studied, positioned in the literature, and ultimately enacted. This is represented in Figure 3.3 by the exterior circle labeled socially constructed environment and internal diamond representing specific contexts such as a group, organization, or community. Both of these elements exert pressure influencing the evolution of leadership theory and a story most often told.

FIGURE 3.3 Reconstructed organization of leadership theory.

Theoretical Clusters

Clusters consist of individual models, theories, taxonomies, philosophies, and frameworks that share similarities in content and approach. The clusters overlap with one another, forming a ring to illustrate how theories build on and draw from one another while contributing to a greater whole. This also makes it easier to recognize how theories retain influence over time as a function of the social context in which they are translated to practice and how it exerts pressure on leadership theories and their evolution. Clustering theories also allow for more flexibility to add, omit, or otherwise adapt the framework as our

shared understanding of leadership evolves. Thus, what is included as theories within a cluster in Figure 3.3 invites your adaptation. What theories are missing that you might add to a particular cluster? What might you envision as the next step in the evolution of leadership theory in terms of new clusters? How might their emergence or non-emergence reflect pressure exerted from the social context?

Within a cluster, the set of theories selected reflect varying degrees to which theories demonstrate concern for people, purpose, and process (see the center of Figure 3.3). The *people* dimension emphasizes the roles individuals and collectives play in leadership, while the *purpose* dimension directs concern toward understanding the intended outcomes or targets of leadership. The *process* dimension emphasizes how leadership unfolds, attending to the actions of individuals and groups in leadership processes, developmental considerations, and considerations of context. Some theories will offer attention to all three dimensions whereas others emphasize specific dimensions.

Table 3.2 describes the seven theoretical clusters that emerge from this reconstructed framework. Note that the theories included represent both the usual suspects as well as theories often omitted from the “story most often told” as an additional means to disrupt normativity. And, just as is the case with any theory we might deconstruct and reconstruct, this proposed framework for the evolution of leadership theory is open to critique and reimagination by you as the reader. It is an example of incremental progress away from a reductionistic and exclusionary “story most often told” about the evolution of leadership theory but it is far from perfect or “right.” But it’s a step in the direction of progress with an invitation for you to keep refining how we make meaning together.

Now it’s your turn to play with the process of deconstruction and reconstruction. I demonstrated the application of critical perspectives to the evolution of leadership theory and “story most often told.” Let’s now turn our attention to an actual leadership model: the leadership challenge (Kouzes and Posner 2023). Typically, the leadership challenge model might fall into the attribute-driven cluster of leadership theories, but let’s play with it a bit here for practice.

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE MODEL

Grounded in research started by Kouzes and Posner in the early 1980s, the leadership challenge model identifies five exemplary practices of leadership measured by a survey instrument called the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). The LPI can be completed as

TABLE 3.2 Reconstructed leadership theory clusters

Theory Cluster	Description	Content Covered
Attribute-driven theories	Strongly emphasize the <i>people dimension</i> offering specific characteristics, behaviors, or competencies associated with success in leader roles; integrate consideration of assumptions about leader prototypes; often are typological, serving as useful heuristics for self-awareness	Great man, trait; strengths-based leadership; the leadership challenge model; implicit leadership theory
Production-driven theories	Strongly emphasize the <i>purpose dimension</i> , offering prescriptive recommendations for how leaders should behave to increase productivity, efficiency, and outcome achievement	Style/behavioral; situational; path goal
Leader-driven theories	Emphasize <i>people</i> , <i>process</i> , and <i>purpose</i> dimensions, examining the role of people in shaping leadership processes targeting a specific purpose of transformation often in service of organizational goals	Transforming/transformational; authentic; servant leadership
Group-driven theories	Strongly emphasize the <i>process dimension</i> , examining how leadership unfolds in groups and teams and the role of formal leaders in shaping this	Leader member exchange; team; shared
Relationship-driven theories	Emphasize <i>people</i> and <i>process</i> dimensions equally; concern for how individuals and groups elevate democratic, reciprocal, relationships in leadership	Connective; relational model; relational philosophies
Complexity-driven theories	Emphasizes <i>process</i> considerations; push the boundaries of how theory is understood examining the roles of whole systems dynamics and adaptive learning	Adaptive; complexity
Justice-driven theories	Integrate considerations of justice and equity as core components of <i>people</i> , <i>purpose</i> , and <i>process</i> dimensions	Social change model, strategic social change leadership

a leader self-assessment or in a 360-degree format, with others filling out the instrument about the leader so that results can be triangulated for accuracy. To date, more than five million users completed the LPI, and Kouzes and Posner's (2023) model informed more than 800 independent research studies. Their work spun off numerous books, certification programs, and training programs. Few other leadership theories have achieved this degree of distribution and usage.

Overview

The leadership challenge model does not articulate a particular philosophical grounding or explicitly state a definition of leadership. However, three key tenets emerge that can be inferred as central propositions. Kouzes and Posner (2012) asserted, “Leadership is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that are available to anyone” and that “leaders mobilize others to want to struggle for shared aspirations, and this means that, fundamentally, leadership is a relationship” (p. 30). They explained that this relationship is “between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow” (p. 30), arguing that credibility provides the foundation for leadership as “constituents must be able, above all else, to believe in their leaders” (p. 37). These tenets position the model as learnable with a focus on the essential competencies of leaders.

Applying the Concept

Kouzes and Posner (2023) identified five exemplary practices of leadership (i.e. model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart), each with two commitments or strategies (see Table 3.3). The goal is for leaders to increase the frequency with which they enact these universal capacities, which in turn

TABLE 3.3 The five practices and ten commitments of exemplary leadership

Practice	Commitment
Model the way	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values. 2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.
Inspire a shared vision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities. 4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
Challenge the process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve. 6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.
Enable others to act	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. 8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.
Encourage the heart	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. 10. Celebrate values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Source: Copyright © 2012 by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. Reprinted with permission from Wiley.

contributes to a wide range of beneficial outcomes from leader effectiveness to organizational goal achievement. The outcomes are derived due to increases in perceived credibility of the leader resulting from engaging in the five practices. They are also resolute in stating that these capacities are learnable.

Like many of the attribute-driven theories, process considerations associated with the leadership challenge model are less clear. It names the five practices as universal capacities but does not clearly state how they interact with one another or should be enacted. For example, the five practices are each unique but interrelated. Is there an order effect in terms of how a person should engage in them? In other words, in working with a team should I exhibit a high frequency of encouraging the heart to foster community before increasing the frequency with which I challenge the process? Or does this not matter? Although Kouzes and Posner (2012, 2023) provide extensive recommendations on how to develop each of the individual practices, little attention is paid to process considerations associated with their actual enactment.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Research on the leadership challenge model is robust and provides empirical evidence to support the psychometric rigor of the LPI (Posner 2015). Suggesting the instrument is psychometrically rigorous is just a fancy way of saying research verifies that it measures what it says it does and there is a high level of trust in the results it produces. Independent scholars also scrutinized the model with supportive research published in academic journals contributing to its credibility. Let's walk through two themes from research on the model.

Universality

Research establishes the universality of the five practices across a wide range of groups and career fields (Kouzes and Posner 2023; Posner 2015). The five practices are also transferable beyond adults, emerging as universal leadership capacities with college and high school students. They are even consistent internationally with research verifying universality in numerous countries outside the United States.

However, questions do arise around individual differences. In early research Posner and Kouzes (1993) argued that "the opportunities for and process of leading is unrelated to individual differences such as functional background or technical expertise, race, gender, organizational position, or cultural background" (p. 198). They have largely maintained

that position (Posner 2004, 2009), although Posner (2015) acknowledged that some studies demonstrated variation on specific practices by gender and race. This variation, however, was attributed in large part to the samples being studied.

Findings that suggest the five practices of exemplary leadership do not vary by race and gender simply do not align with other research. For most minoritized groups in the United States, there are meaningful differences in opportunities in access to leadership development, leader positions, and the process of leading. It could be that this discrepancy between findings is a function of the degree to which studies using the LPI fail to account for context. In other words, there may be few differences in the *capacity* for the five practices based on race and gender, but some contexts may actually constrain the *enactment* of them because of hostile or normative climates.

Impact on Outcomes

Research establishes a wide range of beneficial leadership outcomes associated with practicing the five capacities (Kouzes and Posner 2023; Posner 2015). These benefits range from increased follower motivation and performance to improved organizational commitment and goal achievement. A word of caution is warranted here. Clearly there is an association between higher rates of exhibiting the five practices and positive leadership outcomes. However, what is unclear is to what degree researchers controlled for other factors that might influence leadership simultaneously.

Let me offer an example to explain what I mean. Let's say I want to lose weight, so I adopt two "exemplary" practices to meet that goal: I start working out three times a week, and I bring a healthy lunch to work instead of eating fast food. After six months I've lost 15 pounds and attribute it to these two practices, which very well may be the case. But what if at the same time I started these two practices I also stopped drinking soda? Could the weight loss actually be a function of giving up soda and not the other two practices? Or might it be a combination of both giving up soda and the two practices? Without controlling for other factors occurring in the environment simultaneously, it becomes difficult to determine the unique contribution of the five practices to leadership outcomes.

Wrap-Up

The leadership challenge model is well established and supported by empirical research. It offers a useful heuristic that directs attention to five universal behaviors associated with

increases in leadership outcomes. It is easy to understand and benefits from prescriptive recommendations that translate well across groups. However, anything labeled as “universal” gives me pause. It makes me question whether this seems too absolute, too prescriptive, and too easy an answer, particularly when there is so much evidence suggesting that social location makes a real difference in how leadership is understood, experienced, and enacted. This isn’t to say it shouldn’t be used but that as a critical learner anything framed as universal ought to be troubled as part of its usage. Table 3.4 offers strengths and weaknesses.

This time, I’m not going to do the work for you . . . sorry about that! I want to see you exercise your intellectual muscles and practice the art of deconstruction and reconstruction. Where might you focus your attention in terms of identifying the influences of stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location in the leadership challenge model based on the above description? Are there particular tools of deconstruction and reconstruction that are especially useful? If you were asked to conduct a training with a team using the leadership challenge model, what would you offer as a reconstructed version of the model? Each of the subsequent chapters will help you with the lift of deconstructing and reconstructing theories. However, take a moment and engage with these themes on your own to see where it leads you.

As we close this section, I hope you are seeing the benefits that accrue from “playing” with scholarly and theoretical concepts. Through the process of applying critical perspectives, we deconstruct and reconstruct our individual and shared understandings. This diminishes overreliance or dependance on any one leadership theory and moves us closer to adopting our own, eclectic approach by synthesizing and integrating ideas from across a wide array of formal and informal theories, research, and life experiences. This demonstrates the conceptual and pragmatic value of critical perspectives enhancing our abilities to engage more effectively and more equitably in leader and leadership practice.

TABLE 3.4 Strengths and weaknesses of the leadership challenge model

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a useful heuristic that is easy to understand and implement • Positions leadership as learnable, with clear areas for self-improvement and recommendations to support learning • Supported by empirical research establishing validity and psychometrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader-centric, with strong distinctions between leaders and followers • Suggests universality of the five practices, but unclear whether other factors also contribute to leadership outcomes • Near total absence of process or context considerations

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an opportunity to integrate the architecture of leadership covered in Chapter 1 with the critical perspectives introduced in Chapter 2 as a means to examine the “story most often told” about leadership theory. The chapter also introduced an alternative conceptualization of how leadership theory can be organized. My hope is that you can see how a dominant narrative about what constitutes leadership theory plays a powerful role in shaping both the leadership studies literature as well as leadership practice. I also hope you are beginning to see the value of applying critical perspectives to concepts and ideas. As we move into subsequent chapters, we will continue playing with this process and building your muscle memory for deconstruction and reconstruction.

Kevin Martin is a community organizer, leader, and social justice advocate for the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. He currently serves as the athletics director for Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas and previously worked as a high school history teacher at KIPP Delta. Kevin is an Aspen Young Leaders Fellowship alum and facilitator and holds an MA in human relations from the University of Oklahoma and a BA in sociology from Hendrix College.

As a leader, it is so important to me to represent the perspective of the Arkansas/Mississippi Delta. I went to Kipp Delta Public Schools in Helena-West Helena, Arkansas. My high school was like 98% Black, so I had no conversations or experiences at all with white people until I went to college. Now, I have my undergrad and I got my master's, both from predominantly white institutions. Coming back to this area first as a high school teacher and now as a college administrator, I have power. That has played a lot into the way that I show up. That's the way I am now.

In 2022, I was teaching in Helena, Arkansas. The other teachers and I were getting our classroom procedures and policies and everything straight. We wanted to be on one accord as a grade level. I'm the youngest teacher, and the only African American male teacher. On my team, there was a white male teacher, two African American women, probably one in her 40s and one in her 50s, and then there's me at 23. And I am *not* feelin' them.

We got into a conversation around wearing hats in class. I'm an African American male, so I'm like, *y'all*—I just don't see what's so bad about a kid wearing a hat in class! I wear hats in class. *Y'all* have never addressed me on this. What makes me different from the students? What, students can't learn when they have a hat on . . . ? The other teachers thought the hats were just a distraction.

So, like, what about hoods? Y'all say they can't wear hoods, either, but the hoods are attached to their jackets. Why shouldn't they be able to wear hoods? Y'all aren't thinking about the many different reasons people wear these types of clothes, whether it be for social comfort or as a coping mechanism. I might have my hood on because it blocks my peripheral vision or because it helps my social anxiety coming out of the pandemic. Maybe they're body conscious. Maybe they're wearing it because their hair ain't cut or combed. They wanna be able to show up in a way that's comfortable for them. Why are we trying to censor that?

I'm an African American male who grew up during the time of Treyvon Martin. My name is Kevin *Martin*. Growing up, sharing that last name hit me so hard. I stayed around the corner from a girl whose last name was Zimmerman, the same last name as the person who murdered Treyvon. We went to school together. That was a self-conscious time for me. That was *my* context. Hearing teachers I worked with talk like this, I felt like they were attacking me as a young Black kid. We argued for two hours before I stormed out. What did leadership look like in that moment? I had to be an advocate because the kids weren't there to advocate for themselves. They probably couldn't even put words to it.

As a mentor, I try to be as honest and authentic as I can be with the youth around here because I know that's what they need. As a kid, I looked up to people who drove Cadillac trucks with 24-inch rims with bass booming from down the street. For me, that was what a role model looked like. It wasn't about their beliefs; that had nothing to do with it. To me, those *things* were cool. To realize later that those things are vilified and looked down upon—that makes me even more intentional. I don't treat people like they don't have any humanity just because of the actions that they might do. I know that that person is *somebody's* role model.

I'm very intentional about presenting myself in a certain way so that in the spaces that I'm privileged to be I'm still quietly shaking the table with my ability to show up in a way that upsets people. I have a lot of tattoos. Some people might think I look like a thug, like a stereotyped image of a Black person that they have seen again and again. But once they get my perspective, once they know that I'm educated, once they hear about all of my accomplishments, people see me differently.

What's important to me is that I still *look like* the people who live here. Yeah, I might code-switch my language every once in a while, but not when I talk to students. I don't want to be that guy who's educated in a suit to these kids because, growing up, I didn't have people who were educated wearing suits in my face. It was drug dealers and barbers. It was somebody doing something illegal who still saw something in me and was able to encourage me to be the best that I could be.

For me, it's about changing people's perspective in the moment even if it's just about the way that I look. The way people from my area are seen is big for me because

(continued)

a lot of the people from here look a certain way, and I know that we're perceived a certain way. As a leader, I can draw on those biases to change the way people view us. Knowing that I reflect a part of the population that needs to be heard—that empowers me a lot.



Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does Kevin's narrative challenge the "story most often told" in leadership theory? How might these insights aid in the critical learning process?
2. Consider the lessons on leadership that Kevin speaks to in his narrative. What formal theories from theory clusters stand out for you? What can you learn from Kevin's narrative about seeing theory in practice?
3. Kevin's narrative speaks to the agency he accrued over time and his desire to mentor and be a role model for youth in his region. Where do you see alignment of this with the leadership challenge model? What aspects of Kevin's story inspire insights for reconstruction?

Attribute-Driven Theories

“A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness.”

—ALFRED KORZYBSKI

Attribute-driven theories include trait-based leadership, strengths-based leadership, and implicit leadership theory. As a cluster, these theories are decidedly focused on individuals rather than collectives and leader roles over leadership processes. Additionally, the span of time during which these theories emerged is vast, but even the oldest among them retain influence today—sometimes despite substantial research proving their inaccuracy. The quote that opens this chapter provides a useful metaphor for understanding the intent of attribute-driven theories. In essence, traits and attributes (i.e. the map) are not in and of themselves leadership (i.e. the territory), but they are potentially representative of and associated with it. When this is the case, attribute-driven theories offer insights into how best to describe, cultivate, and reproduce effective leadership.

TRAIT-BASED LEADERSHIP

“Identification of the traits that distinguish leaders from non-leaders and good leaders from bad leaders is perhaps the oldest theme in leadership scholarship” (Zaccaro 2014, 14). The term *trait*, however, can be misleading given that its meaning has changed over time and can vary from study to study. It is used both interchangeably with and distinctively from other terms such as *competency*, *attribute*, *disposition*, *behavior*, *skill*, and *personality*, just to name a few. Let’s start by offering some definitional specificity.

Zaccaro, Kemp, and Bader (2004) defined *traits* as “a range of stable individual differences, including personality, temperament, motives, cognitive abilities, skills, and expertise” (p. 104). Thus, many of the other commonly used terms (e.g. skills, personality) are simply types of traits. Let’s also position traits as the most general term and refer to constellations of traits as *attributes*. For example, traits such as ambition, drive, and initiative might be clustered together as a set of motivational attributes.

We can also divide attributes into two unique categories. *Distal attributes* are more engrained and less mutable, reflecting foundational dimensions of who we are such as personality and cognition. This does not mean that they cannot be altered, but doing so is much more difficult and requires significant time and effort. *Proximal attributes* are more malleable and readily altered or learned, with different situations requiring the use of different sets of traits. For example, one situation may require greater use of social attributes (e.g. emotional intelligence, communication skills), while another draws more on knowledge attributes (e.g. situational knowledge, content knowledge).

One additional term is worth mentioning here. Bass (2008) offered a useful framing of the term *competency*, suggesting “when traits are requirements for doing something, they are called ‘competencies’” (p. 103). Thus, we can think of attributes and the traits that comprise them as the necessary competencies for leaders and leadership.

Overview

The formal study of trait-based leadership is credited to Carlyle’s (1841) *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, which outlined “great man theory.” He argued that some men—and he literally meant males here, not a broader reference to humankind—were born with inherent gifts that set them apart from others positioning them as intrinsic leaders. Great man theories focused on the identification and study of extraordinary individuals such as Napoleon Bonaparte, William Shakespeare, Muhammad, and Martin Luther.

Galton (1869) conducted the first formal research on great man theories in his work *Hereditary Genius*, concluding that there was a natural inequality among men with inherited abilities always trumping learned ones. As a side note, this is also the man who coined the term *eugenics* (i.e. the belief that humanity is best advanced by encouraging reproduction only among those with desirable traits). I’ll just leave that little factoid there for you to mull over. I mean . . .

The first notable critique of Carlyle’s work came from Stogdill (1948), who asserted that although individual traits were significant in determining leadership effectiveness, the

situation and environment in which leadership unfolds play pivotal roles as well. Additionally, a growing consensus arose that many traits could indeed be learned. Thus, the ideas that some individuals were born leaders or that a universal list of individual differences associated with leadership could be generated were rejected (Bass 2008). This initially contributed to a decrease in trait research due to perhaps unfair scrutiny about its relative value in predicting leadership outcomes, although a revival of the approach occurred over the last two decades (Zaccaro 2012). This revival is a function of new statistical approaches that allow for the reinterpretation of previous studies in more complex ways, challenging past critiques.

Contemporary trait-based research also reflects an expansion in the types of traits being studied, moving away from those emphasizing power and control and toward those reflecting reciprocity and transformational change. It also emphasizes constellations of traits (i.e. attributes) rather than single ones, along with how traits dynamically interact with the situation and environment. Finally, reinterpretations of trait-based leadership led to the emergence of secondary theories that focused specifically on anchor traits as core to a person engaging effectively in leader roles and leadership processes.

For example, Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined the trait of emotional intelligence as “the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 189). Emotional intelligence subsequently grew in popularity as a concept both in scholarship and popular press as one trait among many of interest in leadership research (Dasborough et al. 2022). Emotionally intelligent leadership (EIL) later emerged representing a deep dive into a specific proximal trait believed to be essential for effective leadership. Shankman, Allen, and Haber-Curran (2015) suggested that EIL provides “individuals with the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and attitudes to achieve desired leadership outcomes” (p. 9). Although we won’t go into detail on the various secondary theories emerging from trait theory, it is important to understand their origins.

Applying the Concept

Trait-based leadership is premised on the idea that groups should select leaders and provide opportunities for leader development based on the traits that emerge through empirical research related to leadership outcomes. Traits that matter according to research evolved over time and can be organized into three distinct phases: great man, situational, and revival (Bass 2008; Day and Zaccaro 2007; Zaccaro 2012; Zaccaro, LaPort, and

TABLE 4.1 Trait-based leadership phases

Phase	Traits
Great man	Action orientation, aggressiveness, charm, commanding personality, courage, intelligence, intuition, judgment, persuasiveness
Situational	Achievement, adaptability, ambition, communication skills, cooperativeness, conservatism, decision-making skills, dominance, drive, emotional regulation, extraversion, honesty, initiative, insight, intelligence, masculinity, organizational skills, persistence, responsibility, self-confidence, sociability
Revival	Ability to learn, achievement, agreeableness, charisma, cognitive ability, communication skills, conscientiousness, creativity, dominance, emotional stability, extraversion, integrity, intelligence, interpersonal skills, openness, problem solving, physical traits (e.g. height, facial structure), self-confidence, sociability

José 2013). Table 4.1 provides an overview of key traits from each. Note that this list is not meant to be exhaustive but to highlight key findings.

How Research Evolves the Concept

I don't think I'm being unfair by characterizing trait-based research as the junkyard of leadership scholarship. There is perhaps no other body of research in which you can state in advance a trait of personal interest (e.g. assertiveness, intelligence, popularity) and then dive in and find evidence to support that it is indeed important. No, seriously . . . pick a trait . . . any trait. It. Is. In. There. I can almost guarantee it.

There is simply so much trait-based research that it becomes difficult to sort through and find the content that truly is of value, which is a shame because exceptional scholarship does exist. However, much of trait-based research is of questionable quality. This is problematic as people are able to find information that bolsters their assumptions even when they are biased or wrong. For example, despite clear and compelling evidence that leadership is not solely a function of heredity, great man approaches continue to wield influence today in everything from politics and business to education and medicine.

So what do we know about trait theory from high-quality empirical research that does exist?

Need for Clear Outcome Specification

A difficulty emerges in the application of trait-based research when the concept of leadership and/or outcomes that traits purportedly contribute to are not made explicitly

clear (Yukl 2013; Zaccaro 2012). The exact traits and attributes that relate to one type of leadership (e.g. command and control) may not relate to another type (e.g. social responsibility). Similarly, some research examines traits associated with leadership emergence or the adoption of leader roles, other research focuses on leader effectiveness, and still other research examines leader advancement and success. The traits associated with each of these often differ, further reinforcing the importance of definitional clarity.

Leaders Are Both Born and Made

Let's be unequivocally clear. Evidence confirms without question that leaders are not simply born. Rather, leader capacity, enactment, and effectiveness reflect a complex combination of genetic and environmental influences. The most rigorous research on biological connections to leadership involves studies of twins that allow for the examination of differential effects associated with nature versus nurture. Relatively consistent results across studies demonstrate that only between 24% and 32% of leader emergence (defined as occupancy of a positional leader role) is a function of heredity (Arvey et al., 2006; Arvey et al. 2007; De Neve et al. 2013). That leaves an additional 68%–76% that is influenced by the environment, positioning leaders as indisputably *both* born and made.

For those who are feeling that 32% is still high, these studies looked *only* at leader role occupancy—not capacity, not efficacy, not motivation, not enactment, and most certainly not effectiveness. Furthermore, holding a positional leader role is hardly a natural phenomenon but typically a function of being elected or selected by others. Those processes of election and selection are deeply tied to perceptions of “fitting” a dominant leader prototype as we will see when we cover implicit leadership theory later in this chapter. As such, the 32% says more about the genetics that are associated with dominant leader prototypes than leadership itself.

Wrap-Up

Although trait-based leadership ebbs and flows in popularity and credibility, it is among the oldest and largest bodies of leadership literature. Its roots are definitively in a history that reflects biased understandings of leadership emblematic of the time. There is no doubt that great man theory perpetuates inequality by its very design.

I cannot stress enough how important it is to remember that because of the strength of trait-based leadership's roots, great man approaches continue to influence conceptions

TABLE 4.2 Strengths and weaknesses of trait theory

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supported by substantial empirical evidence demonstrating transferability of traits across contexts and importance in predicting leader emergence and effectiveness• Contributed to disproving that leaders were simply born• Offers description of traits associated with leader emergence and effectiveness, useful for targeting learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research is largely atheoretical and of varying quality, with “leader” at best defined by positional role occupancy and at worst left undefined• Disagreement over which traits matter as well as which traits are innate versus learnable• Recognizes influences from situational and environmental contexts, but fails to address influences from broader social systems

of leadership today as well as shape the types of traits considered worthy of study. Because of this, it is easy to dismiss the scholarship on trait-based leadership altogether rather than adopting the critical learning lens necessary to acknowledge its history, sort the good research from the bad, and recognize reasonable contributions. Table 4.2 identifies a number of strengths and weaknesses associated with trait-based leadership.

Making Connections

- Why might the same traits continue to emerge over time? How might ideological critique cause us to reconsider traits as a function of dominant norms more than leader success?
- What stands out as useful about trait-based leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

STRENGTHS-BASED LEADERSHIP

Strength-based leadership may be a controversial inclusion in this book, given its prominence is largely built on popular culture rather than established academic merits. Born from positive psychology, a subset of psychology focused on optimal human functioning and emphasizing assets over deficits (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000), strengths-based leadership is wildly popular across career sectors.

Though there are several competing approaches to strengths-based leadership, the clear Goliath is produced by the Gallup Organization, which uses the CliftonStrengths

Assessment (CSA) to identify individuals' top five talent themes (Buckingham and Clifton 2001). Investing in these talents transforms them into strengths, which are positioned as essential for maximizing personal development and leadership success. To date more than 31 million people have completed the CSA, with its books topping bestseller lists and training programs attracting learners from across age groups and professional fields. So, although strengths-based leadership may lack the history and depth of scholarship of trait-based leadership, there is no question that it plays an outsized role in shaping contemporary understandings of attribute-driven leadership.

Overview

Strengths-based leadership represents a deeper exploration into the distal attribute of personality focusing on innate talents. Let's take a quick step back before moving forward. In his study of great man leadership, Galton (1869) argued that natural abilities always outweigh acquired skills. Strengths-based leadership aligns with this belief asserting "to develop a strength in any activity requires certain natural talents" (Buckingham and Clifton 2001, 29) and that investment in areas of talent will always have a greater overall effect than investing in areas of weakness (Buckingham and Clifton 2001; Rath 2007).

So what exactly are strengths? Rath (2007) defined a strength as "the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance" (p. 20) in one's talent themes. Strengths have the potential to emerge in different areas based on dominant talent themes, which reflect "naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior" (Buckingham and Clifton 2001, 29). Investing in one's talents occurs through the cultivation of knowledge and skills that amplify them as well as refinement through experience and practice (Rath 2007). These concepts are operationalized through the CSA, which is designed to identify a person's top five talent themes from among 34 possibilities (Rath 2007). For example, strengths could emerge from investing in the talent theme of "command" (i.e. individuals with significant presence and the ability to take charge as well as make decisions) or "empathy" (i.e. individuals who are able to readily perceive others' feelings by imagining their perspectives). Strengths-based approaches stress the uniqueness of people given the varied patterns that can emerge across the top five talent themes as well as the fact that no two individuals will surface the same talent themes in exactly the same way (Rath 2007).

You may be wondering how the concept of strengths connects specifically to leadership. Early work by Buckingham and Clifton (2001) made direct connections to management.

Rath and Conchie (2008) later introduced the term *strengths-based leadership*. They offer neither a theoretical grounding of strengths in the leadership literature nor a clear definition of leadership. The terms *leader* and *leadership* are conflated with staunch differentiation between leaders and followers as well as a focus on leader effectiveness: “The most effective leaders rally a broad group of people toward an organization’s goals, mission, and objectives. They lead. People follow . . . You are a leader only if others follow” (Rath and Conchie 2008, 79). That last line communicates a great deal about the conceptualization of leaders and leadership.

Applying the Concept

Strengths-based leadership consists of two key steps: knowing one’s strengths and maximizing teams. When these are employed effectively, they contribute to a deeper understanding of followers’ needs and positive organizational outcomes (Rath and Conchie 2008).

Know Your Strengths

A significant component of strengths-based leadership involves knowing one’s top five talent themes and actively working to cultivate them into strengths. Rath and Conchie (2008) argued that “while our society encourages us to be well-rounded, this approach inadvertently breeds mediocrity” (p. 7). Rath (2007) suggested that “when we’re able to put most of our energy into developing our natural talents, extraordinary room for growth exists. . . . You *cannot* be anything that you want to be—but you *can* be a lot more of who you already are” (Rath 2007, 9, emphasis in original). This claim highlights an important distinction between strengths-based leadership and other attribute-driven approaches. Strengths-based leadership suggests leadership is learnable, but the focus of learning is squarely on areas of innate talent, as “you will excel only by maximizing your strengths, never by fixing your weaknesses” (Buckingham and Clifton 2001, 26). A common misconception about strengths is that it advocates ignoring weaknesses altogether when in reality it encourages people to manage around them, develop them to the minimum amount necessary, or neutralize them.

Hire for Strengths and Maximize Teams

The second component of strengths-based leadership involves maximizing organizational potential. This is accomplished by shifting both hiring and

professional development practices to strengths-based approaches. Rath and Conchie (2008) asserted that “although individuals need not be well-rounded, teams should be” (p. 23) and cohesive teams reflect a diversity of strengths across four leadership domains: executing, influencing, relationship building, and strategic thinking. It is unclear how these domains were identified as particularly essential for leadership above and beyond other concepts, as strengths-based leadership offers no linkages to the leadership studies literature.

Table 4.3 provides definitions for the leadership domains along with the 34 talent themes that fall under each. Buckingham and Clifton (2001) suggested that “since each person’s talents are enduring, you should spend a great deal of time and money selecting people properly in the first place” (p. 216). This includes ensuring that new team members’ strengths are distributed across the four domains, complement those of existing team members, and align well with both organizational values and expectations for the specific role. Additionally, strengths development should serve as a focus of professional training.

TABLE 4.3 Strengths-based leadership domains and talent themes

Executing	Influencing	Relationship Building	Strategic Thinking
Make things happen	Help reach audience by selling ideas	Provide glue that holds team together	Absorb and analyze information to focus on what could be
Achiever	Activator	Adaptability	Analytical
Arranger	Command	Developer	Context
Belief	Communication	Connectedness	Futuristic
Consistency	Competition	Empathy	Ideation
Deliberative	Maximizer	Harmony	Input
Discipline	Self-Assurance	Includer	Intellection
Focus	Significance	Individualization	Learner
Responsibility	Woo	Positivity	Strategic
Restorative		Relator	

Adapted with permission from Rath and Conchie (2008). Copyright © 2008 Gallup, Inc.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Empirical research conducted by Gallup suggests that strengths-based leadership contributes to a wide range of beneficial outcomes, ranging from increased organizational productivity and profitability to higher levels of team member engagement, confidence, and overall quality of life (Asplund and Agrawal 2018; Asplund et al. 2014; Louis 2012; Rath 2007; Rath and Conchie 2008). Concerns do exist about the unique influence of strengths-based approaches beyond other factors as well as the limited attention afforded to considerations of context.

More problematic, however, are scholars' serious reservations regarding the way strengths are used and its research credibility (Dugan and Henderson 2021; Kaiser 2009; Kaplan and Kaiser 2009; McCall 2010; Tapia-Fuselier and Irwin 2019). Concerns largely exist because the CSA is produced by a for-profit company and considered proprietary. In essence, Gallup does not widely release their intellectual property to be vetted by the broader scientific community. That means we have to trust that what they share is accurate as "research on the correlates and consequences of this tool do not regularly appear in peer-reviewed academic journals" (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, and Lyubchik 2017).

Technical reports on the psychometrics of the CSA are made available by Gallup . . . if you know where to look for them. For those persistent enough to track them down, the primary technical reports come with explicit warnings that they cannot be disseminated or even quoted (Asplund et al. 2014; Asplund et al. 2009). I'd provide you a direct quote of the warning, but apparently that would be a form of copyright infringement. Now, you have to ask yourself, "Why wouldn't Gallup want this information disseminated as widely as possible to reinforce the quality and rigor of the assessment?"

Furthermore, some of the information provided in technical reports can appear misleading. Let me share three examples that highlight this. First, the published books on strengths-based leadership clearly articulate the important role that strengths should play in hiring and building teams. However, technical reports as well as the professional conduct section of Gallup's terms of use statement explicitly state that CSA should *not* be used for hiring or selection purposes. This seems contradictory and antithetical to how the portfolio of strengths materials is described and sold.

Second, technical reports claim that the psychometric properties of the CSA were established by both Gallup and independent researchers (Asplund et al. 2014). They even go as far as differentiating between Gallup affiliates and "outsiders" by listing scholars and their institutional affiliations. Yet, these are mostly technical reports published by Gallup

and not academic journal articles, which are the gold standard for vetting the trustworthiness of research. To suggest that research by “outside” scholars substantiates quality is at best disingenuous given the researchers are approved collaborators and the results are largely published by the same organization that benefits from establishing the quality of the instrument.

For the third example, I’m going to get statistically technical, so bear with me. I’ll explain this carefully because it is important. Reliability reflects the extent to which a scale demonstrates consistency and stability of measurement and is important for establishing psychometric rigor. Reliability estimates at or below 0.60 are unacceptable, 0.61–0.65 are undesirable, and 0.66–0.69 are at best questionable (DeVellis and Thorpe 2021). Think of interpreting a reliability score this way. If a scale’s reliability score is 0.90, there is only a 10% chance that the results are inaccurate or a result of error. Conversely, if a reliability score is 0.50, there is a 50% chance that the results are a function of error.

Now, let’s apply the concept of reliability to the limited information we have about the psychometrics of the CSA. In a random sample of 250,000 people, a whopping 74% of the 34 CSA scales yielded reliability estimates below 0.70, indicating that per statistical standards the results were at best questionable. Of these, eight scales were reported to be 0.60 or less, indicating the scores were unacceptable (Asplund et al. 2014). In a sample of college students, the reliability score for using the Activator scale with students of color was a dangerously low 0.39 (Schreiner 2006), indicating a 61% chance of error and that it should *not* be used with this population at all. Let’s just make sure we are clear on what this means: essentially the scale used to measure Activator does not work with students of color yet continues to not just be used but sold!

Gallup researchers suggest low reliability is a function of the way the CSA scales are designed, making it difficult to obtain higher scores, and as such the CSA is still appropriate for its intended purpose (Asplund et al. 2014; Schreiner 2006). This runs counter to scientific logic, adding to the overall concerns. All of the research on strengths-based leadership and its impact lacks relevance if the primary scales fail to consistently capture the concepts they are designed to measure. Furthermore, what is communicated when a scale purportedly works for White people but not for people of color yet continues to be used? Clearly, there is a need for greater transparency in reporting, external and objective testing of the instrument, and more nuanced analyses of the psychometric transferability of the CSA across populations.

Wrap-Up

As you might have guessed by now, controversy regarding the inclusion of strengths-based leadership emerges due to tensions between its popularity with the general public and scholars’ apprehensions regarding the research that supports it. A lack of transparency complicates this further. Strengths-based leadership is not a theory as technically defined, nor does it approximate one. Not unlike other attribute-driven theories, it reflects a static list of concepts hypothesized to relate to leadership outcomes. It also fails to address issues of context and how social stratification and power may shape how strengths are received in group and organizational environments.

Unlike other attribute-driven theories, strengths-based leadership offers neither a sufficient theoretical integration of the leadership studies literature nor adequate independent, empirical evidence to support its central propositions. Reservations also emerge because of the multiple “faces” of strengths-based leadership. The primary source of information lies in published books, which at times appear to conflict with technical reports on the CSA (which we aren’t supposed to disseminate anyway). In turn, both of these can be at odds with the reality of how strengths-based leadership is operationalized in practice by “strengths coaches,” who may or may not have received formal training. Conflicting messages lead to a wide range of misinterpretations and misrepresentations, making it even more difficult to assess the empirical support for the work and its applicability to leadership practice.

This book places at its core the assumption that leadership is manifest at least in part from socialization and the formation of informal theories that guide understanding. There is no doubt that strengths-based leadership pierced the collective consciousness through its extensive dissemination and use. As such, it has the potential to directly affect informal theories and *cannot* and *should not* be ignored. Table 4.4 offers additional strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

TABLE 4.4 Strengths and weaknesses of strengths-based leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emphasizes assets over deficits by identifying and developing innate talents• Use is associated with wide range of leadership outcomes• Serves as a tool for developing self-awareness, leadership efficacy, and positive group dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership is not defined, nor is there a grounding in leadership studies literature• Lack of independent, empirical research establishing basic premises• Limited attention to context, with assumption that enactment of strengths will be positively received and valued

Making Connections

- Consider your innate talents and personal strengths. How might these be received differently when enacted in different contexts based on social location, power, or other dynamics?
- What stands out as useful about strengths-based leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

IMPLICIT LEADERSHIP THEORY

Implicit leadership theory (ILT) emphasizes understanding how people's perceptions, beliefs, and expectations regarding leaders and leadership contribute to the creation of ideal prototypes. Thus, ILT essentially flips the script on attribute-driven theories shifting the interpretive power away from a person fulfilling a leader role and the traits or strengths they should leverage. It focuses instead on how *perception* among those engaged in a leadership process directly influence whether that person is considered a leader and/or effective. Ultimately, an individual or group could enact leadership based on just about any theory, but if it does not align with implicit assumptions, deep consequences may arise.

ILT, also referred to as "leader categorization theory," centers the importance of congruence between how people perceive leaders should be and how they actually show up. In the first chapter I drew on footings (i.e. research paradigm, social construction, values-based, interdisciplinary) to suggest that leadership is often the sense that a person makes of it and that this sense is derived in large part from the individual's informal theories about leadership. As a cognitive theory, ILT addresses this point in both profound and scary ways.

Let's use a brief scenario to illustrate ILT. Marta is a first-generation, Latinx college student and currently a junior at a university in Ohio, where she is majoring in chemical engineering. She has made the Dean's list for exemplary academic performance every semester and also serves on the executive board for her sorority and is vice president of the student government. She was encouraged to run for these positions by her peers and is credited with contributing significantly to both organizations' successes. Marta, however, is frustrated. Although she has achieved a great deal outside the classroom, she often feels overlooked, disconnected, and harshly criticized within her major, where she is one of only three women and the only Latinx student.

During group projects, peers often assign Marta menial tasks. When she objects, she is accused of being overly sensitive. She is often selected last for lab teams, and when she asked her teaching assistant for advice, he shared that she needed to be more assertive and competitive. Her most recent team experience involved peer evaluations, and she received average to low marks, despite carrying significant responsibility for the project. This had a negative effect on her overall grade in the course. Marta's professor expressed confusion about the low performance evaluations from her peers, given that the final product was excellent and that she observed Marta working effectively with the team. Marta feels she can never do anything to satisfy her peers and recognizes a pattern that when group projects go well, the team takes all the credit, rarely acknowledging her role. When things go poorly, though, she seems to be heavily blamed. We will return to Marta's story as a vehicle to better understand the dynamics at play in ILT as we walk through the theory.

Overview

Advanced largely through the work of Lord and colleagues (Foti et al. 2017; Hall and Lord 1995; Lord et al. 2001; Lord et al. 2020; Lord et al. 1984; Lord, Foti, and Phillips 1982; Shondrick, Dinh, and Lord 2010), ILT is derived from implicit personality theory (i.e. the study of patterns and biases that individuals consider in the process of impression formation) and attribution leadership theory (i.e. the study of how inferences are made about leadership abilities based on environmental and behavioral cues). These theories examine the commonsense assumptions that people draw upon from the social world and how they inform perceptions of what leadership ought to be. ILT was later extended to examine the assumptions that leaders have regarding followers as well. The work in ILT offers important insights into how individuals and groups identify, react to, and evaluate leaders, which in turn influences a wide range of individual outcomes as well as the likelihood of success in leader roles.

Applying the Concept

ILT operates on the premise that individuals develop cognitive schemas that serve as tools for meaning-making by assisting in the organization and processing of the massive amounts of information one encounters in life. These schemas aid social navigation and redirection of cognitive energy to areas that are perceived to need greater attention. Some schemas operate subconsciously and outside of conscious awareness with such speed that

the perceiver believes that the schemas reflect observable data when often they do not (Foti and Lord 1987; Phillips and Lord 1982). The implicit in ILT, however, “refers to individuals’ preconceptions about traits. . . . Individuals have an internal working model or schema comprised of certain traits and characteristics that are typically associated with the word ‘leader’” (Foti et al. 2017, 264). What is typically subconscious is *not* the attributes that a person associates with their leader and leadership prototypes but the impact that these associations have on perceptions, judgments, and actions associated with leaders and leadership.

Cognitive schemas contribute to the development of *prototypes*, which are “abstract collections of attributes and qualities that characterize a group or category type” (Dinh and Lord 2012, 655). Lord, Foti, and Phillips (1982) argued that people label individuals as leaders or non-leaders based on the degree to which they match the prototypes they construct. Prototypes also serve as powerful filters for how people define leadership and the expectations they hold for leaders. If all this sounds shockingly familiar, it should. The basic concepts of ILT are not that far afield from the concepts of stocks of knowledge presented in Chapter 2.

How do prototypes operate? Prototypes are based on configurations or patterns of traits and behaviors versus any singular trait (Dinh and Lord 2012; Foti and Hauenstein 2007; Lord et al. 2001; Lord et al. 2020). Essentially, as individuals are exposed to the concept of leadership and encounter leaders directly, they craft a composite of commonly observed traits. For example, someone’s leader prototype might include characteristics such as assertiveness, fairness, compassion, and efficiency as well as fixed factors such as height, being male, and being White. The more a particular trait is observed, the stronger it becomes to the overall composite prototype.

Thus, prototypes both evolve over time and are contextually contingent. This means that they are shaped by the environmental contexts in which social stimuli are experienced. Different contexts or even crises that emerge in a particular context can trigger different desired prototypes, which explains why an individual exhibiting the same traits or strengths may be endorsed as a leader in one environment but not in another. In other words, the leader prototype could look radically different for a military leader, nonprofit leader, educational leader, or business leader.

Let’s return to the scenario involving Marta. What she is experiencing is a classic example of how ILT operates. In the context of her sorority and student government, the traits and behaviors she exhibits seem to match the leader prototypes held by peers. We might come to this conclusion because her peers endorsed her as a leader, encouraging

her to run for positional leader roles. They also attributed organizational successes to her efforts. However, the same traits and behaviors do not seem to elicit an equivalent response in her academic major. She is neither seen as a leader nor desired as a member of teams. Indeed, she is described as being overly sensitive and not assertive or competitive enough. It could be that the dominant leader prototype in engineering does not align with the traits she exhibits or fixed factors she possesses such as race and sex. *Understanding the traits and fixed factors that drive prototypes in a particular environment is essential to both navigating and attempting to disrupt them.*

How Research Evolves the Concept

Although researchers acknowledge (Foti et al. 2017; Lord et al. 2020) there is no universal leader prototype that could be applied in all situations and contexts, research attempts to better understand themes related to prototype emergence and how it influences leader success.

Impact of Prototypes

Dinh and Lord (2012) asserted that “the connection between traits and prototypes becomes important in understanding leadership perception when we consider that prototypes provide a mechanism by which a leader’s behavior is interpreted and generalized by others” (p. 655). In other words, what happens when leader prototypes are either matched or mismatched with how a leader shows up? Synthesizing empirical research on ILT, Junker and van Dick (2014) reported that numerous benefits accrue from perceived congruence, including:

- Stronger identification with and perceptions of legitimacy, liking, respect, collegiality, and trust for the person in the leader role;
- Higher evaluations of performance of the leader even when actual performance may not be effective; and
- Greater overall job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and general well-being among those working with the leader.

A lack of match between leader prototype and the person in the leader role generally leads to the inverse (e.g. lower evaluations of performance, levels of trust and liking, and job satisfaction). This positions ILT prototypes as powerful arbiters of success in leader roles.

General Leader Prototype in the United States

Several researchers examined themes across prototypes that emerge in the United States. Early work by Lord et al. (1984) suggested the importance of charisma, honesty, intelligence, and kindness. Offermann, Kennedy, and Wirtz (1994) also found charisma and intelligence to be important but added attractiveness, dedication, sensitivity, and strength to the list. Yep, you read that correctly . . . attractiveness. Refining previous work, Epitropaki and Martin (2004) identified dedication, dynamism (i.e. a combination of strength and charisma), intelligence, and sensitivity as central to leader prototypes. ILT research moved beyond just looking at traits to examine other factors, with tone of voice, height, facial structure and expression, and posture all linked to leader prototypes (Dinh and Lord 2012).

Cultural Contingency

Leader prototypes are culturally contingent given the prominent role that socialization plays in shaping cognitive schemas. This in turn deeply influences expectations about leaders. International research identified a number of consistent traits globally that contribute to leader prototypes (House et al. 2004) including charisma, humaneness non-self-protective and nonautonomous behaviors, and participative and team orientations. Lakshman, Vo, and Gok (2022) extended this research beyond traits alone affirming that when there is also a match between leader and follower expectations, their interactions are characterized as trustworthy, credible, motivating, and communicative, and there is greater alignment around the accuracy of received and perceived exchanges. Understanding the cultural contingency of ILTs is an important factor in accounting for how prototypes vary across international contexts.

Social Stratification

Leader prototypes also reflect social stratifications that permeate societies. In the United States, leader prototypes are strongly related to race, sex, gender, and age (Eagly and Chin 2010; Festekjian et al. 2014; Junker and van Dick 2014; Leicht, de Moura, and Crisp 2014; Livingston, Rosette, and Washington 2012; Ospina and Foldy 2009; Parker 2005; Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips 2008; Rosette and Livingston 2012; Scott and Brown 2006; Sy et al. 2010). This results in a leader prototype for most people that is White, cisgender, male, and more youthful. Remember, this often operates subconsciously and is a function of socialization. Yet, the impact is significant. Eagly and Chin (2010)

remind us that “people can unknowingly discriminate by means of ‘mindless’ processes that operate beyond their conscious attentional focus, all the while thinking they are merely choosing the best person for the job or otherwise acting in an unbiased manner” (p. 217), when in reality they are drawing on biased leader prototypes.

Empirical research demonstrates the profound and negative impact of social stratification on ILT. For example, Scott and Brown (2006) found that leader prototypes contributed to females being seen as less “believable” in comparison with their male colleagues when exercising agency. Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips (2008) found that whiteness was viewed as an essential feature of the business leader prototype and that White leaders were systematically evaluated higher than Black, Latinx, and Asian peers. Additionally, “the bias in favor of White leaders was evident in other racial groups” (p. 772). In other words, people of color had largely adopted whiteness into their own business leader prototypes, internalizing these negative perceptions. There is parallel support for this in Festekjian et al.’s (2014) research, which not only found that Asian Americans identified whiteness with leader prototypes but that these perceptions resulted in lower leadership aspirations for themselves. Rosette and Livingston (2012) found that because of leader prototypes, organizational successes led to equivalent evaluations of Black men, Black women, and White women, but that these evaluations were all lower than those received by White men. Furthermore, when an organization failed, Black women were evaluated more harshly than their colleagues. Increasingly, research shows that the impact of social stratification on leader prototypes is not based on any one social identity (e.g. race, gender, age) but the dynamic and intersectional relationship among the various social locations we hold.

Wrap-Up

Let’s return to the scenario involving Marta. Empirical research on ILT supports the possibility that the impact of not matching the leader prototype in engineering goes beyond simply not being seen as a leader and has broader implications. This includes Marta receiving negative performance appraisals from peers despite the group being successful and her professor observing excellent work. Furthermore, her experience with how successes versus failures were attributed aligns with research suggesting that those who do not meet leader prototypes often encounter greater penalties for failures. Finally, Marta indicates a sense of feeling overlooked and disconnected from those in her major, suggesting she may be struggling with negative impacts from mismatch such as drops in motivation, aspirations, and general well-being.

TABLE 4.5 Strengths and weaknesses of implicit leadership theory

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grounded in and evolved through significant empirical research• Positions followers as powerful in shaping the relative success of leaders versus simply subject to them• Acknowledges social construction through contextual and cultural contingency of leader prototypes, surfacing realities of how bias influences leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Largely descriptive, offering few examples of what to do about or how to disrupt leader prototypes• Overemphasis on leader prototypes and formal power, with little attention to leadership prototypes or informal power• Minimal attention on the interaction effects between group-level ILTs about the leader and the leader's ILTs about the group

Table 4.5 offers strengths and weaknesses associated with ILT. The theory provides an incredibly useful descriptive lens by pushing us to examine how our definitions of leadership and ways we expect leaders to show up reflect socially constructed and often biased assumptions. This ultimately influences the relative success of leaders and has implications for everyone engaged in the process of leadership. Furthermore, empirical research on ILT paints a disturbing picture of what happens when understandings of leadership are allowed to remain implicit and how resulting prototypes can systematically perpetuate social stratification.

Making Connections

- What would you identify as key traits associated with your leader prototype? How has this shifted over time? Engage in critical self-reflection to consider how this reflects your own stocks of knowledge and social location.
- What stands out as useful about ILT? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

DECONSTRUCTING ATTRIBUTE-DRIVEN THEORIES

At this point you’ve probably noticed at least three persistent themes among attribute-driven theories: (1) they rarely reflect theory as traditionally defined, typically offering typologies, lists, or heuristics, (2) empirical research supporting their assertions can vary substantially, and (3) they often omit considerations associated with context, power, and

social location that shape how leadership unfolds. The process of deconstruction will expand on these concerns using the deconstruction tool of *willful blindness*, which is a complicit retreat from responsibility in favor of simplicity that typically reinforces the status quo. Willful blindness appeals to our desire for certainty, and attribute-driven theories tap into this yearning. Each theory represents an attempt to identify *the* traits and attributes that best translate into or are aligned with perceptions of effective leadership. However, adopting overly prescriptive models wholesale comes with costs. Willful blindness can mean overlooking a variety of limitations of a theory because its simplicity is so attractive. This oversimplification risks obscuring concerns related to a lack of process considerations and reinforcing dominant stocks of knowledge.

Lack of Process Considerations

Attribute-driven theories disproportionately focus on the *what* of leadership, ignoring process considerations associated with the *how* of enactment. A lack of detail on how to engage with these concepts risks misinterpretation and the perception of a universal translation of content to practice, along with ease of use. Most attribute-driven theories fail to offer specificity in terms of implementation, suggesting a person should simply hire, train, or exhibit as much as possible a specific set of traits and attributes. Easy, right?

Let's step back for a second. Could exhibiting a particular trait or attribute *too* much become detrimental? Specifically concerned with strengths-based leadership, Kaiser and Overfield (2011) demonstrated that this was a distinct possibility and that negative costs were accrued when strengths were overly employed "whether it be by applying too much of that behavior in proportion to situational demands or applying the behavior in situations where it is not appropriate" (p. 92).

Another example of potentially negative implication stems from how "experts" translate attribute-driven theories to practice. Let me share a quick story to illustrate this. A number of years ago I had the pleasure of working with a graduate student who was exceptionally talented. During his job search process he was particularly taken with a position for which he had completed two interviews. As the hiring agent walked him out after the second interview, she shared that they would like to invite him for a final meeting and that he should expect a formal invitation later that evening. She also shared that this was the final step in the process and that he was the top candidate. As they were saying their goodbyes, she suddenly remembered a question. She shared that her team was "big into strengths" and wondered if he was familiar with the concept. My student had taken the

CSA as part of a training program and vaguely remembered his results. The hiring agent was thrilled and asked what his top strength was. My student hesitated and shared that he thought it might be Activator, but that he couldn't remember for sure. The hiring agent's nonverbals immediately shifted to genuine disappointment. Later that evening he received an email indicating that everyone on her team had that same particular strength and they felt the need to diversify their group. As such, she wouldn't be able to extend the invitation for the final interview after all.

This story highlights how the application of already simplistic approaches lacking detailed, process-based considerations can be problematic. This often happens because people believe themselves "experts" in a heuristic approach without formal training or the ability to integrate critical learning considerations into how the concepts are taught. This can result in overextending a theory's utility or misinterpreting its core premises.

Now, would my student have eventually secured the position if the strengths question had not arisen? Maybe. Maybe not. Was he indeed a strong potential hire, but in the consideration of strengths another hire would better serve the organization? Perhaps. Note, however, that the application of the strengths-based approach was accurate in the tactic of hiring for talent themes that diversify a team—at least according to books and early writing on strengths-based leadership. Technical reports and terms of use statements clearly state this is inappropriate, but it should be no surprise that this is a point of confusion given the mixed messages across content. More problematically, the hiring agent (1) asked about the student's single top strength rather than about the top five talent themes and their unique manifestation, and (2) seemed concerned with diversifying individual strengths rather than across the four domains of the strengths-based leadership model. It might be easy to dismiss this as mere user error, but these types of user errors can have profound consequences in people's lives, which is the precise concern and connection to willful blindness.

Reinforcing Stocks of Knowledge

As a retreat from responsibility in favor of simplicity, willful blindness in attribute-driven theories can have dangerous implications that reinforce the status quo. Part of retreating from responsibility involves defaulting to leader centrality and positioning individuals, and particularly those in authority roles, rather than groups or processes as the greatest determinants of leadership success. There is no doubt that the individual as leader is normative in these theories and evident in the staunch differentiation between leaders and

followers. If you go back and review the direct quotes from several of the theories, you will see a disturbing level of differentiation. This exacerbates the false dichotomy of leaders and followers as mutually exclusive. It also increases the risk of reasserting great man myths, constraining leadership efficacy, and contributing to follower dependency. This makes it difficult to challenge those in positional leader roles and can exacerbate inequitable power dynamics.

Leicht, de Moura, and Crisp (2014) remind us that the heuristic thinking characteristic of attribute-driven theories can reinforce dominant norms, creating a cycle in which preference for certain traits and attributes reflects internal beliefs about who *should* be in a leader position rather than the person's actual effectiveness or the characteristics that *would* make a difference. ILT prototypes are born out of ideological and hegemonic assumptions, reflect differences in social location, and in the process constitute our stocks of knowledge related to how a leader should look and behave. Lord and Maher (1991) remind us that "while leadership perceptions may not be reality, they are used by perceivers to evaluate and subsequently distinguish leaders from non-leaders or effective from ineffective leaders. This type of attribution process provides a basis for social power and influence" (p. 98).

The deconstruction of ILT is made easier as the theory does not hide the ugly truth of how prototypes operate. My good colleague, Dr. William Southerland, argues that implicit leadership theory appears to be self-deconstructing. ILT acknowledges the ways in which biases and assumptions shape prototypes and in turn influence the experiences of everyone involved in the leadership process. This goes well beyond the degree to which most other theories acknowledge social stratification and hegemony.

Yet, ILT is largely descriptive, documenting the potentially harmful effects of implicit prototypes with only minimal attention directed at ways to mitigate negative impacts. What good does the recognition of implicit assumptions do without also offering insights on how to disrupt them? After all, a central tenet of critical perspectives is to move beyond critique alone and to take action to advance social justice. ILT is certainly a step in the right direction in terms of naming implicit assumptions, but simply making the implicit explicit without framing what to do with that information leaves substantive change to chance. All too often this then defaults to placing undue burden on those who are negatively affected to address issues.

Remember, stocks of knowledge often operate in the background of our thinking but contribute in powerful ways to informal theories by creating ideal prototypes. Did the traits and attributes associated with attribute-driven theories emerge because they have such a positive and powerful impact on leadership, thus contributing to the identification

of leaders who exhibit them, or were those who already secured positional leader roles studied and as a result these characteristics emerged? When we step out of willful blindness and apply this logic to attribute-driven theories, chicken-versus-egg arguments quickly emerge, as do insights about how the status quo is reinforced.

We can also deconstruct ILT using *flow of power*. ILT is predicated almost entirely on formal leader roles and the presumption of positional authority. It also seems to leave the responsibility for management of perceptions squarely on the shoulders of those in leader roles, reinforcing leader-centric ideas. What obligation does everyone involved in the leadership process hold for engaging with implicit assumptions?

Additionally, ILT never addresses whether leaders should alter their traits (if that is even possible, as many fixed factors such as race or height simply cannot be changed) to match a group's prototype or whether the group should alter their prototypes to match the leader. This issue is laden with power dynamics. Do we ask individual leaders to assimilate to dominant norms? For example, in the earlier scenario Marta obviously cannot change her race or sex to match that of the male- and White-dominated engineering context, but should she follow the recommendations of her teaching assistant and demonstrate less sensitivity and increased competitiveness? Would these traits even be positively received if she enacted them? Who's to say that Marta isn't already demonstrating them but they go unnoticed based on biased assumptions? Conversely, do we ask entire cultural groups to accommodate an individual leader who deviates from a culturally contingent prototype? For example, when a US company opens overseas and consists largely of workers from that country, are they expected to engage in leadership based on US prototypes?

Let's go a step further by connecting back to the quote that opened the chapter. Are traits and attributes actually mapping commonalities among those who hold positional leader roles rather than the territory we are interested in (i.e. leadership)? This is not to suggest that the two "territories" (e.g. leadership and commonalities among those in leader roles) are mutually exclusive. In fact, there are likely points of overlap. However, if we overlay the concept of social location, it troubles these ideas further. For example, we know that in the United States those holding positional leader roles are disproportionately White, male, heterosexual, and cisgender. Might effective leadership traits and attributes of those who do not identify as White, male, heterosexual, and cisgender go unacknowledged in attribute-driven theories? Might we in fact develop stocks of knowledge that prefer leader traits and attributes associated with White, cisgender, heterosexual men?

Attribute-driven theories are almost exclusively focused on the *identification* and *perception* of characteristics of successful leaders, failing to take into account the ways in which

stocks of knowledge contribute to the creation of leader prototypes. These prototypes reflect normative assumptions and are often ingrained subconsciously into our informal leadership theories, reinforcing a cyclic process of looking for leaders who best reflect our “recipes.” What are the long-term effects on leadership development in general, and leadership efficacy and motivation in particular, when individuals encounter match and/or mismatch in terms of leader prototype? Attribute-driven theories don’t just position certain traits and attributes as normative (e.g. achievement, charisma, empathy, intelligence). They also fail to take into account how they can be differentially *received*, depending on factors associated with context and social location.

Deconstructing attribute-driven theories highlights how certain traits and attributes may be universal in concept, but their enactment may be met with varying degrees of receptivity based on perception, stocks of knowledge, and normative assumptions. It also shows how the enactment of traits and attributes are often divorced from context. Relative receptivity typically falls along the fault lines of social stratification in a society. Let’s look a little closer at this in the US context. Are women typically afforded the same degrees of freedom as men to exhibit traits and attributes such as ambition, achievement, or command? To what extent might a man be perceived as weak if he enacted empathy, connectedness, or harmony? Similarly, how might an African American or Black person be perceived if they enacted self-assurance, command, or activator? Based on dominant stocks of knowledge and normativity, might they risk being perceived as aggressive rather than assertive by demonstrating the very concepts advanced in the leadership literature?

In a perfect world the enactment of traits and attributes would be universally interpreted and received, but we don’t live in that world. To suggest otherwise is not only naive but also puts people at risk by masking the need to assess and navigate context. It also illuminates the privilege associated with membership in majority groups where consideration of how traits and attributes may be received is typically a nonissue. Perhaps, then, the greatest indicator of normativity in these theories is the assumption that context doesn’t matter. Willful blindness plays a powerful role in ensuring that this assumption does not change.

RECONSTRUCTING ATTRIBUTE-DRIVEN THEORIES

The process of reconstruction can take many forms, with this chapter treating the process more as an abstract and intellectual exercise. The result will be a revised conceptual framework for attribute-driven theories, with implications for how these theories are taught, learned, and translated to practice.

Disrupting normativity involves purposefully and explicitly identifying, examining, and redressing hegemonic norms. We can reconstruct from this perspective by infusing greater attention to process, context, and social location, which are so clearly absent from attribute-driven theories. Disrupting normativity also invites us to add an actional process to making prototypes explicit and exploring their influences. Let's double back to trait theory to illustrate a way to accomplish this.

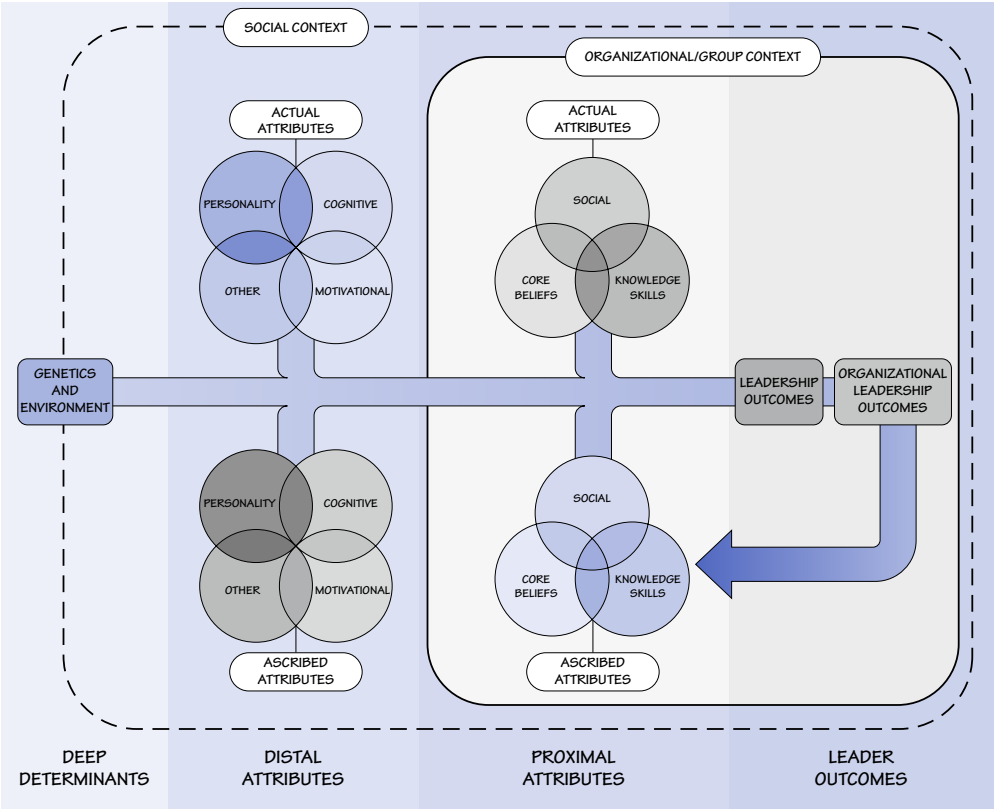
Trait and strength-based leadership theories suggest a link between enactment of specific characteristics and emergence into leader roles, leadership effectiveness, and achievement of beneficial organizational outcomes. ILT, however, gives us insight into considerations associated with perception, process, and context to explain how this occurs. One approach to reconstruction would be to combine these three theories into a single framework that integrates critical perspectives.

Figure 4.1 offers a reconstructed model of attribute-driven leadership theories adapted in part from scholars' existing works (Antonakis 2011; Dinh and Lord 2012; Zaccaro, Kemp, and Bader 2004; Zaccaro, LaPort, and José 2013). The model begins by differentiating three types of traits as well as adding process considerations about how they influence one another and shape leadership outcomes.

Deep determinants reflect fixed factors that are a function of genetics and environmental socialization (e.g. race, culture, height, facial structure) and unlikely to change. These are most closely related to early trait-based research. These deep determinants in turn shape *distal attributes* (e.g. cognitive, personality, motivational, other), which you will recall can be altered but only with time and significant developmental attention. Distal attributes in turn influence *proximal attributes* (e.g. social, knowledge and skills, beliefs). Finally, the fourth column represents *leadership outcomes* that are shaped by the compounding influences of the three types of traits. Leadership outcomes might include whether people emerge as leaders, their degree of effectiveness, and the influences this has in producing beneficial organizational leadership outcomes (e.g. productivity, organizational citizenship behaviors).

In addition to adding process dimensions, greater attention to context is infused. Trait theory states the importance of assessing and navigating organizational context, so this is made explicit in the new framework. The organizational context field directly influences proximal attributes as well as leadership outcomes. Trait-based leadership is most effective when it includes attention to performance requirements; each leader role will require a set of specific competencies that are contingent on the environment and situation and in turn shape leadership outcomes (Zaccaro, LaPort, and José 2013).

FIGURE 4.1 Reconstructed model of attribute-driven leadership theories.



An additional field encompasses the full model, explicitly representing the broad social context, which reflects dominant ideological and hegemonic norms that shape how leadership is perceived and unfolds. Social context informs organizational context, which often replicates its norms. It also shapes the development and enactment of both proximal and distal attributes. Note that social context cuts through deep determinants. This is because some deep determinants are genetically fixed (e.g. height, facial structure), whereas others (e.g. race, gender) are socially constructed and as such shaped by social context.

Inclusion of social context adds a critical perspective to the model by explicitly naming the presence of and need to navigate inequitable social systems created by ideology, hegemony, and social location. Let's take this a step further to include stocks of knowledge. We can do this by overlaying concepts from ILT. The broader social and organizational contexts drive perceptions of leadership based on stocks of knowledge. This influences the interpretation of *actual* versus *ascribed* distal and proximal traits.

For example, do some social identity groups benefit from automatic ascription of intelligence? Are different social identity groups expected to manifest particular personality traits? The deconstruction of attribute-driven theories stressed the ways in which actual versus ascribed traits may differ as well as the relative receptivity of particular traits based on group membership. Perceived alignment between actual and ascribed traits influence who can, and does, emerge as a leader in a given context; their relative effectiveness; and the degree to which they achieve organizational outcomes. Thus, the model accounts for the dynamic way in which attributes build upon one another and synergistically interact with context to shape outcomes.

Finally, the new conceptual model draws on ILT to infuse purposeful action. This involves altering the theory so that it moves beyond just acknowledging the presence and influence of prototypes toward actively disrupting them to create more democratic and just environments. Disrupting normativity involves identifying, examining, and redressing the ways in which hegemonic norms creep into theory. ILT and the research supporting it already identify and name how prototypes reflect and replicate social stratifications in harmful ways. They just fail to integrate possibilities of how to alter this. I would reconstruct ILT by integrating three new propositions or central tenets to undergird the theory: (1) ILTs must be explicitly examined to move prototypes and their impact from subconscious to conscious, (2) leader prototypes that systematically advantage or disadvantage must be redressed structurally, and (3) leader prototypes that systematically advantage or disadvantage must be redressed personally and interpersonally.

The first proposition simply makes an explicit statement of the importance of bringing to consciousness prototypes that drive how we perceive leaders and their impact. Given that prototypes are culturally and contextually contingent as well as reflective of social stratification, this means that the process cannot occur just once but needs to be revisited in an ongoing way. This diminishes the likelihood of defaulting to implicit assumptions.

The second proposition acknowledges that disruption of leader prototypes must occur at the structural level. Recall from Chapter 2 that seemingly fair institutional policies and practices often reflect biases associated with ideology, hegemony, and social location. Performance evaluations reflect an example of a disruption that could occur at the structural level. Research on ILT shows how standardized approaches to evaluating leader performance are often inaccurate because they conflate a match between leader and prototype with actual effectiveness. This systematically biases evaluations for those who do not match the leader prototype, necessitating creative ideas for corrective measures that more accurately capture performance.

The third proposition acknowledges that until systems and structures change, people still need to survive and thrive within them, suggesting the need to target both structures and the individuals who exist within them simultaneously. Several researchers point to the importance of exposing both leaders and groups to counterevidence as a tool for engaging with prototypes and reducing bias (Junker and van Dick 2014; Leicht, de Moura, and Crisp 2014; Schyns et al. 2011). Examples include empirical research, exemplar role models, and counternarratives that contradict and disrupt hegemonic norms. Counterevidence can be used to educate those from majority groups, challenging their assumptions about what is prototypical as well as to bolster the legitimacy and efficacy of those who may not match dominant leader prototypes. However, caution must be taken in using counterevidence to avoid tokenizing individuals or putting them at greater risk based on differential levels of social and organizational power.

ILTs and the prototypes that drive them permeate how people understand, experience, and enact leadership as well as their expectations for leaders and how the process of leadership “ought” to unfold. These informal theories operate regardless of the theoretical grounding that may inform someone’s approach to leadership. In other words, if leaders and the groups with whom they work fail to make explicit, examine closely, and cocreate healthy, equitable, and just leader prototypes, it will not matter what theoretical approach is employed. Both leaders and groups will likely default to ILTs reflecting their cultural and contextual realities and in the process risk replicating the hegemonic norms and social stratifications embedded within them. ILT provides

a powerful reminder of the importance of examining these taken-for-granted assumptions and how they shape leadership.

You may be wondering what benefits accrue from taking a more intellectual approach to reconstruction rather than a direct application to practice. Let's walk through several.

- *Building agency and efficacy:* The process of intellectual reconstruction builds agency and efficacy for approaching theory as a critical learner as well as recognizing one's legitimacy as a knower who can disrupt, alter, and adapt theory. It is an important step in the process of learning how to understand, apply, and enact critical perspectives.
- *Explicit naming:* Intellectual reconstruction offers an opportunity to make explicit critical perspectives that are absent or implicit in theories. It is difficult to disrupt or adapt that which goes unnamed or is willfully ignored. All too often an implicit representation of justice in leadership theories is insufficient as enactment reverts to dominant norms. Explicitly naming critical considerations increases accountability for how theories are translated to practice.
- *Conscientious application:* Intellectual reconstruction results in an altered version of a theory that can serve as a road map for teaching, learning, and applying leadership in more conscientious and just ways.

Making Connections

- How does the deconstruction resonate? Are there elements with which you strongly agree and disagree? How might you deconstruct these theories further?
- What elements of the reconstruction resonate? What other approaches to reconstruction might you take?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Let's close this chapter with a helpful quote from Rumsey (2013a):

There is a natural desire to want to simplify our complex world, to reduce it to terms we can understand. . . . Accordingly, we often see a search for the one feature that distinguishes the effective leader from the ineffective one. If we could just find that feature, we could adjust our selection and training or developmental techniques to

ensure that all our leaders had it. However, reality will not always accommodate our desire for simplicity. . . . There is no single trait or training technique that gives us the leaders we want. (p. 99)

It can be incredibly enticing to seek out the simplest of answers when confronted with the most complex of problems. Enacting leader roles and engaging in leadership processes are by their very nature complex. Attribute-driven approaches do offer us a useful starting point from which to consider leadership. These theories are particularly helpful as heuristics from which we can learn more about ourselves and the traits and attributes in which we excel along with those in which we have room to improve. This understanding can also be used in groups and teams to expand collective knowledge about what we identify as important for those in leader roles as well as what we each bring to a collective team in terms of strengths and areas for development. Perhaps most importantly, reconstructing attribute-driven theories provides insights into the ways in which normative dimensions of social and organizational contexts influence the traits and attributes that are deemed important and how they are perceived based on varying social locations. This provides a point for intervention to challenge assumptions and create more equitable systems that better align the “map” with the “territory” in leadership.

Maria Gabriela Pacheco, also known as Gaby, is an immigrant rights leader from Miami, Florida. As a former Dreamer, she experienced the intricacies and difficulties of the US immigration system firsthand. Gaby has been central to the advocacy of immigration and immigrant rights and received numerous accolades for her work. She spearheaded the efforts that led to the announcement of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and became the first undocumented Latina to testify in front of Congress in 2013. Gaby currently serves as the president and CEO of TheDream.us, the largest college and career success program for undocumented immigrant students.

What is leadership? What is a leader? Are you a born leader? The story that I want to tell you is one that is unbelievable to me even as I reflect on it. I came to the United States from Ecuador as an eight-year-old with a tourist visa, then student visas, then was undocumented—but I didn't know that at first. I learned that I was undocumented when I was in the eighth grade. My oldest sister went over to the local community college but came home crying. She wasn't able to enroll in school because she didn't have the right kind of papers. That's when I understood my immigration status was going to have very severe consequences on my life.

Since I was in fifth grade, I knew I was going to go to college. But when I learned that I couldn't go because of my immigration status, that became something I was going to fight for. When I graduated high school, I was told again I couldn't go to college, but I said, "Yeah? Watch me!" Eventually, I was accepted to the same college where my sisters were denied.

My social identity as an immigrant, as an undocumented person, pushed me to know and understand that I had to be a leader. I never cared for politics. I knew that I had to be in a position of leadership that would allow me to have influence, to have a voice, to have a platform where I could create change. So I decided to call the information phone number for student government at the university. "Hello," I said, "my name is Gaby. What do I need to do to be president?"

Eventually, I was elected student government president and became a public figure. I did a lot of TV and radio interviews. Other moms and dads would see my story and reach out to me. Pretty quickly, we developed a network of undocumented people.

Today, almost 20 years later, I am so proud to lead as the CEO of TheDream.us, a nonprofit organization that is opening the doors of opportunity for little Gaby's all over the country. We've provided scholarships to over 10,000 people and raised over \$350 million in 10 years. The impact that we have had in the community is so incredible. Close to 4,000 students graduated, and 94% of them have a job. They work at companies including Microsoft, FedEx, Amazon, Labcorp, JP Morgan Chase & Co., Apple, Northwell Health, Bank of America, and IBM. They are also teachers, nurses, and public service workers. Some of our graduates started their own businesses or work as independent contractors. Through their education and work, they are increasing the quality of life for not just themselves and their families, but for their communities and our entire country.

I've always understood that power is not something that is given; you have to demand it because people are often blind to it. People don't understand their own privilege. I recognize power and privilege. I see it in the ways that I exert myself. I'm tall. Since I was a little girl, and in middle school especially, I would always walk really tall. I used my height to keep people from pushing me around.

Today, when I go into rooms with a bunch of fancy people, I use the privilege of my height to set the tone. *I know who I am. You're not above me.* Even if you have more privilege because you are a male, or you have millions of dollars in your bank account, or you have a certain title and position, or you have college degrees—I walk in knowing that I'm taller than them, so I have that privilege.

I don't see power as up and down; I see it as side by side. I see power on a horizontal line with all of us on the same plane. You're not better than me. You're not above me, even if you have power and privilege. If I think about power as up and down, then I am accepting that I am below other people. I recognize power, but then I challenge it. I don't let power and privilege minimize my power or stop me from pushing back on it.

(continued)

I'm my fully authentic self every single day, but there's still certain parts of me that are just for me, for my safe spaces. None of us are super humans. It has taken me a long time to accept who I am. I still have faults. I'm still imperfect. I still make mistakes. I still have my doubts. Very few people see the real Gaby—messy, carefree, who gets down on the floor wrestling with my dogs. The Gaby who will drop everything I'm doing if you need something, to be face-to-face with you.

When I'm in my heels and a suit, talking to presidents and senators and billionaires, I carry myself in a very different way. Growing up we always hear that we must respect our elders because they have wisdom. *Más sabe el diablo por viejo que por diablo*—the devil knows more because he's old, not because he's the devil! But they have to respect us too. I've spoken before Congress. I've met with Donald Trump, George Bush, and Barack Obama. When I'm talking with them, there's an understood respect. Yes, they're elected officials, and you respect the title. But, that person's also a human being just like me. I'm going to make sure that when I am addressing them, they know I am their equal.



Reflection Questions

1. Gaby shares a variety of leadership traits and attributes that she draws on as a leader. What traits or attributes can you recall learning about or ascribing to leaders? To what extent do they align with commonly held leader prototypes?
2. Gaby illustrates powerfully how she shows up in spaces as a leader based on her social location. How do you navigate when the traits or attributes that you value may challenge dominant prototypes? What about when they simply differ from those of others?
3. What lessons can be gleaned from Gaby's narrative that inform your understanding of what it means to translate attribute-driven theories to practice?

Production-Driven Theories

“Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them.”

—PAULO FREIRE (2000)

Production-driven theories are grounded largely in management and emphasize the purpose dimension of leadership. Of primary interest is how positional leaders, particularly those with formal authority, engage in social coordination (e.g. supervision, project management) to most efficiently and effectively achieve organizational outcomes. The concern here is production and how best to maximize it. Style theory, situational leadership, and path-goal each attempt to identify the specific leader behaviors that contribute to this, offering prescriptive advice on the most effective approaches to leading.

In examining theories that constitute the production-driven cluster, it becomes clear that each is a response to the limits addressed by its predecessor. This positions them collectively as a progression in thinking that situates leader behaviors as a primary influence on organizational outcomes. It also draws into question the degree to which each legitimately serves as a theory in its own right or, more realistically, an inflection point along the continuum of a single line of inquiry.

STYLE THEORY

Style theory, also referred to as behavioral theory, provides the basis from which most production-driven theories are derived. It emerged as a direct response to the limitations of trait theory, refocusing research away from the mere possession of traits and attributes

and onto specific behavioral enactments of leadership. This was initially in service of identifying a single best way to lead.

Overview

Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) conducted some of the earliest work on leader behaviors by examining how they contributed to the emergence of different work climates (i.e. autocratic, democratic, or laissez-faire). This, along with Stogdill's (1948) critique of trait theory, served as catalysts for a boom in research that identified behaviors associated with effective leadership. Note that in almost all these studies, leadership is defined as a process of management, with effective leadership a function of employee satisfaction and performance.

The most influential research on style theory was conducted in the 1950s and 1960s at the Ohio State University and the University of Michigan. This research resulted in two meta-categories describing leadership behaviors: task and relational (Cartwright and Zander 1960; Fleishman 1953; Halpin and Winer 1957; Katz and Kahn 1951; Likert 1961). Meta-categories serve as overarching themes under which more specific leader behaviors fall. *Task behaviors* are concerned with efficiency of performance and maximizing productivity, whereas *relational behaviors* address building affinity between leaders, members, and the larger group to enhance job satisfaction. Yukl (2013) argued that a third meta-category, *change-oriented behaviors*, emerged from research in the 1980s and is associated with navigating change processes.

The names for meta-categories can differ from study to study, along with the specific behaviors that constitute them, but their general definitional parameters are consistent and empirically supported. Table 5.1 provides sample behaviors from each of the three major meta-categories of leadership.

Applying the Concept

Early claims from the Ohio State and Michigan studies suggested that behaviors associated with task and relational meta-categories fell along a single continuum, with a leader practicing one more than the other. Later research led scholars to assert that each meta-category represented separate and unique continua, with leader enactments ranging from low to high frequencies on each. This, in turn, shaped employees' levels of satisfaction and productivity.

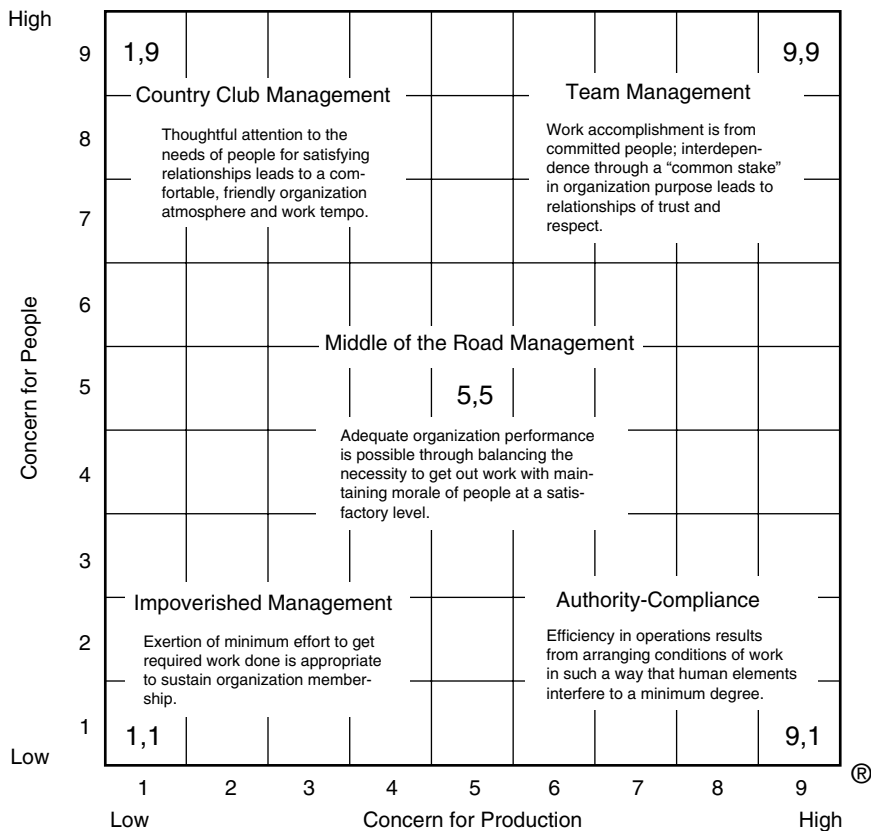
TABLE 5.1 Meta-categories of leader behaviors

Meta-category	Sample behaviors
Task AKA: initiating structure, instrumental, directive, performance orientation, concern for product, production orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Organize and assign work to improve efficiency ♦ Explain and clarify rules, policies, expectations, and priorities ♦ Monitor performance and goal achievement ♦ Provide worker feedback and accountability ♦ Direct and coordinate work activities ♦ Resolve problems that disrupt performance
Relational AKA: consideration, supportive, maintenance, concern for people, employee orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Socialize with workers to develop positive relationships ♦ Use symbols, traditions, and stories to build group cohesion ♦ Provide support, encouragement, and coaching to workers ♦ Solicit feedback on decisions that directly affect workers ♦ Foster agency among workers in how best to achieve goals ♦ Assist in resolving issues and conflicts in constructive ways
Change-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Monitor environment to address threats and opportunities ♦ Engage in active vision setting for innovation ♦ Encourage and facilitate creativity and innovation ♦ Foster collective organizational learning ♦ Communicate importance and nature of change processes ♦ Facilitate implementation efforts related to change processes

Adapted with permission from Yukl, Gary A. *Leadership in Organizations*, 8th edition. Copyright © 2013. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., New York, New York.

Blake and Mouton (1964) created a model that translated task and relational behaviors more directly to leadership practice. Originally referred to as the Managerial Grid, their work is now referred to as the Leadership Grid and conceived the two meta-categories of task and relational behaviors as falling along separate but intersecting axes. By triangulating the level of concern for tasks with the level of concern for relationships, they created a grid representing multiple leader styles (see Figure 5.1).

The Leadership Grid has undergone numerous revisions (Blake and McCanse 1991; Blake and Mouton 1964; McKee and Carlson 1999), resulting in some variation in naming conventions for the styles that emerge based on a leader's relative concern for task and

FIGURE 5.1 The Leadership Grid.

Reproduced with permission from Blake, R. R., and Mouton, J. S. *The New Managerial Grid*. Houston: Gulf Publishing Co., 1978.

relational behaviors. Variation in naming conventions can be a source of confusion, so both the most common and current labels are provided in the following descriptions:

- *Indifferent/impoverished*: Reflects low task and low relational behaviors that are generally unconcerned with people or productivity, effectively evading and eluding responsibility.
- *Accommodating/country club*: High in relational behaviors and low in task behaviors yielding and complying to people's needs with the hope that happy employees will equate to high performance.

- *Controlling/authority-compliance*: Exhibits low relational behaviors but high task behaviors that are often directive and domineering as employees are reduced to serving as tools for productivity.
- *Status quo/middle of the road*: Moderate levels of both task and relational behaviors in an attempt to balance and compromise but runs the risk of failing to provide adequate support in either area.
- *Sound/team*: Demonstrates both high task and relational behaviors with strong commitment to goals, and positions employees as valued contributors.
- *Paternalistic*: Shifts between accommodating/country club and controlling/authority-compliance styles to reward loyalty and discourage being challenged, divergent thinking, or noncompliance.
- *Opportunistic*: Behaviors fluctuate among all styles based on self-interest and as a means to manipulate or exploit opportunities for personal gain.

Grid scholars suggest people adopt a dominant style of leadership that is “not dependent on a single incident or consciously selected according to a particular situation. In fact, dominant styles are based on firmly entrenched values and attitudes and cannot easily be turned on nor off according to isolated situations” (McKee and Carlson 1999, 19). Typically, individuals also have a backup style that is seen when the person is under duress or the dominant leadership style does not work. In short, people bring a particular leader style to an environment and may or may not be conscious about the ways in which it informs how they engage in leadership.

At this point, you may be thinking that style theory, and the Leadership Grid in particular, seems to function much like person-driven theories, offering taxonomies or heuristics that simply shift content from lists of traits and attributes to lists of behaviors. You wouldn’t be entirely wrong. However, there is an often omitted third dimension to the Leadership Grid that affords greater attention to process considerations through the exploration of motivation (Blake and McCauley 1991; Blake and Mouton 1964; McKee and Carlson 1999). It asks what drives a person to demonstrate particular levels of concern for tasks and relationships. The hypothesis is that each style is motivated by what the person most desires and most fears when engaging in a leader role. Table 5.2 walks through the motivations associated with each leader style.

Blake and Mouton (1964) make the case that the “one best way to lead” or ideal leader style is sound/team. They go as far as to suggest that leadership practice must evolve

TABLE 5.2 Motivational factors associated with dominant leader styles

Style	Positive Motivational Influence	Negative Motivational Influence
Indifferent/impoverished	Desire to be uninvolved	Fear of being terminated
Accommodating/country club	Desire to please others	Fear of being rejected
Controlling/authority-compliance	Desire for dominance, mastery, and/or control	Fear of failure
Status quo/middle of the road	Desire to belong	Fear of humiliation
Sound/team	Desire for fulfillment through contribution	Fear of selfishness
Paternalistic	Desire for reverence and adulation	Fear of repudiation and abandonment
Opportunistic	Desire to be “on top” or win	Fear of being exposed as opportunistic

Adapted from Blake and McCanse (1991).

to using this as a universal approach. Note, however, that early work with the Leadership Grid explicitly differentiated between the styles of leaders with formal authority and the styles of their “subordinates” who were not in and of themselves considered leaders. The distinction is so strong that they even developed a separate grid just to represent subordinates’ levels of concern for their boss (i.e. the relationship) and the task (Blake and McCanse 1991). Thus, the universality of a sound/team style is really about ensuring that those with authority adopt and enact it *on* subordinates versus a style that informs group processes as a whole.

Later work with the Leadership Grid shifted away from positioning the leader as ultimate authority, naming the ways in which power flows through organizations and the importance of all actors in group processes being perceived as leaders (McKee and Carlson 1999). The utility of the grid is then repositioned as a vehicle to increase consciousness of leader styles and to “develop a shared understanding up front so that people working together can discuss and agree on what behaviors they think are effective *before* beginning a task” (McKee and Carlson 1999, 20, emphasis in original). This in turn allows for a greater likelihood that groups will achieve their purpose and members of those groups will be satisfied in the process of doing so.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Yukl (2013) argued that historically “more research has been conducted on leader activities and behaviors than on any other aspect of leadership” (p. 405), although recent years have seen a dramatic decrease (Dinh et al. 2014). This may be a result of differing opinions regarding the relative contribution of style theories. Some argue that they largely serve as precursors to later theories, that they are limited by a lack of attention to situational and environmental considerations, and that research yields inconsistent findings about their effects on leadership outcomes (Judge, Piccolo, and Ilies 2004; Yukl 2012, 2013). Others suggest that the meta-categories, and task and relational behaviors in particular, represent enduring influences with unique explanatory value even when combined with other theories to examine leadership outcomes (DeRue et al. 2013; Judge, Piccolo, and Ilies 2004; Piccolo et al. 2012). Let’s explore two considerations:

Impact

Just like with past theories, studies on leadership style can vary significantly in quality and the degree to which they account for the impact of enacting the meta-category behaviors above and beyond other influences. However, several high-quality, meta-analytic studies (i.e. research that examines results across multiple studies) demonstrate that the frequency of employing task and relational behaviors is indeed related to leadership outcomes, although they have differential effects (DeRue et al. 2013; Judge, Piccolo, and Ilies 2004; Piccolo et al. 2012). Perhaps not so shockingly, task behaviors are more strongly associated with productivity and goal achievement, whereas relational behaviors are more strongly linked to follower satisfaction and motivation. This research also provides evidence that there is no single “right” style of leading and that leaders must draw on varying frequencies of task and relational behaviors in a way that is responsive to the environment and situation.

Ascription

Past chapters addressed how people often ascribe onto leaders various perceptions. Yukl (2013) described how ratings of a leader’s enactment of task and relational behaviors are often inflated when the person is well liked and suppressed when they are not liked, suggesting the power of affiliation and affinity in shaping perceptions of leaders’ styles. Additionally, scholars express concern regarding perceived incongruence between stereotypical gender roles for women and leader roles as well as ways in

which meta-categories draw on highly gendered stocks of knowledge that associate masculine gender performance with task behaviors and feminine gender performance with relational behaviors (Ayman and Korabik 2010; Eagly and Carli 2007). Context indeed matters as these normative assumptions contribute to women routinely receiving worse evaluations and diminished perceptions of effectiveness than their male peers in male-dominated environments or when adopting stereotypically male leader roles. This is despite the fact that research confirms that there are no differences in the enactment of task behaviors between men and women and that women demonstrate relational behaviors more frequently than men (Eagly and Carli 2007). Said another way, gender and other dimensions of social location (e.g. race, sexual orientation) do not influence *how well* an individual enacts task and relational behaviors, but they do influence in powerful ways *how these behaviors are perceived* by others.

Wrap-Up

Style theory marks a significant theoretical shift in its attempt to identify specific behaviors that contribute to effective leadership. However, because effective leadership is defined largely by employee satisfaction and productivity, the theory can seem more concerned with general principles of management than contemporary understandings of leadership. Additionally, given the ultimate goal is to enhance organizational productivity, the emphasis on relational behaviors is less altruistic and more of an expedient means to a desired end. Nevertheless, Judge, Piccolo, and Ilies (2004) remind us that we shouldn't be so quick to dismiss the core concepts of task and relational meta-categories as dated or archaic because research affirms their contribution above and beyond that of other theories, positioning them as "important pieces of the leadership puzzle" (p. 44). Table 5.3 highlights additional strengths and weaknesses.

Making Connections

- Are there particular leadership behaviors that you feel more efficacious enacting than others? How might this be tied to influences of social location rather than actual competence?
- What stands out as useful about style theory? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

TABLE 5.3 Strengths and weaknesses of style theory

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent emergence of task and relational behaviors in research as well as links to leadership outcomes • Represent important management behaviors related to supervision, project management, and decision making • Offers concrete direction for leaders through identification of learnable behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers viewed as a commodity to be managed in service of increased production • Neglects situational and environmental influences that shape leader behaviors and how they are perceived • Does not take into account socially ascribed norms that may negatively influence how behaviors are perceived

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

With increasing recognition that style theory lacked sufficient attention to the context in which leader behaviors unfold, focus shifted to understanding situational influences. Situational leadership has extensive name recognition and is widely represented in mainstream leadership texts, although often without substantive critique. Academic leadership texts, however, frequently omit it entirely or position it as a footnote given its near total lack of empirical support (Graeff 1983, 1997; Thompson and Vecchio 2009; Yukl 2013).

To complicate things, the evolution of situational leadership reads like a bad episode of reality television—shifting claims, altered premises, a split between the creators' approaches to and uses of the concept, and the equivalent of academic throw-downs challenging the legitimacy of the concept. So why include it in this text? Situational leadership persists as a popular tool for teaching and explaining leadership across disciplines. Indeed, the terminology of situational leadership seems to have slipped into the language of how leadership is informally described even when it is not tied explicitly to the theory itself. Despite being deeply flawed, situational leadership has a definitive influence on the informal theories people hold.

Overview

The premise of situational leadership is that there is no single best way to lead and that to accomplish goals leaders must adapt their behaviors to meet followers' needs under varying contextual conditions (Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Nelson 1993; Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi 2013; Hersey and Blanchard 1969; Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson 2013).

Leaders' behaviors fall along two continua: supportive and directive. If these sound familiar, they should. They mirror the task and relational meta-categories advanced by style leadership, along with the ways in which the continua interact as outlined by the Leadership Grid. What situational leadership adds is consideration of how the context shapes followers' needs, which are framed as a function of their development (i.e. varying levels of commitment and competence). Follower development, in turn, dictates the leader style that should be employed to maximize leadership outcomes.

Although situational leadership represents a fairly straightforward approach, explaining the specifics can be tricky because its authors have generated multiple versions—and when I say multiple versions I mean lots and lots of versions. For the sake of space and clarity, we will use Situational Leadership II (Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi 2013), but let me walk you through a few important elements of how we even get to this version.

Whose Theory Is It Anyway?

Hersey and Blanchard (1969) codeveloped the original situational leadership theory along with early revisions. However, the two parted intellectual paths in the late 1970s . . . sort of. They continued to publish a management text together that features situational leadership (Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson 2013) but also developed separate consulting firms and independent revisions of the concept. Hersey's work is now referred to as the situational leadership model, while Blanchard and colleagues' is called Situational Leadership II. Confused yet?

What's This Based On?

Situational leadership's major contributions were theoretically justified using Korman's (1966) proposition that there may be a curvilinear relationship between task and relational behaviors and leader effectiveness. In other words, simply increasing the frequencies of *both* task and relational behaviors may not result in more effective leadership. Said another way, the sound/team leadership style advocated for in the Leadership Grid may in fact not always be the one best way to lead. Hersey and Blanchard (1969) suggested this nonlinear relationship between task and relational behaviors and leader effectiveness occurred because of situational influences associated with followers' needs. However, scholars challenged the use of Korman's proposition as a theoretical justification, and it was removed from later explanations (Graeff 1983, 1997) and replaced with a justification based on "conversations with our colleagues at Blanchard Training and Development, Inc., our own experience,

and the ideas managers have shared with us” (Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi 1985, 7). Hmmm . . . that sounds legit!

This Is a Theory . . . I Mean a Model?

Situational leadership was originally labeled a theory. The creators later dropped the word *theory*, eventually replacing it with the term *model*. Graeff (1997) points out with absolutely no hint of sarcasm that this represented “a four-step evolution of the theoretical arguments or foundations for Situational Leadership” (p. 163) from (1) relatively precise but problematic to (2) theoretically ambiguous to (3) atheoretical and based on informal theories to (4) the realization that it is in actuality . . . a model. Are you puzzled yet?

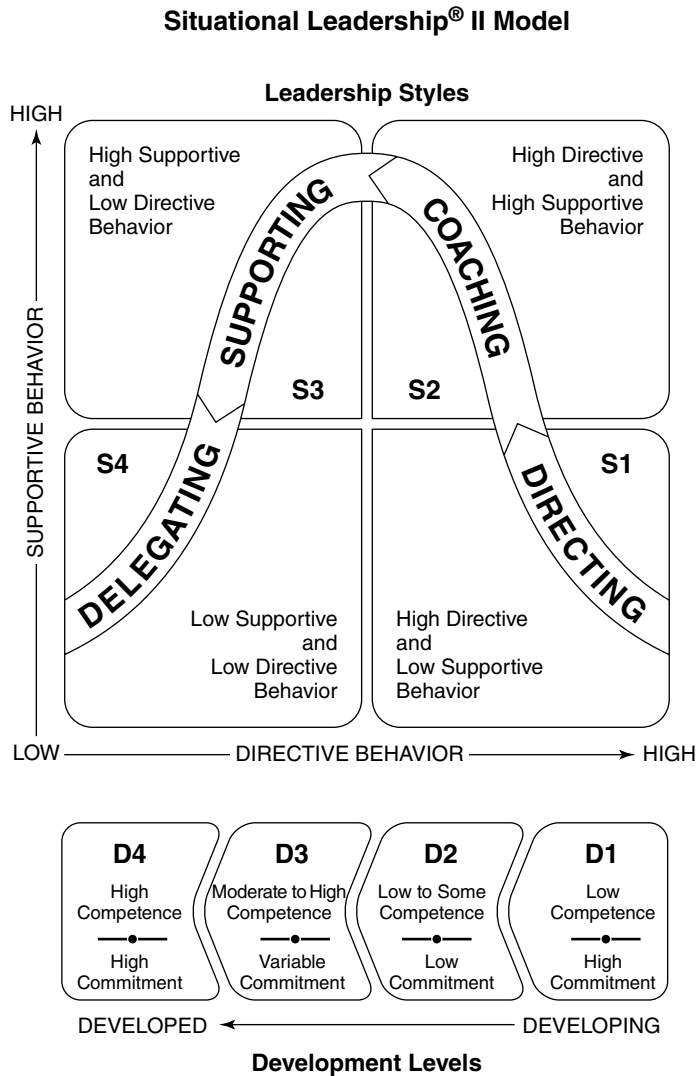
Does Terminology Even Matter Anyway?

Shifting labels across versions of situational leadership lack detailed explanations, making it difficult to track content and arguments. Of primary concern is the description of followers’ needs, which reflect one of the major contributions the theory purportedly offers. Initial conceptualizations referred to this as follower “maturity” and measured it on a unidirectional continuum from low to high. Maturity was later segmented into two bidirectional continua labeled job maturity (i.e. ability) and psychological maturity (i.e. willingness). These were later changed with the labels “development” replacing maturity and “competence” and “commitment” replacing job maturity and psychological maturity, respectively. Along with the changes in labels, the actual continua changed in recent versions and are no longer described as linear. Oh, and almost all of the other elements of the model were renamed. Would you be surprised at this point if I shared that all of this did little to resolve critiques regarding the lack of clarity in the theory—I mean model?

Applying the Concept

Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi (2013) asserted that three learnable skills are involved in enacting situational leadership. These include setting clear goals, diagnosing followers’ relative development related to assigned goals, and matching leader styles to followers’ developmental levels. Figure 5.2 provides a visual representation of the model and its component parts.

Assessing followers’ development lies at the heart of situational leadership. Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Nelson (1993) described *development* as “the extent to which a person has

FIGURE 5.2 Situational Leadership II.

Source: *Leadership and the One Minute Manager*, Updated Edition by Ken Blanchard, Patricia Zigarmi, Drea Zigarmi. Copyright © 1985, 2013 by Blanchard Management Corporation. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

mastered the skills necessary for the task at hand and has developed a positive attitude toward the task” (p. 27). This is assessed based on a follower’s varying levels of competence and commitment. *Competence* refers to the degree to which a follower has the requisite knowledge and skills needed to accomplish a goal. *Commitment* reflects both the

confidence individuals have that they can complete the task effectively without significant oversight and their degree of interest and enthusiasm for the task. When these are triangulated, a four-point continuum ranging from developing to developed (congrats, you've finally made it, my friend!) emerges (see Figure 5.2).

- *The enthusiastic beginner* (D1): Reflects low competence levels but high commitment; motivation is likely high because the scope of learning necessary for the task is still unknown.
- *The disillusioned learner* (D2): Reflects low to some competence and low commitment; motivation may have dropped and frustration set in regarding the difficulty of the task, but knowledge and skills are beginning to accrue.
- *The capable but cautious contributor* (D3): Reflects moderate to high competence but variable commitment levels; demonstrated knowledge and skills to accomplish the task but a lack of confidence can cause doubt; alternatively, the follower may become bored, also lowering motivation.
- *The self-reliant achiever* (D4): Possesses the requisite knowledge and skills along with self-confidence and enthusiasm for the task.

Enacting situational leadership involves identifying the leader style that best matches the developmental level of a follower on a given task. Leader styles reflect “the way you work with someone. . . . It’s how you behave, over time, when you’re trying to influence the performance of others, as perceived by them” (Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi 2013, 12). Four specific leader styles align with followers’ development levels. These are visible along the performance curve in Figure 5.2:

- *Directing* (S1): Highly directive behavior coupled with lower levels of supportive behaviors; provision of clear instructions about what needs to be done and how to do it; highly structured with regular feedback and monitoring of progress.
- *Coaching* (S2): Both highly directive and supportive; clear structure and direction along with a strong investment in the individual; begins to engage the follower as an active contributor to the process as well as in decision making.
- *Supporting* (S3): Lower levels of directive behaviors coupled with highly supportive behaviors; shared decision making; role becomes that of facilitator to support followers, using their knowledge and skills to accomplish goals.
- *Delegating* (S4): Lower levels of both directive and supportive behaviors; locus of control shifts to the follower for decision making and task direction; focus on monitoring and offering support and growth opportunities.

The leader's style should progress over time from directing through coaching and supporting to delegating as much as possible, and this list reflects that order. This progression is based on the belief that followers can and will increase their competence and commitment when properly supported, which in turn allows the leader to evolve styles.

Notable changes between early versions of situational leadership and more recent incarnations influence how it is enacted. First, Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi (2013) explicitly state the importance of treating followers as individuals rather than a homogeneous collective. This means that the specification of a follower's development happens through a dyadic relationship between individual leader and individual follower. Second, they are clear that a follower's development level is associated with a particular task and can vary between tasks. As such, a directing style might be necessary for one area of responsibility but a supporting style could be most effective with the same person in another area of responsibility. Finally, they stress that enacting "situational leadership is not something you do to people. It's something you do with people. . . . You look at people more as partners. You don't see them as subordinates" (pp. 101–102). This positions diagnosing development as a mutual process rather than the simple labeling of followers based on perceptions. Again, these represent shifts from the original theory.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Although research has been conducted on situational leadership, few studies appear in academic journals limiting the amount of credible insights regarding the model. Graeff (1983, 1997) offered perhaps the most biting critiques, arguing that "the major problem confronting all of the versions is the continued lack of a sound theoretical foundation of the hypothesized relationships" (Graeff 1997, 164). The few empirical studies of situational leadership that do exist largely call into question major components of the model.

Thompson and Vecchio (2009) found that matching followers who have high competence and high commitment with a leader style consisting of low directive and low supportive behaviors simply does not work. They go on to suggest that the only elements that appear accurate in the model are pairing new followers with leader styles that are higher in task behaviors and more experienced followers with styles that are more supportive, allowing for greater autonomy. Thompson and Glasø (2018) conducted one of the largest studies of situational leadership examining the degree of congruence between leader and follower assessments of development (competence and commitment) but found that "matching in accordance with the precepts of SLT is rare in organizations" (p. 587).

In the case of situational leadership, empirical research actually calls into question the legitimacy of the model rather than extending our understanding of it. Thompson and

Vecchio (2009) argued that “without compelling empirical evidence of the validity of SLT’s principles, it is difficult to endorse the use of the model in leadership training programs” (p. 845). Note here that they are referring to a lack of compelling evidence to support the original version, the contemporary version, and even the base principles informing the theory—I mean model. They go on to assert that “those who instruct others within leadership training programs should, as a matter of professional honesty, advise their trainees that SLT still lacks a strong empirical grounding, and that its alluring character should not substitute for the absence of empirical substantiation” (p. 846).

Wrap-Up

Situational leadership advances the importance of attending to task and relational meta-categories when enacting leadership, along with asserting that there is no one “right” way to lead. However, serious concerns arise regarding its continued promulgation given major faults in its theoretical grounding as well as empirical evidence that calls into question its core premises. This raises the question of why it continues to have influence. I have to believe that this has to do, at least in part, with its seductive and alluring practicality. Table 5.4 identifies a number of strengths and weaknesses associated with situational leadership.

Making Connections

- If empirical evidence disproves the accuracy of situational leadership, why is it so often incorporated into people’s understandings of leadership? How might this reflect dominant stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location?
- What stands out as useful about situational leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

TABLE 5.4 Strengths and weaknesses of situational leadership theory

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocates that there is no single right or universal way to lead• Offers prescriptive advice that is both intuitive and appealing in its practicality• Takes into account the influence of contextual factors such as follower development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Major concerns regarding theoretical foundations and numerous alterations• Empirical evidence does not substantiate and in some cases refutes assumptions• In no way addresses a leader’s own development in the leadership process

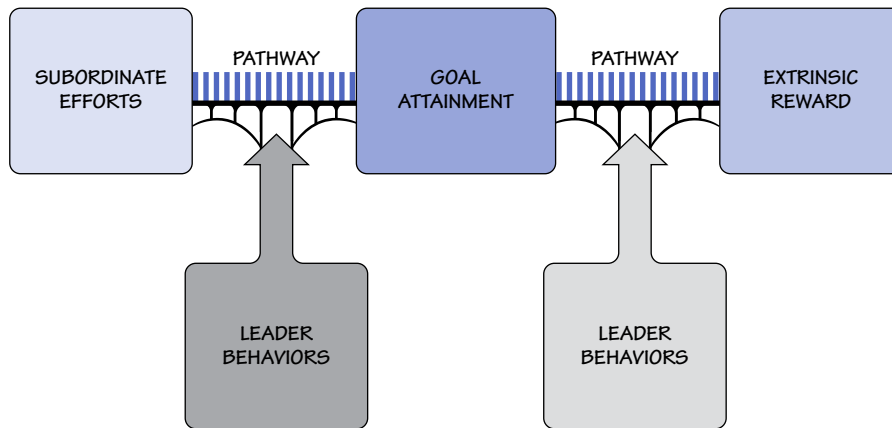
PATH-GOAL THEORY

Path-goal leadership marks a third inflection point in the cluster of theories emphasizing production and effectiveness. It builds on the affirmation that there is no one right way to lead while directing greater attention to the complexity of influences that emerge from considering how leaders, subordinates, and situational factors interact to shape leadership outcomes. It does this by more closely examining the role of subordinate motivation. Interestingly, path-goal leadership is often framed as a theory that has reached its apogee in terms of utility. It holds a unique position in the literature as simultaneously appreciated for its historical importance *and* its limitations. Theory is rarely allowed to expire or transition to new forms even when empirical research fails to support its propositions. This positions path-goal theory as an important source for learning not just about incremental advances in understanding leader behaviors but also about the approach to and treatment of theory by a discipline.

Overview

House (1971) formalized path-goal theory based on early conceptual work by Georgopolous, Mahoney, and Jones (1957) and Evans (1968, 1970), with two revisions of the theory occurring based on emerging empirical evidence and shifting trends in the leadership literature (House 1996; House and Mitchell 1974). The central proposition of path-goal theory is that leaders must “engage in behaviors that complement subordinates’ environments and abilities in a manner that compensates for deficiencies and is instrumental to subordinate satisfaction and. . . performance” (House 1996, 323). How leaders do this is what makes the theory unique as it infuses considerations from expectancy theory, which addresses the role of motivation in decision making (Vroom 1964). Expectancy theories suggest individuals are motivated based on the belief that a particular behavior will result in a specific outcome and the degree to which that outcome is attractive.

Thus, effective leaders enact behaviors that create pathways linking subordinate effort to goal attainment and goal attainment to attractive extrinsic rewards (see Figure 5.3). In essence, leader behaviors serve as points of intervention to increase motivation and the subsequent quality of effort by “increasing personal pay-offs to subordinates for work-goal attainment, and making the paths to these pay-offs easier to travel by clarifying it, reducing roadblocks and pitfalls, and increasing the opportunities for personal satisfaction en route” (House 1971, 324).

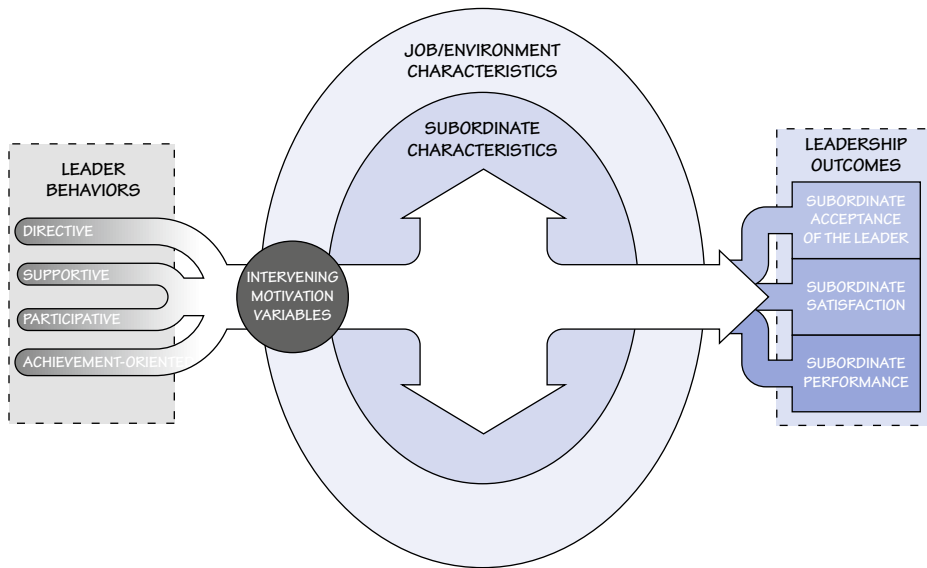
FIGURE 5.3 Motivational functions of leader behaviors.

Applying the Concept

House (1996) was initially clear that path-goal theory should be applied *only* to dyadic supervisory relationships in which one actor holds a formal authority role and the other is a subordinate. It should not be applied to a leader's influence over entire teams or organizations. Nor is it designed for use in informal leadership relationships, collective leadership processes, or leadership focused on change. This creates narrow boundaries for the theory, which in many ways is refreshing when compared with how frequently theories are overextended and positioned as providing answers to any and all leadership challenges. Here we have a theory specifically designed for use in supervisory relationships. Figure 5.4 offers an adapted visual of the theory.

Path-goal theory extends beyond the two traditional meta-categories of task and relational behaviors to also include participative and achievement-oriented behaviors. Each of these behaviors plays a role in shaping subordinate motivation and is described in the section that follows.

- ♦ *Directive*: Provides structure to the work experience so expectations and pathways to work goal attainment are clear.
- ♦ *Supportive*: Displays concern for the needs of a subordinate and contributes to a psychologically safe work environment that is friendly and communicates concern.
- ♦ *Participative*: Involves the subordinate in key work processes and decision making.
- ♦ *Achievement-oriented*: Promotes a culture of excellence by offering challenging opportunities and expressing confidence in the subordinate's ability to meet goals.

FIGURE 5.4 Adapted representation of the path-goal theory of leadership.

How subordinates interpret the above leader behaviors is mediated by five intervening motivational variables (House 1996). These include (1) the relative attractiveness of the leader behavior to subordinates, (2) the degree to which subordinates believe that their efforts will result in goal attainment, (3) the relative attractiveness of attaining goals to begin with, (4) the degree to which subordinates believe that goal attainment will result in attractive rewards, and (5) the availability of said rewards. If this sounds like a lot to take into consideration when choosing leader behaviors, it is. But there's more.

Path-goal theory also takes into account two types of situational factors that influence motivation (House 1996; House and Mitchell 1974). This includes a wide range of *subordinate characteristics* hypothesized to shape how leader behaviors are received. These include degree of affiliation, need for control, desire for structure, achievement-orientation, and self-efficacy for goal attainment. For example, a subordinate with low self-efficacy might be motivated to increase effort by more directive and supportive behaviors, whereas a subordinate with a strong internal locus of control may be motivated by participatory leader behaviors.

Characteristics of the job and environment are also identified as important situational influences on subordinate motivation. These include the degree of job ambiguity, how satisfying the job is, authority influences, environmental conditions, work unit dynamics, and

external demands, just to name a few. All of these add complexity to determining leader behaviors and their effects on key leadership outcomes such as subordinate acceptance of the leader, satisfaction, and performance.

Implementing path-goal theory requires the leader to understand how subordinates' perceptions and situational factors mediate the interpretation of behaviors. This in turn influences subordinate motivational levels and the quality of effort extended toward goal attainment. Thus, selecting leader behaviors in a supervisory relationship has the potential to raise motivation, lower it, or cause it to stagnate. Motivation is critical because it directly affects subordinate quality of effort and resultant leadership outcomes. In other words, the leader's job is to clarify pathways between effort, goal attainment, and reward by enacting behaviors that provide whatever is missing from the situation based on characteristics of the subordinate, the task, and the organizational context in which they are nested.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Empirical research demonstrates support for some elements of path-goal theory while calling others into question. This includes support for the role environmental characteristics play in shaping perceptions of leader behaviors and leadership outcomes (House 1971). Research also suggests that supportive behaviors contribute to subordinate satisfaction above and beyond directive behaviors alone (Schriesheim and Neider 1996).

Strangely, though, most research on path-goal theory seems to have completely left out the core dimension that makes it such a meaningful inflection point in the study of leader behaviors: motivational influences. This may be a function of the complexity of the theory and incredible difficulty of measuring so many dynamically interacting variables in a single study (Schriesheim and Neider 1996). Additionally, House (1996) acknowledged that the study of motivation changed dramatically since the inception of expectancy theory and that "we have come to realize that individuals are not nearly as rational" (p. 332) as expectancy theory suggests. This not only suggests difficulty in the measurement of motivation but also that how path-goal theory conceptualizes motivation may in and of itself be flawed. It presumes rational action, when even under ideal circumstances people often make less than rational choices.

The final revision of path-goal theory (House 1996) articulated hope that it might stimulate further empirical testing and improvement of the theory. Unfortunately, that did not happen. In fact, House further complicated an already complex theory by (1) extending it to a whopping 26 propositions, (2) increasing the types of leadership behaviors from

four to eight, and (3) shifting the focus to include organizational and work unit outcomes. Furthermore, I was unable to identify a single research article that specifically tested path-goal theory in any of the major leadership journals since House’s final revision. For this reason, Schriesheim and Neider’s (1996) concern that “path-goal theory is in grave danger of being prematurely buried (or, at the least, of being ignored and dying of malnutrition)” (p. 319) now seems prescient.

Wrap-Up

Path-goal theory represents an important inflection point in the study of leader behaviors but is a concept that has reached its threshold in terms of utility. It is most valued for its deeper exploration of motivational influences on leadership, expansion of leader behaviors beyond just task and relational meta-categories, and attention to more complex situational factors. Scholars also credit path-goal theory for its important role in shaping future theories (Ayman and Adams 2011; Evans 1996; House 1996). This situates path-goal as a historical reference point but also a theory from which important lessons can be gleaned about explicitly stating limitations and acknowledging when it is time to move on to other considerations. Table 5.5 identifies additional strengths and weaknesses.

Making Connections

- In what ways might perceptions of subordinate motivation introduce bias into path-goal theory? How might these operate off faulty stocks of knowledge?
- What stands out as useful about path-goal theory? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

TABLE 5.5 Strengths and weaknesses of path-goal theory

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Increased attention toward motivational needs of subordinates♦ Clearly articulated purpose for use in authority-based, supervisory relationships♦ Offers prescriptive advice on leader behaviors and how they shape outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Unable to be substantiated by empirical research♦ Presumes individuals’ motivations are rational, which is not always the case♦ Fails to account for situational factors associated with social location

DECONSTRUCTING PRODUCTION-DRIVEN THEORIES

Production-driven theories present an interesting case for deconstruction given that the vast majority of empirical research draws into question their very legitimacy. And yet they persist as more than historical footnotes. This says a great deal about the power they wield. Therefore, let's take a more nuanced approach to their deconstruction using the tool of commodification, which examines the consequences of environments that demonstrate an unhealthy focus on production or engage in practices that dehumanize and alienate workers. Both of these concerns offer connecting points to production-driven theories through the examination of commodification of knowledge and people.

Commodification of Leadership Knowledge

The search for mechanisms to increase productivity, organize labor, and maximize goal attainment has grown exponentially over the past 50 years, contributing in part to the boom in the "leadership industry." The leadership industrial complex is estimated to be a \$366 billion global enterprise with \$166 billion spent in the United States alone (Westfall 2019). This industry is predicated on its ability to sell leadership knowledge through books, webinars, and training and development programs. Capturing a piece of this market share can equate to big money, which disincentivizes letting go of or making alterations to theories, no matter how justified or empirically supported they may be, as it could jeopardize one's hold on the market. Although we would like to think of the *academic* study of leadership as divorced from the leadership industry because of its focus on knowledge generation versus profit, the reality is that the two are deeply intertwined. Indeed, this very book, while attempting to deconstruct the commodification of leadership knowledge, will still become part of the leadership marketplace.

Commodification of knowledge requires us to ask important questions about who benefits from the continued dissemination of a theory as well as how theories are positioned to maintain influence over time. These questions are particularly relevant in the context of a cluster of theories whose premises have largely been disputed. Let's examine three common tactics used to maintain market share, relevance, and influence.

Quick Fixes

The reality is that quick fixes often sell. Not unlike the ways in which some attribute-driven theories from Chapter 4 offer attractive and simplistic *descriptions*, production-driven

theories capitalize on *prescriptive* appeal. This is evident in the promotion of a singular *right* way to lead and the convenient use of matrices to triangulate followers' needs with leaders' behaviors to maximize results. The level of certainty these theories provide (even if false) is attractive, as is the ability to package and sell them as solutions for effective leadership.

I know you may be thinking, "I would never fall for an overly simplistic solution for what I know to be a complex problem." But do not underestimate the seductive power of a prescriptive solution wrapped in a pretty package. Let me share a humbling example. I'm embarrassed to admit that even knowing all of the flaws of situational leadership, when I reread it to write this book I paused. I was captivated by its positivity and practicality. It gave answers and clear processes to follow. I was so enthralled I decided to put it into practice with my supervisees. Perhaps not surprisingly, my enchantment quickly waned as the practical suggestions failed to yield their intended results. Was I simply translating it to practice inaccurately? I redoubled my efforts before eventually realizing that enacting situational leadership not only failed to sufficiently account for the multiple variables at play in leadership relationships but also that its quick fixes didn't work.

Theory Flippers

In real estate, "house flipping" involves purchasing a home at a lower price and selling it later at a higher one due to changes in the market or because improvements were made to increase its value. However, house flipping can also have an opportunistic side in which sellers only make cosmetic changes to increase the value of the home, dumping new homeowners with a property that may look pretty but largely has all its original flaws. Theory flipping, the seedy equivalent of opportunistic house flipping, operates on the same principle.

The changing of key terms, underlying principles, core tenets, and even the very names of production-driven theories exemplify theory flipping. The Management Grid becomes the Leadership Grid to position itself more advantageously in the burgeoning leadership industry. The argument that followers with high competence and commitment benefit from a leader demonstrating low task and relational behaviors is proven incorrect. "No, no, no, the theory isn't wrong. We have a 'revision' that explains that we meant lower relational behaviors. Oh, and we have a new and improved book you can purchase that will teach you how to implement this change." Or perhaps the theory was designed solely for use in dyadic supervisory relationships, but that no longer sells, and the audience

demands more. Simply stretch the relevance. “Absolutely; this can be applied to the entire work unit.” The problem is that when you look behind the pretty new features, many of these theories are still operating on the same faulty assumptions that got them into trouble in the first place. Substanceless retooling becomes a vehicle for sustaining relevance in a rapidly changing leadership marketplace.

Zombie Theories

The commodification of leadership knowledge is perpetuated not only through the expedient retrofitting of theories to fit contemporary marketplace demands but also by the failure to let theories die. I call these zombie theories because despite being disproven or lacking relevance in a contemporary context they continue to be animated by the leadership industrial complex. Sometimes, even when the very author of the theory argues that it has reached its threshold, the zombie theory keeps stumbling around as more than a historical reference point. This may be because leadership consultants have built curricula using a particular theory and are reluctant to let go of the profits they yield. It could also be because academics are complicit in their survival. This is evident when leadership texts dedicate significant space to the discussion of zombie theories without naming them as such. Simple footnotes indicating, “Oh, by the way, this doesn’t work. FYI, you probably don’t want to use it” simply don’t cut it. The only thing worse than this is when zombie theories are covered at length without even a mention that they are inaccurate. Ultimately, my concern with zombie theories is that they distract from our efforts to extend existing knowledge while simultaneously contributing to the spread of misinformation about leadership.

What do these forms of commodification of knowledge share in common? They perpetuate false information to the benefit of those who profit off their proliferation. This false information shapes not only informal theories but is often the basis for formal training and development programs shaping the ways in which people learn about leadership. As we will see from the second form of commodification, this can have troubling consequences.

Commodification of People

Commodification questions the extent to which workers are considered fully agentic, vested partners in the process of production or simply tools to augment it. The quote that opened this chapter suggests that when the latter occurs leaders are practicing nothing more than

manipulation. Style, situational, and path-goal theories all were birthed from the idea that workers' performance and satisfaction directly influence productivity and could be molded by varying leader behaviors. We need to be clear here: concern for workers was *in service of* productivity, *not* because it was the right thing to do. This contributes to the commodification of people and subsequent positioning of the leader as sole agent.

When production-driven theories position the leader as sole agent and the worker as subject, it reinforces a dynamic in which the leader does *to* the worker as if they were non-autonomous. Again, it is important to establish here that this is about more than standard, authority-based reporting lines. Rather, it is about how a theory may contribute to power dynamics that further social stratification. It isn't just that the leader is the ultimate decision maker, but that workers become dependent on or reactive to the leader instead of working collaboratively. Let's walk through three disconcerting consequences that can emerge from this.

Workers Are Subject to Leaders' Perceptions

When workers are positioned as nonautonomous, leaders unilaterally define their relative competence, commitment, motivation, and needs. Where is the self-determination of workers in this process? Do they not have the ability to name this for themselves or through shared dialogue? Granted, later versions of some theories attempted to rectify this through a retooling of the leader/worker relationship as a collaborative process, but this does not reflect the original underpinnings of the theories. Additionally, changes related to this were largely cosmetic and meant to sustain the relevance of the theories rather than alter their core premises or the values that inform them.

Situating the leader as sole agent also leaves significant room for biased stocks of knowledge to shape perceptions of workers based on social location. For example, younger and older employees alike may be perceived as less competent than they actually are. Or stereotypes based on racial group membership might influence the perceptions of worker motivations. Allowing unquestioned and often inaccurate stocks of knowledge to guide authority relationships not only reinforces worker alienation and dehumanization but perpetuates social stratification as well.

Boomerang Implications for Leaders

Positioning leaders as sole agents and workers as dependent subjects can create a double-edged sword in which leaders are also dehumanized to some degree. When leaders reinforce

perceptions of being *the* authority, workers may be more likely to project heroic leader archetypes onto them, affording less room for fallibility.

Furthermore, research demonstrates how stocks of knowledge can bias workers' interpretations of leader behaviors based on social location rather than actual effectiveness. This can create double binds in which the leader simply will not be seen as effective. For example, a woman enacting task-related behaviors may be perceived as aggressive, controlling, or bitchy because of perceptions that she is violating normative social roles. Simultaneously, should she fail to enact task-related behaviors, she may be perceived as incompetent. This contributes to a situation in which women may be damned if they do and damned if they don't, perfectly illustrating how a double bind emerges.

Neglects Situational Complexity

Production-driven theories state the importance of situational factors but neglect almost entirely influences associated with stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location. This increases the risk of fundamental attribution error, a concept from social psychology that suggests people have a tendency to attribute behaviors they observe in others to internal factors (i.e. disposition or personality) rather than external ones (i.e. situational influences). Perhaps not surprisingly, when we assess our own behaviors we are much more willing to take into account situational influences. For example, if you saw me walking down the street and I fell, you might think, "Wow, that guy is clumsy." If *I* am walking down the street and fall, I'm more likely to recognize that a patch of ice was the culprit.

An increased likelihood for fundamental attribution error is a by-product of commodification that distances leaders from workers and workers from one another. It can result in increases in scapegoating or blaming and further obscure the powerful ways in which stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location influence how individual actions are interpreted.

Take, for example, a worker who is perceived as lacking in commitment to a new project. Assumptions associated with production-driven theories at best might assume that this is because of motivational mismatch between goal attainment and reward or the influence of environmental characteristics (e.g. work team dynamics). At worst, though, the theories may contribute to fundamental attribution error and the determination that low motivation is due to a personal deficit (e.g. laziness, lack of skills, low efficacy). What if the low motivation has nothing to do with characteristics of the person or environment but the larger social world that the worker navigates? Work and leadership do not happen in a vacuum. What if the perceived lack of motivation is episodic and a function of a

personal health crisis or family issue? Alternatively, what if low motivation has to do with the very dynamic of the authority relationship? What if workers feel like they are being treated nonautonomously or that biased stocks of knowledge force them to show up at work in ways that force assimilation to authorities' recipes? In both of these scenarios, fundamental attribution error increases the risk that situational factors influencing perceptions of worker performance may be ignored, defaulting to deficit-based assumptions about the person.

Hopefully, you are seeing the dangerous, self-perpetuating cycle that emerges as a result of commodification. Theories emphasizing unchecked production and rigid authority relationships contribute to the commodification of people by positioning workers as nonautonomous commodities to be managed or manipulated into increased levels of performance. Although these theories are largely disproven through research, commodification of knowledge preserves their status as important and effective. Therefore, they continue to be taught and disseminated, typically without deconstructing this dynamic, so that when they are translated into practice the cycle repeats itself.

RECONSTRUCTING PRODUCTION-DRIVEN THEORIES

Disrupting the cycle of commodification of people and knowledge become key points of intervention in the reconstruction process. Complicating this is the fact that production-driven theories have largely been disproven by empirical research or remain unconfirmed. In earlier chapters we established the importance of distinguishing deconstruction from dismissal, and this becomes important here. We could simply dismiss the theories altogether to reduce negative influences associated with quick fixes, theory flipping, and zombie theories. This aligns to some degree with cautionary warnings regarding the application of style, situational, and path-goal theories. Yet we are simultaneously reminded that the meta-categories of task and relational behaviors indeed offer important explanatory insights above and beyond those from other theories. This suggests the importance of engaging with the reconstruction process despite the significant limitations that characterize these theories.

In the previous chapter we approached reconstruction from a more intellectual standpoint, rebuilding a conceptual model of attribute-driven theories. In this chapter let's take a more applied approach by establishing core tenets that reframe the appropriate use of production-driven theories. These are then applied specifically to the process of supervision through operating principles that guide authority-based relationships. All of this

builds on the reconstruction tool of *attending to power*, which attempts to better name power dynamics that emerge in theories along with fostering healthier approaches to them.

Core Tenets for the Interpretation of Production-Driven Theories

Three core tenets provide an interpretive lens for the critical learning and application of production-driven theories, making clear their limitations as a means to disrupt the cycle of commodification. Note that these are not meant to replace the core tenets of individual theories but to frame the interpretation of the cluster of theories as a whole. Core tenets include the following:

1. Historical Reference Points

Production-driven theories represent incremental advances in the study of leader behaviors, serving as important sources for learning about the historical evolution of leadership theory. As such, they should be more explicitly taught and framed for their historical relevance rather than their functional utility in a contemporary context. This makes their use for the commodification of knowledge more difficult.

2. Fatal Flaws

The Leadership Grid and situational leadership both suffer fatal flaws uncovered through empirical research. Path-goal theory is not much different and remains largely unsubstantiated. These facts need to be explicitly named. Furthermore, any dissemination or review of the theories beyond a historical reference point has an obligation to emphatically state that their use may not only be ineffective but could also reinforce unhealthy power dynamics with detrimental individual, collective, and organizational consequences. This, too, disrupts the commodification of knowledge and challenges scholars to do the hard work necessary to validate and continually reassess the accuracy of theories.

3. Spheres of Influence

In Chapter 1 we discussed the multiple spheres of influence in which leadership unfolds from macro to micro levels. Theories, too, have spheres of influence in which their applications are most appropriate and effective. Production-driven theories are designed specifically for use in a micro sphere with dyadic, authority-based, supervisory relationships. Additionally, these theories best serve leadership as tools for management. Remember that management is an essential component of leadership focused on the social coordination of people and tasks. The emphasis on maintenance

versus transformation make these theories most appropriate in that context. Avoiding the extension of production-driven theories beyond their intended spheres of influence decreases the potential for the commodification of people and knowledge.

Operating Principles for the Application of Production-Driven Theories

The most empirically supported concepts across production-driven theories lie in (1) the importance of both task and relational behaviors in how workers are supervised, (2) recognition of the ways in which situational factors influence how leader behaviors are perceived and affect workers, and (3) increased attention to workers as autonomous beings with varying motivations. How might these converge with the core tenets to generate operating principles that could guide the application of production-driven theories to authority-based, supervisory relationships in healthier ways? Table 5.6 offers several possibilities for this.

TABLE 5.6 Operating principles to guide production-driven theories

Operating Principle	Example Considerations for Application to Practice
Continuous engagement in critical self-reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Engage in the ongoing process of interrogating stocks of knowledge, allowing them to be more critically examined for accuracy, which decreases the likelihood for rigid authority relationships and/or biases associated with ascription ♦ Foster a climate that encourages workers to explore, name, and thoughtfully navigate the ways in which stocks of knowledge shape how they perceive and interact with supervisors and one another
Cultivation of reciprocal relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Foster mutual understanding and center the voices of workers shifting their treatment from tools of productivity to fully agentic and self-determining ♦ Invest in the development of workers to create leader full organizations that benefit from synergistic learning
Explicit acknowledgment of power dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Name power in authority relationships, offering opportunities to discuss with workers its boundaries and ways in which both parties can successfully navigate it ♦ Provide opportunities to challenge authority in healthy ways while remembering that it cannot be given away and power dynamics are always present
Increased recognition of situational impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Build capacity for social perspective-taking among leaders and workers to decrease the tendency for fundamental attribution error ♦ Increase awareness of a wider range of situational influences to consider critical perspectives associated with ideology/hegemony and social location with particular attention to the adverse effects of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression

Making Connections

- How does the deconstruction resonate? Are there elements with which you strongly agree or disagree? How might you deconstruct these theories further?
- What elements of the reconstruction resonate? What other approaches to reconstruction might you take?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Production-driven theories, although flawed in substantive ways, mark an important historical shift in the evolution of leadership theory. This shift reflects a movement away from the sole study of traits and attributes toward greater complexity in the study of leader behaviors and situational factors. Taken together, these are important advancements. Indeed, research across production-driven theories point to the durable influence of task and relational meta-categories of leader behaviors. This influence is above and beyond contributions accounted for by other theories.

In many ways, understanding production-driven theories requires critical learners to practice the skill of dialectical thinking (i.e. the process of holding two seemingly contradictory concepts in unison). Dialectical thinking allows us to hold constant both the fatal flaws and historical importance of the theories. It allows us to disrupt seemingly oppositional concepts such as leader/follower or leader/subordinate to see the possibility for mutual agency, reciprocity, and cocreation even in the context of power and authority dynamics. Finally, it allows us to avoid dismissal of theories while simultaneously refusing to accept them wholesale, which intervenes in powerful ways in the cycle of commodification of knowledge and people.

Mary Morten is the president of Morten Group, a national consulting firm focused on nonprofit, for-profit, governmental, and foundation fields. She built Morten Group with an intentional focus on assembling a multiracial, cross-generational team of professionals with a commitment to social justice while centering diversity, racial equity, and inclusion in executive placements and research.

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Mary is also known as a documentary filmmaker including her award winning film *Woke Up Black*.

I grew up on the far southwest side of Chicago, the youngest of six children. At a very early age, I started going to lots of meetings because my mother was very involved in community activism. She brought me along because I was the youngest, and I did horrible things to my sister, so she couldn't leave me alone with her. So I would often go to these meetings, and I got used to sitting and listening, hearing the same things over and over until they started to sink in. It became clear to me that you are either part of the problem or part of the solution.

With any leadership position I've taken on, I've usually been the youngest person by about 10 years and maybe the only person of color. So I felt a certain responsibility to always do well. I went into a management position right out of college supervising eight people—people who were old enough to be my parents and didn't necessarily appreciate having a younger person manage them. I was also thrown in without any kind of training. To this day, I apply “essential lessons” I learned from this experience in my work across various sectors.

I recently returned to the board of an organization I cofounded almost 15 years ago. The organization is a statewide advocacy group dedicated to the safety of LGBTQ youth through public education, research, and policy. I currently serve as the vice chair of the board. Although I cofounded the organization, I eventually stepped away to create space for other community work as well as new leadership. I came back to the board about two years ago. Currently, this organization is building a new coalition that will address a number of serious concerns with the current governor's administration. The governor appointed a pastor and former state senator to an office with tremendous power and influence over Illinois public education. He is not just anti-gay but has also made horrifically disparaging remarks about women, specifically women of color and Jewish people, and is someone you would describe as an equal opportunity offender.

I'll be honest . . . I've been a little more involved than a board member would typically be in this situation—in particular because I have a lot of experience in the community doing advocacy and coalition work. My voice has become critical because I'm African American—and I'm okay with that. The official appointed by the governor happens to be African American as well. I mention all of this because as an organization, we are very clear that we don't want this to boil down to race; it's much bigger than that. When I reengaged with this organization, we were just selecting the new executive director, who is a White man. Our current board chair is also a White man, and we were very clear that this situation could not turn into the White gay organization going after the Black minister. As one of the founders, we have repeatedly discussed the challenges of this dynamic for an organization founded on the intersectionality of multiple identities. We have to continuously consider the visibility of differences around

race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. We have to remain conscious of what our “face forward” looks like in any given situation, and that was the case in this situation.

Although I’m stepping forward in my work with this statewide organization right now, there have been other times when I have consciously created space for new leadership within this group and others. Most people don’t know how to step back. They feel like they’ve got to be out front, they’ve got to lead it, they’ve got to say it, that it’s got to be in their name or it’s just not meaningful. What I’ve come to realize is that I can do all kinds of important work behind the scenes without people ever knowing that I was even involved. People have to take out some of the ego. It has to be about the work and the goals of the work and not about whether or not you are personally recognized. I really try to approach my work from this non-egocentric place, stepping forward and stepping back as needed.

My level of involvement in this statewide organization has also been greater because we have a fairly new staff who, in some cases, are not only new to the organization but also new to this kind of community-organizing work. They need a little more guidance in these roles. You have to meet people where they are and make sure they aren’t thrown into things without support because that’s generally what we do. We don’t provide people with the training and experience they need to lead. Somebody has to sit down with people on an individual basis and work with them. How that happens and how we bring it to scale becomes an essential question. You’ve got to say, “This is the road map on how we’re going to get you to be a leader of this organization or a leader on this project. These are the skills you’re going to need, this is the time that we need to invest in specific areas, and then we’re going to push you out the door. We’ll be here to support you, but you’re going to step out on your own.” The work of leadership development has to be planned. It doesn’t just happen.

It’s also not *just* about developing leaders, but also about how we work together. I truly believe whether by action or by deed we are showing people how to treat one another. When I work with people I try to be respectful. I try to be inclusive. I do have a strong personality, but I understand that everybody has to be heard. Everybody has to have some ownership, and how we create space for ownership is critical. I think relationship building has a lot to do with ownership and how we get people to feel like they have a stake in the work and that what they think matters. I also try to be really clear, whether I’m supervising people or working in coalition, that I want to hear your ideas. You may not feel that your idea is seen in the final analysis or decision, but I want to assure you that I am taking it into consideration. Because of where I sit in an organization, I may have information that you’re not privy to, and so I’m hoping you will trust that I’m taking what you’re saying into consideration and that I value it. I’ve had supervisors

(continued)

in the past who ruled with an iron hand and didn't consider other people's input. They weren't transparent, and it eventually backfired on them. I mean it backfired on them horrifically. I've realized that although I do play the role of a managing figurehead at times, our work depends on building relationships and collective power.



Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does Mary's narrative challenge the assumptions of production-driven theories, particularly as they relate to identity and social location? How can these insights be used to further advance a reconstructed approach to their application?
2. Mary's story offers a powerful example of recognizing how situational factors influence the need for leadership development versus the adoption of deficit perspectives regarding those working for her. What steps can you imagine taking to ensure a similar approach to leading within your spheres of influence?
3. What lessons emerge from Mary's narrative about how to navigate authority in relationships? About determining how and when to step forward in leader roles and when to step back?

Leader-Driven Theories

“People who go about seeking to change the world, to diminish suffering, to demonstrate any kind of enlightenment, are often as flawed as anybody else. Sometimes more so. But it is the awareness of having faults, I think, and the knowledge that this links us to everyone on Earth, that opens us to courage and compassion.”

—ALICE WALKER

Leader-driven theories mark a distinct shift in the dominant leadership literature attempting to alter its intention. If posed the question “leadership for what?” prior theory clusters would respond with a resounding focus on productivity. Leader-driven theories offer a more humanizing approach that couples goal attainment with individual and social advancement. Transforming/transformational leadership, authentic leadership, the leadership challenge, and servant leadership emphasize the concurrent importance of people, process, and purpose, examining the role of individuals and collectives in shaping how leadership positively influences systems. These are lofty goals, and the theories are not without their faults. As Walker’s quote so elegantly conveys, we engage in transformational approaches with all the beautiful fallibilities that make us who we are, shape how we engage with one another, and ultimately complicate the process of leadership. Leader-driven theories capture this, inviting us to wrestle with our imperfections along with the inherent messiness of working toward positive change.

TRANSFORMING/TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

For more than 40 years, transforming and transformational leadership represented the dominant approach in the leadership literature (Antonakis 2012; Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber 2009; Bass 2008; Díaz-Sáenz 2011; Dinh et al. 2014; Jones 2019; Ladkin and Patrick 2022; Mhatre and Riggio 2014; Ng 2017; Siangchokyoo, Klinger, and Champion 2020). So essential is its perceived influence that Antonakis (2012) argued that “it would be hard to imagine what the field of leadership would have been like had transformational leadership . . . not been developed” (p. 256). What began with Burns’s (1978) transforming leadership led to evolutions and extensions, including the full-range model of leadership (Avolio 2011; Bass 1985), charismatic leadership (Conger and Kanungo 1988; Shamir, House, and Arthur 1993), and authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner 2005; Luthans and Avolio 2003). Our focus will be on the scholarship of Burns and Bass as they are among the most frequently researched and translated to practice.

Overview

The origins of transformational leadership are typically attributed to Downton’s (1973) work on “rebel leadership,” but it was Burns’s (1978) conception of transforming leadership and his infusion of ethics and morality that elevated it to greater prominence. He argued that absent ethics, leadership was nothing more than management. Burns’s work is also positioned as the catalyst for the grand paradigm shift in how leadership is understood in the “story most often told” of how leadership theory has evolved.

Burns (1978) defined leadership as the process of “inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of *both leaders and followers*” (p. 19, emphasis in original). Thus, leadership is not a unidirectional power relationship, but a bidirectional relationship that takes into account the development of the follower as well. He conceived these relationships as falling along a continuum, with transactional leadership representing one end and transforming leadership the other. Thus, leaders adopt either a more transforming approach or a more transactional approach in terms of how they structure their relationships with followers.

Burns (1978) identified *transactional leadership* as the most typical approach employed by leaders because it capitalizes on self-interest and involves the exchange of items of perceived value as a means to motivate followers (e.g. financial payment in

exchange for work performance). Conversely, *transforming leadership* leveraged both leaders' and followers' mutual morality, motivation, and aspirations to accomplish goals, demonstrating a more profound effect on followers by raising their levels of consciousness to transcend self-interests. Burns also believed transforming leadership developed "a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents . . . the type of leadership that can produce social change" (p. 4).

Bass (1985) built off Burns's (1978) foundations but altered the terminology from *transforming* to *transformational*. His efforts largely focused on clarifying its application to practice. However, he deviated in several significant ways from Burns's original concepts. He shifted transformational and transactional leadership from operating on a single continuum to two separate continua, arguing that motivating followers to performance beyond expectations involved the use of *both* transactional and transformational behaviors to varying degrees.

Additionally, Bass (1985) initially diverged from the assumption that transforming leadership was inherently ethical, omitting this from the theory and directing greater attention to the importance of charisma. This meant that transformational leadership *might* be in service of a greater good, but this was not always the case and, in fact, transformational leadership could be used to advance opportunistic self-interests. This removal of the *intent* of the theory contributed to a number of problems. For example, representation of transformational leaders often defaults to "great men" such as Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. The removal of Burns's (1978) moral component allowed leaders with horrifyingly negative influences on society to be classified as "transformational" (e.g. Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) later made corrections to this distinguishing between transformational leadership, which retained an ethical and moral focus, and *pseudo-transformational leadership*, which masked as such but was employed to advance only the opportunistic self-interests of the leader.

Applying the Concept

Bass and colleagues (Avolio 2011; Bass 1985; Bass and Avolio 1994) nest transformational leadership as part of the full-range leadership model, which identifies three behavioral meta-categories consisting of eight factors that interact dynamically to shape a leader's behavioral style, in turn influencing followers' efforts. Yukl (1999) is quick to note that the model's name is misleading as it does not, in fact, cover a full-range of behavioral

considerations. Transformational factors associated with the full-range leadership model include the following:

Idealized Influence

Originally referred to as charisma, this reflects leaders “who by the power of their person have profound and extraordinary effects on their followers” (Bass 1985, 35). By serving as role models, sacrificing personal gain, acting consistently, and demonstrating ethical courage, leaders build emotional attachments that are leveraged in service of goals. These attachments lead to followers emulating the leader and perceiving them as trustworthy and well respected. Thus, idealized influence is a result of both the behaviors that the leader enacts and followers’ attributions.

Inspirational Motivation

This factor involves leaders’ abilities to inspire performance above expectations, typically pushing followers to new heights “by providing meaning and challenge to . . . followers’ work” (Bass and Avolio 1994, 3). This in turn creates a sense of connection to a greater whole or team. The leader both communicates and role-models enthusiasm and optimism to involve followers in constructing a shared vision for the group.

Intellectual Stimulation

The leader engages followers in the process of “questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations with new methods and perspectives” (Avolio 2011, 61) to foster creativity, innovation, and critical thinking. This situates followers as co-contributors to the resolution of problems. Leaders are also careful not to publicly critique mistakes or stymie ideas just because they differ from their own.

Individualized Consideration

The leader aligns mentoring, coaching, and developmental investment efforts with the unique needs of each follower. Avolio (2011) argued this requires “a two-way exchange in communication” (p. 62) between leader and followers. The leader demonstrates active listening, delegates responsibility, and creates learning opportunities that contribute to the growth and development of followers. This creates a healthy climate that acknowledges, respects, and supports individual differences.

Transactional leadership factors include the following:

Contingent Reward

This involves creating a contract with the follower that specifies roles, responsibilities, and desired outcomes. Positive rewards are exchanged based on the degree to which goals are met.

Active Management-by-Exception

The leader monitors followers' performance, adopting an approach that is "more corrective than constructive" (Avolio 2011, 57), closely observing and intervening before or as errors are made to reduce or avoid them.

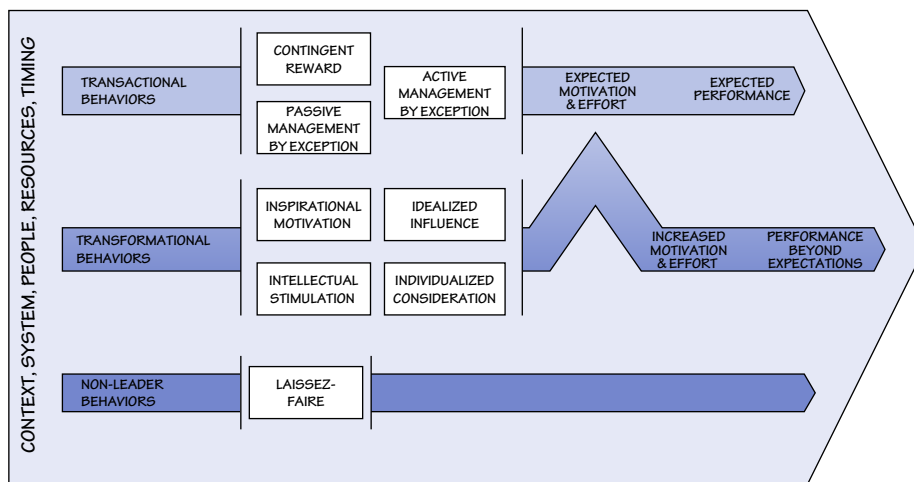
Passive Management-by-Exception

The leader monitors followers' performance and notes mistakes but does not offer corrective interventions before problems arise, waiting to address issues until after they occurred. The leader may use punishment after the fact as a tool for accountability.

The final meta-category in the full-range model describes non-leader behavior and consists of a single factor. *Laissez-faire* leaders are passive, avoid responsibility, or simply do not engage with their role.

The full-range model suggests that leaders inherently engage in all eight behaviors to varying degrees. However, optimizing leadership, which in essence means elevating the motivational and performance potential of followers, involves balancing the frequency of transactional and transformational behaviors based on considerations associated with the context and system as well as the people, resources, and timing that form it (Avolio 2011). Figure 6.1 illustrates how this balancing act alters followers' motivation and performance, in turn heightening leadership outcome achievement.

Non-leader behaviors, along with passive management-by-exception, are considered largely ineffective and should be practiced the least. Active management-by-exception behaviors should be kept to a minimum and while occasionally necessary are not typically effective or well received by followers. Conversely, healthy transactional behaviors in the form of contingent reward provide a foundation for the four transformational leadership behaviors, which leaders are encouraged to enact at high rates given they contribute to the greatest degree of satisfaction and effectiveness. Avolio (2011) positioned idealized influence and inspirational motivation as the most potent of the transformational factors.

FIGURE 6.1 Adapted full-range model of leadership.

Finally, Avolio and Bass (2004) noted that effective enactment of transformational leadership behaviors should lead to a *cascading effect* in which followers are developed to their fullest potential and in turn become transformational leaders themselves. Thus, the impact of adopting transformational leadership is believed to go beyond just achievement of leadership outcomes to create an environment that contributes to human capacity building.

How Research Evolves the Concept

The mountain of research on transformational leadership is built primarily on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which was designed to measure the eight factors of the full-range leadership model (Avolio and Bass 2004). Given that so much of the empirical research on transformational leadership relies on the MLQ, substantial efforts have been directed toward its psychometric validation (Antonakis 2012; Avolio and Bass 2004). The instrument demonstrates both reliability and validity as well as significant cross-cultural transferability. Countless studies along with meta-analytic research (i.e. studies of studies) examine contextual influences (e.g. career settings, individual differences, cultural contexts) with the potential to influence transformational leadership as well as its influence on leadership outcomes (Bono and Judge 2004; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen 2003; Judge and Piccolo 2004; Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam 1996; Ng 2017; Wang et al. 2011).

Okay, but there is a catch here. Although the MLQ is the primary means of operationalizing transformational leadership through measurement, not everyone is buying it. In fact, multiple scholars question the degree to which MLQ actually measures the underlying concepts of transformational leadership or whether it contributes to a drift away from the core tenets of the original theory (Jones 2019; Siangchokyoo, Klinger, and Champion 2020; Van Knippenberg and Sitkin 2013). In other words, did the MLQ take on a life of its own that now deviates from the core assumptions of transformational leadership? Let's divide results from the empirical research into the good news and issues to consider.

The Good News

The great news is that research using the MLQ routinely demonstrates the positive effect of enacting transformational leadership on a wide range of leadership outcomes, including satisfaction with the leader, leader performance evaluations, follower performance levels, group performance levels, follower well-being, follower perceptions of their qualifications, follower communication behaviors, and organizational commitment and citizenship behaviors (Alegbeleye and Kaufman 2022; Ng 2017; Judge and Piccolo 2004; Lee and Chon 2021; Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam 1996; Sim and Lee 2018; Wang et al. 2011). Perhaps not surprisingly, some studies show that although the benefits accrued from transformational behaviors affect all outcomes they are most potent on attitudinal and motivational ones (Wang et al. 2011). These studies also largely support that active and passive management-by-exception as well as laissez-faire leadership have negative influences on leadership outcomes.

More recent neuroscientific research confirms and expands on the positive impact of transformational leadership. Bergner, Rybnicek, and Koschutnig (2022) demonstrated “the neural response to perceived [transformational leadership] not only correlates with the followers’ level of motivation but even predicts it beyond well-establishing rating measurements” (p. 4). They also found that this impact occurred on the basis of belief in a leader as transformational alone without experience, direct interactions, or transformational leadership behaviors. Notably, however, the research solely focused on male leaders significantly limiting the generalizability of the research. Interesting choice. We will come back to this in our deconstruction and reconstruction.

Most importantly, the full-range leadership model rests on the key argument that enacting transformational leadership behaviors has a positive effect on followers beyond that obtained through transactional factors alone. Research by Wang et al. (2011) supports

this, demonstrating an increased frequency of voluntarily motivated actions exceeding the requirements of a follower's job description when contingent reward is augmented by transformational behaviors. The same effect is observed in team performance. Interestingly, this augmentation effect operates in reverse with regard to influencing followers' performance of base job responsibilities. If you want followers to meet base expectations, transformational behaviors alone may not be sufficient, and if you want people to exceed expectations, contingent reward on its own is insufficient.

The Concerning News

The strongest critiques of transformational leadership come from Van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013), who go as far as to call for its abandonment as a theoretical construct. They express concerns about its (1) lack of definitional clarity; (2) explanations of causality between transformational behaviors, their impact on followers, and impact on outcomes; (3) confounding of leader behavior and effects; and (4) inconsistent reproduction of theoretical concepts via measurement. Jones (2019) and Siangchokyoo, Klinger, and Champion (2020) echoed these concerns but don't go quite as far as classifying transformational leadership as a zombie theory. Siangchokyoo, Klinger, and Champion (2020) suggested the need to revisit theoretical assumptions for validation and/or refinement offering a road map for future research.

Part of the concerns about transformational leadership involve the limited evidence of precisely how the enactment of transformational leadership contributes to such significant gains in leadership outcomes. Some argue it has to do with the ways in which followers are empowered and their leadership development stimulated as a result of engaging with a leader who enacts transformational behaviors (Mhatre and Riggio 2014). Others argue that transformational behaviors contribute to greater personal identification with the leader, trust, intrinsic motivation, psychological support, and individual and collective efficacy (Kark and Shamir 2002; Mhatre and Riggio 2014; Yukl 1999). Ultimately, though, the full-range leadership model does not provide a prescriptive recipe for how to implement the factors that constitute it. Nor does it offer a comprehensive explanation of just how the four factors interact with one another to produce transformational leadership, largely providing just a set of behavioral recommendations (Alvesson and Kärreman 2015; Van Knippenberg and Sitkin 2013). Ng (2017) suggested that the pathways between transformational behaviors, follower impact, and performance impact are better understood by integrating considerations of leader-member exchange theory (see Chapter 7).

Another essential argument of transformational leadership involves the cascading effect and belief that exposure to transformational behaviors contributes to the development of followers into leaders in their own right. Empirical evidence on the influence of transformational leadership behaviors on followers’ leadership capacity is scant. Furthermore, there exists virtually no examination of the effects of transformational leadership in actually transforming conditions. How are organizations dramatically altered based on the principles? What gains are made because of transformational leadership in ameliorating the compelling social, political, and scientific issues faced by society? Indeed, Antonakis and House (2002) argued that existing “evidence does not imply that transformational leaders cause transformation in organizations and followers. Although causal links could be theorized, up to this point, we have seen no empirical evidence to make that deduction” (p. 27). A decade later Antonakis (2012) stated that “we are still waiting” (p. 280). It’s now 2024—still waiting.

Wrap-Up

Transformational leadership reflects the single most dominant theoretical approach, wielding enormous influence on leadership practice. It is frequently positioned as the catalyst for a boom in leadership research and altering the very paradigm of how leadership is understood. Yet Yukl (2013) argued that the derivatives of transforming leadership don’t quite capture the intent of moral uplift and social progress evident in Burns’s (1978) original work, defaulting more toward its use as a vehicle for organizational goal achievement. Table 6.1 identifies strengths and weaknesses associated with transforming/transformational leadership theory.

TABLE 6.1 Strengths and weaknesses of transforming/transformational leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grounded in moral values, it is among the earliest theories to espouse the importance of investing in follower development• Substantial, high-quality research supports the validity of the theory and its influence on a wide range of leadership outcomes• Situates transformational behaviors in the context of transactional and non-leader behaviors differentiating the influences of each	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full-range leadership is a misnomer as the meta-categories described do not account for all leadership behaviors• Little evidence of how followers, organizations, or systems are transformed as a result of behaviors• Leader-centricity offers minimal consideration of follower agency despite articulating a mutual relationship between leaders and followers

Making Connections

- Transformation sounds great, but who has the power and authority to determine the type of transformation being pursued and the moral foundations that guide it? How might this run the risk of replicating dominant norms?
- What stands out as useful about transforming/transformational leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Building on the work of transformational leadership, authentic leadership emerged from scholars' attempts to make meaning of the egregious failures of leadership across both the public and private sectors (Avolio and Walumbwa 2014; Caza and Jackson 2011; Gardner et al. 2011; George 2003; George and Sims 2007). Political scandals, corruption on Wall Street, and allegations of child abuse by religious figures are just a few of the catalysts for perceptions that both individuals and institutions that were *supposed* to lead were instead violating the public's trust. It is important to note that this was not just a perfect storm of problems indicative of the time when authentic leadership first emerged. The same issues and many more continue to diminish public opinion about leaders and leadership.

That leaders would act with such disregard for their impact served as an impetus to examine the apparent vacuum of ethical and moral grounding in leadership. Authenticity emerged as a framework to address these concerns. George (2003) is often credited with reinvigorating efforts to integrate authenticity with leadership. His popular books (George 2003, 2015; George, Craig, and Snooks 2015; George and Sims 2007) brought significant attention to the topic, cementing the term as inherently linked to "good" leaders and leadership in many people's informal theories. Concurrently, scholarship on authentic leadership grew, with Luthans and Avolio (2003) playing a central role in establishing its prominence in the leadership studies literature.

The pace and vigor with which leadership studies adopted, theorized, and applied the concept of authentic leadership is, in and of itself, novel in its attempt to situate itself as an underlying and requisite part of all prosocial theories of leadership (e.g. transformational, servant, social change model). Additionally, the work of authentic leadership may suffer most from the inauthenticity of its own origins. Both questions about the integrity

of the underlying research that created it and the degree to which authentic leadership is legitimately distinguishable from transformational leadership haunt the theory to this day.

Overview

I need to be candid. The body of literature on authentic leadership, while novel and important to leadership studies, is also—how should I put this—a mess. The rapidity with which scholars delved into the subject matter and leaders translated it to practice is astonishing. It also resulted in competing definitional parameters, core tenets, component parts, and methods of measurement, making it exceptionally difficult to compare conceptualizations. Additionally, much of the literature operates on questionable conceptual and theoretical foundations (Alvesson and Einola 2019; Gardner et al. 2021). Things get further complicated given that several of the empirical studies that do exist and support the development of the theory have either been called into question for problematic research procedures or completely retracted from the academic, peer-reviewed publications in which they appeared. This makes synthesizing content related to authentic leadership challenging.

To minimize confusion, we will only explore content from the scholarly line of inquiry that evolved from Luthans and Avolio's (2003) conceptualization of authentic leadership. This is not to suggest that popular press and more practical writing on the topic are not important or do not influence the larger body of work. However, focusing on the scholarly literature allows us to interpret content in more informed ways.

Points of Caution

Let's start by walking through a number of cautions that emerge across the scholarly literature on authentic leadership:

- *There exists no unifying definition, theory, model, or measurement of authentic leadership* (Gardner et al. 2011). Consensus simply has not been reached. There is some cohesion around core components outlined by Kernis (2003) and Kernis and Goldman (2006), which we will explore later.
- *Authenticity is often framed as a false dichotomy* in which a person is either entirely authentic or entirely inauthentic. This reduces the concept to a static trait as opposed to a capacity that can be developed. It also ignores situational influences on how authenticity is manifest. Scholars typically position authenticity as a developmental construct and urge the use of more nuanced terminology that reflects gradations such as more

or less authentic (Erickson 1995; Gardner et al. 2011). However, writing on authentic leadership often fails to make this distinction, employing language that reinforces a good/bad, authentic/inauthentic dichotomy.

- Scholarship on authentic leadership is *leader-centric, often exacerbating staunch differentiations between leaders and followers* (Alvesson and Einola 2019; Ladkin and Spiller 2013; Yammarino et al. 2008). Most scholarship focuses on the actions of the leader, although these are understood in relation to followers' perceptions. Some attention is directed toward follower authenticity and the role that leaders play in developing it, although this reinforces leader/follower dichotomies and risks paternalism. Some suggest authentic leadership emerges from the relationship between the leader and follower as opposed to focusing on one or the other (Avolio and Walumbwa 2014). The description of this, however, reflects more of an interactional approach than a relational one.

These cautions reflect points of tension in the literature that differentiate perspectives on what authenticity and authentic leadership are as well as how they operate.

Defining Authenticity

So what exactly is authenticity? This question has troubled philosophers and scholars across cultural and political contexts from antiquity to today. Some of the earliest understandings date back to ancient Greece and the philosophical tenet “know thyself.” Modern conceptualizations typically position authenticity as the process of constructing a core sense of self that is consistent over time and across contexts (Avolio and Gardner 2005; Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbwa 2005; Gardner et al. 2011; Kernis and Goldman 2006). Harter (2002) defined authenticity as “owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know oneself . . . one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings” (p. 382).

Gardner et al. (2011) explained that authenticity is believed to consist of four elements, originally outlined by Kernis (2003) and Kernis and Goldman (2006) including “(1) awareness (i.e. knowledge and trust in one’s thoughts, feelings, motives and values); (2) unbiased processing (i.e. objectivity about and acceptance of one’s positive and negative attributes); (3) behavior (i.e. acting based on one’s true preferences, values, and needs rather than merely acting to please others, secure rewards, or avoid punishments);

and (4) relational orientation (i.e. achieving and valuing truthfulness and openness in one's close relationships" (p. 1121). This understanding of authenticity and its constituent parts serves as the basis for most of the literature on authentic leadership (Avolio and Walumbwa 2014; Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbwa 2005; Gardner et al. 2011).

Defining Authentic Leadership

Before we explore how authentic leadership is defined, let's walk through three core premises that inform it:

- *Authentic leadership grows out of two specific bodies of literature.* Positive psychology (i.e. a subset of psychology focused on optimal human functioning and emphasizing assets over deficits; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) served as a strong influence in shaping the interpretation of authenticity in the context of leadership (Luthans and Avolio 2003). Additionally, many consider authentic leadership to be an extension of transformational leadership attempting to further the differentiation between positive enactments and negative, pseudo-transformational ones (Caza and Jackson 2011).
- Together these bodies of literature position *authentic leadership as fundamentally moral* (Avolio and Gardner 2005), a premise that did not appear in the original definitions of authenticity in which it is grounded.
- Scholars increasingly argue that *authentic leadership serves as a root construct* that undergirds all prosocial leadership theories by providing a grounding in morals and ethics (Avolio and Gardner 2005; Avolio et al. 2004; Luthans and Avolio 2003). Thus, someone might practice authentic transformational leadership, authentic situational leadership, or authentic implicit leadership.

Luthans and Avolio (2003) initially defined authentic leadership as "a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development" (p. 243). This definition was later adjusted based on empirical research. Walumbwa et al. (2008) defined *authentic leadership* as "a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development" (p. 94).

This shift in definitions reflects a more competency-based approach to authentic leadership, moving further away from original definitions of authenticity. Additionally, Walumbwa et al. (2008) deviated from Luthans and Avolio's (2003) assertions of the centrality of positive psychological capacities and ethical organizational climates. They argued instead that there was a reciprocal relationship between these concepts and the development of authentic leadership. Therefore, they remain foundational to understanding authentic leadership but not part of the core conceptualization.

Applying the Concept

The four core competencies (i.e. self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective) identified in Walumbwa et al.'s (2008) definition of authentic leadership provide the focal point for translating the theory to practice (see Table 6.2 for definitions). Collectively, they represent the overarching construct of authentic leadership, with each component demonstrating unique contributions to the whole. Additionally, each construct is constituted by both a person's thoughts as well as behaviors. Essentially, enacting the competencies is equated with enacting authentic leadership.

TABLE 6.2 Core competencies associated with authentic leadership

Competency	Definition
Self-awareness	Understands one's own process of deriving and making meaning of the world as well as how this influences the perspective of self over time; demonstrates understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses; recognizes the multifaceted nature of the "self"; gains self-perspective through social interactions; exhibits mindfulness of one's impact on others
Relational transparency	Ability and willingness to present one's authentic self to others; promotes trust through disclosure and openness in sharing; communicates one's true thoughts and feelings while also reducing expression of inappropriate emotions; avoidance of self-representations that are distorted or insincere
Balanced processing	Ability to objectively analyze all relevant information before decision making; requests and legitimately considers information and perspectives that challenge deeply held positions
Internalized moral perspective	Draws on ethical values and moral standards in process of self-regulation; resists external pressures that conflict with internalized standards; demonstrates congruence between internalized values and behaviors

Adapted from Avolio and Walumbwa (2014) and Walumbwa et al. (2008).

TABLE 6.3 Positive psychological states associated with authentic leadership

State	Definition
Hope	Motivation to accomplish goals (willpower); ability to identify multiple pathways to achieve a goal (agency)
Optimism	Expectation of a positive outcome; internalization of successes; failures perceived as temporary and a function of context
Resiliency	Adoption of patterns of positive adaptation to situations; the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity or stress

Adapted from Avolio and Luthans (2006) and Luthans et al. (2007).

Positive psychological capacities influence the four key competencies of authentic leadership and in turn are influenced by them. So what exactly are they? Luthans et al. (2007) suggested they represent a form of psychological capital and are defined “as going beyond human (what you know) and social (who you know) capital to ‘who you are’ (your possible self) . . . [and] involves investing in the actual self to reap the return of becoming the possible self” (Avolio and Luthans 2006, 147). I had to read that quote about three times, and I’m still like . . . what? The scholars argue that this investment occurs through ongoing development across three positive states: hope, optimism, and resiliency (see Table 6.3).

As is the case with many competency-based and behavioral approaches to leadership, there is a lack of clarity about how the theory functions beyond enactment of the core concepts. The principle is largely to just do more of what the theory values. Avolio and Walumbwa (2014) suggested that the enactment of authentic approaches “should be highly valued by followers and indeed emulated in that followers would come to identify with and trust authentic leaders to a great extent” (p. 339). This situates role modeling as well as trust building as primary considerations in translating authentic leadership to practice.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Making sense of the empirical research on authentic leadership can be challenging given the wide array of measurement tools that exist. The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire is used most often and reflects Walumbwa et al.’s (2008) definition of the theory (Banks et al. 2016; Gardner et al. 2011). The instrument demonstrated cross-cultural and cross-context reliability, although more work is needed to verify the extent of this (Avolio and Walumbwa 2014; Walumbwa and Wernsing 2013). Further refinement of

the measurement model was conducted by Avolio, Wernsing, and Gardner (2018), but its accuracy continues to be questioned by scholars.

Leadership Outcomes

Research links authentic leadership enactment by leaders to outcomes such as increased teamwork, trust, group performance, follower satisfaction and engagement, well-being and family enrichment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Azanza et al. 2018; Bamford, Wong, and Laschinger 2013; Banks et al. 2016; Braun and Nieberle 2017; Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, and Avey 2009; Edú-Valsania, Moriano, and Molero 2016; Giallonardo, Wong, and Iwasiw 2010; Leroy et al. 2015; Walumbwa et al. 2008; Weiss et al. 2018; Wong and Giallonardo 2013; Wong, Spence Laschinger, and Cummings 2010). Much of the research is predicated on perceptions of leader authenticity by followers. Additionally, Stefens et al. (2016) found that followers' perceptions of leader authenticity were enhanced by the degree to which they believed the leader both advocated for collective interests over personal ones and was a member of the group rather than an outsider.

Distinctiveness as a Theory

There is some concern about the extent to which authentic leadership is distinctive from other theories that incorporate moral and ethical perspectives (Alvesson and Einola 2019; Avolio and Walumbwa 2014; Banks et al. 2016; Lemoine, Hartnell, and Leroy 2019). Walumbwa et al. (2008) provided empirical evidence that as a root construct authentic leadership is related to transformational and ethical leadership but also offers explanatory value above and beyond those theories. Multiple scholars (Alvesson and Einola 2019; Banks et al. 2016; Gardner et al. 2021; Hoch et al. 2018), however, refute this philosophically and empirically, identifying a high degree of overlap between authentic leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, and ethical leadership with minimal unique contributions among them. This draws into question whether there really is a distinction between the various theories.

Wrap-Up

Practitioners and scholars alike seem enthralled with authentic leadership, and the theory most certainly demonstrates considerable potential. However, Walumbwa and Wernsing (2013) admitted that while “authentic leadership is believed by scholars to foster a range of positive outcomes and reduce counterproductive behaviors, the *how* and *why* of these

TABLE 6.4 Strengths and weaknesses of authentic leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extends the understanding of prosocial leadership theories by identifying authentic leadership as a root construct• Positions ethical and moral values as drivers of leadership• Incorporates the concept of psychological capital as a foundation with attention toward hope, optimism, and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leader-centric in design and treatment of followers• Lack of conceptual clarity contributing to multiple interpretations of the theory, its core concepts, and measurement• Remains largely conceptual with limited empirical testing, some of which is identified as problematic

relationships has remained largely unexplored” (p. 397). Avolio and Walumbwa (2014) go a step further by urging caution regarding the rapidity with which authentic leadership has been adopted, suggesting that the integration of what are still nascent and unvalidated ideas into training and development programs is risky. More than almost any other theory, scholars of authentic leadership seem to blur the boundaries of statements based on evidence versus mere conjecture. In sum, authentic leadership attempts to extend the work of transformational leadership theories, but its lack of conceptual, measurement, and theoretical clarity are among its greatest weaknesses. Table 6.4 provides additional strengths and weaknesses.

Making Connections

- How might authentic leadership reflect dominant norms associated with social location? To what extent might exhibiting authenticity be dangerous based on power dynamics?
- What stands out as useful about authentic leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The concept of servant leadership initially emerged as a philosophical framework for understanding leadership in a series of papers written by Greenleaf (1970, 1977), a business executive who worked for AT&T. Greenleaf offered a reframing of what he believed leadership *should* be about. His philosophy suggested that formal leaders should act as

servants first and leaders second, reflecting a calling to give back rather than self-serving motives or an overemphasis on production.

Greenleaf's propositions contributed to a wide range of publications and the formation of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership to advance the philosophy and train people in its application to practice. Numerous businesses, universities, and faith-based organizations adopt servant leadership as the foundation for their work given its positioning of leadership as a moral imperative. Despite servant leadership's popularity in practice and existence for over 45 years, it has only been in the last 15 years that scholars directed considerable attention toward its empirical validation.

Overview

Interestingly, Greenleaf's (1970, 1977) early writings on servant leadership predate Burns's (1978) work on transforming leadership. Yet, servant leadership did not initially receive the same degree of academic attention that Burns's work did. Both theories draw on similar foundations, emphasizing a movement beyond management alone, engagement with values and ethics, and development of followers. The potentially unique contribution of servant leadership above and beyond transformational leadership lies in its inclusion of social responsibility as a core premise (Graham 1991; Van Dierendonck 2011). In transformational leadership there is a stated need to invest in individuals, but those investments are in service of an end goal of organizational advancement whereas in servant leadership they are ends in and of themselves. Fully understanding servant leadership requires a quick sidestep into its origins.

The Muse

Greenleaf (1977) credits Hesse's (1956) novel *The Journey to the East*, first published in Germany in 1932, as the inspiration for servant leadership. The novel tells of a mystical journey taken by a group of Western European men who belonged to a sacred religious order whose past members included great men and characters from history, including Plato, Mozart, Don Quixote, and Puss in Boots. Yep, the cat. So the sacred order was composed of all men and a talking cat. We'll come back to that later.

The purpose of the group's journey to the East was to seek the "ultimate truth." What starts as a successful and jovial spiritual quest falls apart after a humble servant to the group disappears and its members devolve into petty arguments. They eventually disband and pursue individual paths. It's clear to readers, however, that this "servant" was in

actuality much more. He provided the glue that held the group together, yet they remained oblivious to his importance.

The main character spends years in despair over the failure and what he believes to be the collapse of the religious order that gave him purpose and direction in life. He attempts to document the journey, struggling to capture what happened and all the while becoming more disenfranchised. A sharp turn in the novel reveals that the “servant” who left the group was in actuality . . . Puss in Boots! Just kidding, the servant was the head of the religious order and the journey and subsequent years of disillusionment were tests of faith, which the main character failed. He is given a final test that challenges his understanding of what constitutes “truth.” This test ends with the main character viewing his own story as documented in the archives of the order, revealing that his identity is tied to and merging with that of the servant—an allegory for letting go of personal ego and the emergence of an interdependent consciousness.

Understanding the story that inspired Greenleaf (1977) to write about servant leadership is incredibly important as it helps us understand the dynamics from which he built his philosophy. His interpretation rests on the assertion that “this story clearly says that *the great leader is seen as servant first*, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness . . . he was servant first because that was who he was, *deep down inside*” (Greenleaf 1977, 21, emphasis in original). Greenleaf saw in Hesse’s (1956) work how “servants” are often obscured by groups that instead focus on those in formal positions using authority to advance organizational or individual goals rather than collective ones. Drawing on the major themes of the story, his intent was to reshape leadership as derived *first* from deep service that in turn elevates into formal authority.

However, as a function of both its content and the historical context in which it was written, *The Journey to the East* also reflects problematic elements either ignored by Greenleaf (1977) or that show up in his philosophy and its contemporary application. This includes the patriarchal positioning of “great men,” paternalistic approaches to development and learning, and orientalist overtones (i.e. an ideology presuming marked distinctions between “Western” and “Eastern” cultures in which Western values are normative and Eastern cultures misrepresented, exaggerated, and exoticized). These ideas are particularly apparent in how servant leadership remains leader-centric, positions the role of the leader as a nurturing parental figure, and reproduces gendered norms.

Furthermore, Greenleaf’s interpretation leaves out some of the most important existential questions of the novel that draw on multiple spiritual traditions, defaulting instead to Judeo-Christian examples. It should not be surprising, then, that servant leadership is

sometimes narrowly interpreted through the lens of religiosity and appropriated as *solely* a story of Judeo-Christian leadership. For example, Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) argued that “Greenleaf is not the individual who first introduced the notion of servant leadership to everyday human endeavor. It was Christianity’s founder, Jesus Christ, who first taught the concept of servant leadership” (p. 58). Parris and Peachey (2013) caution that the roots of servant leadership date back *not* to a single faith tradition or individual but to teachings from most of the world’s great religions and a wide range of historical figures.

Philosophical Starting Point

If you think back to the first chapter, we differentiated between theories, models, taxonomies, and philosophical frameworks. Servant leadership provides an example of how that differentiation becomes important. Servant leadership, as originally conceived by Greenleaf (1977), offers a philosophical framework or abstract representation of untested ideas and principles. He did not offer a formal theory, provide an explicit definition, or include a model for how it should be operationalized in practice. This means that the application of servant leadership and scholarly research on it are interpretations of Greenleaf’s philosophy reflecting varying degrees of congruence with the original work.

Scholars and practitioners alike attempted to provide definitional clarity about what servant leadership means. Most draw on the following quote in building their definition:

The servant-leader is servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such, it will be a later choice to serve—after leadership is established. . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not be further deprived? (Greenleaf 1977, 27)

Additionally, scholars attempt to identify core tenets that set servant leadership apart from other theories. These typically include that (1) the motivation to lead is derived from a deeply personal desire to serve others, (2) the desire to serve others operates not just in a particular organizational or group context but in all aspects of the leader’s life, (3) power

and authority should be given to leaders by followers and only to the degree that they operate from a servant perspective, and (4) leaders have a moral obligation to demonstrate concern for the development of followers to their full potential.

Applying the Concept

Numerous scholars offer insights into how best to operationalize servant leadership, moving it from a broad philosophy to a functional theory, model, or taxonomy more accessible for application to practice (Barbuto and Wheeler 2006; Brown and Bryant 2015; Liden et al. 2014; Liden et al. 2008; Russell and Stone 2002; Spears 1995, 2010; Van Dierendonck 2011; Van Dierendonck and Nuijten 2011; Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2015). Initially these efforts focused almost entirely on the identification of traits and behaviors associated with enacting the role of a servant leader. This was later extended to a broader range of considerations. However, there exists no single agreed-upon approach to servant leadership. As such, Figure 6.2 provides an adaptation of servant leadership that draws on several of the most recognized conceptualizations (Eva et al. 2019a; Liden et al. 2008, 2014; Van Dierendonck 2011).

At the center of Figure 6.2 is the heart of servant leadership—the behaviors that leaders exhibit to bring to life Greenleaf's (1977) original philosophy. These include:

Conceptual skills: Developing knowledge of the environment in which leadership unfolds as well as the leadership tasks/processes occurring to be able to support followers effectively

Emotional healing: Demonstrating sensitivity to the personal concerns of followers

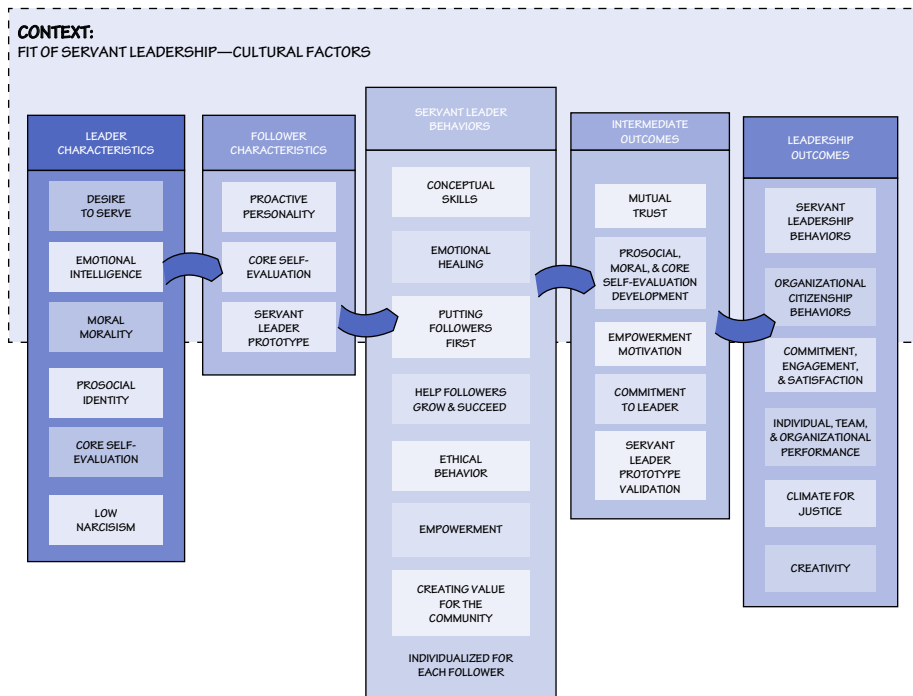
Putting followers first: Communicating and demonstrating through action that the work needs of followers are a priority

Helping followers grow and succeed: Prioritizing the personal and professional development of followers by providing necessary support and resources

Behaving ethically: Engaging with followers in an open, fair, and honest manner

Empowerment: Positioning followers as capable of identifying and resolving problems as well as directing their own work flow through encouragement

Creating value for the community: Communicating a genuine concern for the community

FIGURE 6.2 Adapted model of servant leadership.

Each of the behaviors should be individualized to best meet the unique needs of each follower. For example, how a leader enacts emotional healing may look different for one person than it does for another.

The relative effectiveness of servant leader behaviors is a function of three key factors. First, the context in which servant leader behaviors are manifest shapes the degree to which they will be accepted. Second, not all groups and organizations may find servant leadership desirable or effective and thus may not be receptive to it (Anderson 2009; Liden et al. 2014). Third, culture influences the ways in which servant leader behaviors are enacted, valued, and interpreted (Van Dierendonck 2011).

Additionally, the characteristics of both leaders and followers play a powerful role in determining the effectiveness of servant leader behaviors. Leader characteristics include the following traits and attributes: (1) a *desire to serve others* grounded in altruistic, intrinsic motivation, (2) *emotional intelligence*, (3) a level of *moral maturity* characterized by the ability to make sound moral judgments, employ metacognitive reasoning, situate oneself as morally responsible, and consistently act in moral ways, (4) a *prosocial*

identity in which one's self-concept is defined in part by a belief in the importance of helping others, (5) a *core sense of self* characterized by healthy self-esteem and self-efficacy, an internal locus of control, and low degrees of neuroticism, and (6) *low levels of narcissism* so that ego-driven behaviors, self-importance, and entitlement are limited and the needs of followers put first.

Leader characteristics interact dynamically with follower traits and attributes, influencing how servant leader behaviors should be enacted. First, followers with a *proactive personality* thrive on and benefit from the agency and interdependence afforded by empowerment behaviors. Those whose personalities are less proactive benefit from behaviors associated with conceptual skills, putting followers first, and helping followers to grow and succeed. Second, when followers possess a *healthy core sense of self*, behaviors associated with empowerment and helping followers grow and succeed are well received. If a follower's core sense of self is underdeveloped, then behaviors associated with helping followers grow and succeed and emotional healing become important.

Finally, harkening back to implicit leadership theory (ILT), followers develop ideal leader prototypes that shape how they perceive those in leader roles. Followers' *servant leader prototypes* influence their conscious and subconscious expectations regarding what servant leadership should look like and whether it is desirable. This shapes followers' receptivity to and expectations for servant leader behaviors, in turn requiring leaders to rely heavily on the relational aspects of emotional healing to customize behaviors to meet their needs.

When there is a dynamic alignment between context, leader characteristics, and follower characteristics, servant leader behaviors cultivate intermediate outcomes that contribute to leadership outcomes (e.g. performance, satisfaction, goal attainment). These intermediate outcomes are important in and of themselves as they foster a climate of reciprocity. This includes increased mutual trust between leaders and followers; gains in followers' core sense of self, prosocial identity, and moral development; greater sense of empowerment; increased commitment to the leader; and better alignment between leader and follower prototypes for servant leadership. Collectively, these intermediate outcomes shape the degree to which leadership outcomes are achieved.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Servant leadership originated as a broad philosophical framework without a clear theoretical base from which to ground empirical research. This may explain in part why it took so long for scholars to direct significant attention toward evolving the concept despite its widespread use. Let's examine several considerations from research.

Validation and Theoretical Distinctiveness

The seven servant leader behaviors presented in this chapter are the result of empirical model building and psychometric testing (Eva et al. 2019a; Liden et al. 2008, 2014, 2015). While other sets of behaviors exist, none have undergone such extensive empirical examination to affirm accuracy of measurement. Yet, scholars debate whether servant leadership is distinct from other theories including authentic and transformational leadership. Findings vary with some validating servant leadership's uniqueness, and others identifying considerable overlap (Banks et al. 2016; Ehrhart 2004; Eva et al. 2019a; Hoch et al. 2018; Liden et al. 2008; Parolini, Patterson, and Winston 2009; Peterson, Galvin, and Lange 2012; Schaubroeck, Lam, and Peng 2011; Van Dierendonck et al. 2014).

Influences on Leadership Outcomes

Research demonstrates an impact associated with enacting servant leadership behaviors on leadership outcomes. Several literature reviews synthesize these results, highlighting its positive influence on outcomes ranging from individual and team performance to organizational commitment and citizenship behaviors (Eva et al. 2019a; Liden et al. 2014; Parris and Peachey 2013; Van Dierendonck 2011). Figure 6.2 captures the range of leadership outcomes found in the literature. It is important to note that research on servant leadership has included varying aspects of the environmental context often absent from studies as well as demonstrated the additive value of enacting servant leadership beyond that accrued through other theories alone. That having been said, servant leadership represents an area of research that requires significant caution. A volume of studies appear in two journals dedicated explicitly to servant leadership and its propagation, both of which vary considerably in quality of research methods and impact.

Considerations Based on Social Location

As is the case with many leadership theories, most of the research on servant leadership addressing social location reflects a convenient sidestep around domestic cultural differences in the United States, emphasizing instead international cross-cultural applications. Empirical measures of servant leadership employed in a variety of international contexts appear to demonstrate transferability (Hu and Liden 2011; Schaubroeck, Lam, and Peng 2011; Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Oke 2010).

Some attention has been directed to gender differences in the enactment of servant leadership behaviors, although most of this research comes from unpublished dissertations

or studies with limited generalizability. Eicher-Catt (2005), however, offered an insightful deconstruction of servant leadership, drawing on feminist perspectives that add significantly to understanding the concept. She troubled the use of contradictory terms such as “servant” and “leader,” which elicit paradoxical stocks of knowledge to disrupt commonly accepted understandings of leadership. However, these terms are not neutral values and as such also simultaneously draw on gendered stocks of knowledge that associate “leader” with masculinity and dominance and “servant” with femininity and subjugation. Eicher-Catt further argued that the grounding of servant leadership in a Judeo-Christian ideology has implications for how power is manifest, given its rootedness in patriarchy and how the tradition has historically “marked women and other marginalized groups as others, as transgressors against society’s norms” (p. 21). She goes on to caution that because the initial disruption of what leadership is thought to be is so attractive and the core tenets of inclusivity and development align with contemporary values, servant leadership “can be easily appropriated to serve political ends” (Eicher-Catt 2005, 23).

Wrap-Up

Servant leadership is unique within the body of leadership theories, having evolved from a philosophical framework created to challenge commonly held conceptions of power and production. However, servant leadership also runs the risk of reinforcing leader-centricity and a number of problematic ideologies depending on how it is translated to practice. Greenleaf (1977) acknowledged some of these criticisms. He also encouraged people to avoid dismissing the potential that servant leadership presents simply because it isn’t perfect. Table 6.5 synthesizes key strengths and weaknesses associated with servant leadership.

TABLE 6.5 Strengths and weaknesses of servant leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emergent research that is psychometrically rigorous validates the concept• Demonstrated positive influences on leadership outcomes above and beyond those associated with other leadership theories• Acknowledges how dynamic interactions with context, culture, and followers shape relative success when translating to practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Because it originated as a philosophy, multiple competing versions exist, each with varying congruence with the original concept and quality of empirical support• May not be desirable in all organizational contexts given its core tenets• Leader-centric nature, limited examination of social location, and potential to perpetuate patriarchal and Judeo-Christian norms necessitate caution in its enactment

Making Connections

- Servant leadership demonstrates incredible potential to engage in reciprocal, developmental leadership relationships but also to become patriarchal. Drawing on your own leadership experiences, what needs to be considered when applying servant leadership to practice?
- What stands out as useful about servant leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

DECONSTRUCTING LEADER-DRIVEN THEORIES

Leader-driven theories represent a shift to conceptualizing leadership in a way that is hopeful and inspiring. This does *not* mean, however, that they are above deconstruction. Indeed, a number of themes emerge that merit careful consideration, including (1) leader-centricity, (2) lack of a complex treatment of what transformation entails, (3) utopian perspectives, and (4) the potential for patriarchal, paternalistic, or colonialistic enactment. *Ideological critique* (i.e. identifying normative assumptions and how they maintain the status quo) serves as a useful tool to examine these themes.

Romanticizing Leadership

Critical leadership studies challenge how leadership is frequently framed as an inherent good and even romanticized (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, 2014; Collinson 2011, 2014, 2018, 2020). Deconstructing leader-driven theories requires an assessment of the degree to which leadership is romanticized and framed as inherently positive. For example, transformational leadership explicitly states its grounding in moral and ethical values. *Pseudo-transformational* leadership is partitioned out as something else entirely and explained as the use of the same behaviors but in service of opportunistic self-interest. This creates a false binary. History is rife with examples of leaders whose motivations do not neatly collapse into categories of good versus bad, transformational versus pseudo-transformational. This is an inconvenient truth often left unstated.

Leadership for What?

Leader-driven theories focus disproportionate attention on the process of leadership rather than understanding the complexity of the end goal itself. Highlighting how leader-driven

theories seem more fantasy than reality, Alvesson and Kärreman (2015) argued that “one gets the feeling that Disney is more of an inspiration than corporate reality for many leadership academics” (p. 144). This assessment doesn’t just hold for business but all contexts. Ultimately, the degree to which a leadership theory is prosocial and moral lacks relevance if it fails to direct adequate attention toward understanding the complex realities that shape the targets it is attempting to transform.

Diminished Complexity

Authentic leadership is particularly guilty of resting on an implicit assumption that the “self” is concrete, stable, singular, and easily defined, when we know it is much more complex than that. A sense of self is fluid, multiplistic, created in relationship with others, and emerges as a result of stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location.

Consider, for example, how you show up in different places. Are you always exactly the same? Do you always authentically communicate exactly what you are thinking? I know that how I show up at work is similar to but also unique from how I show up with my friends and family. Not everyone in every context deserves access to my innermost sense of self. Even in our most intimate and personal relationships, aren’t there still boundaries around what we share and how we share it? Does that make us any less authentic? Couldn’t each of these representations of self authentically coexist?

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2013) took this argument a step further, suggesting “it is difficult and challenging to construct a true self in an imperfect world with varying social and relational dynamics. The workplace particularly calls for the ability to play a variety of different roles and to act in ways which do not necessarily overlap with the feeling of who one truly is” (p. 49). Clarke, Kelliher, and Schedlitzki (2013) argued that what authentic leadership ultimately advances is the importance of a *perception* of authenticity—that the performance and appearance of authenticity contributes to a greater sense of credibility and loyalty to the leader. They go on to suggest that this reaps a variety of disconcerting benefits, ranging from perpetuating leader-centricity, great man ideals, and follower dependency to situating the leader as the framer of truth given their positioning as authentic, transformational, and/or as servant.

Overreliance on Altruism

Leader-driven theories rely heavily on altruistic intentions grounded in “calling,” “moral uplift,” and “authenticity.” There is no doubt that these are admirable concepts. To put it bluntly, though, what if an individual, team, or organization simply doesn’t give a shit? What

then? Does the application of these theories become moot? And I'm not just talking about ambivalence from those in positional leader roles. Some followers may demonstrate resistance to altruistic behaviors while others might prey on the goodwill of those who use them.

Perpetuating the Heroic Leader Myth

Alvesson and Kärreman (2015) suggested that “much of what is published under the label of leadership contributes to strengthen, rather than undermine, the ideology of leadership legitimizing and supporting a faith in leader-elites doing the good thing” (p. 142). Leader-centricity is explicit in transformational, authentic, and servant leadership, which can contribute to dependency relationships and deprive those without formal authority of agency. Three significant dangers arise from this.

The Savior Complex

Leader-driven theories run the risk of contributing to ego-driven savior complexes. Consider, for example, the central role that idealized influence plays in transformational leadership. Its function is based on leveraging “the power of their person” which creates “profound and extraordinary effects on their followers” (Bass 1985, 35). The power of their person—it sounds almost supernatural, and it should as the concept is grounded in charisma and reaffirms stocks of knowledge that position leaders as heroes. The savior complex that emerges from this is also self-perpetuating.

Transformation theories also fail to fully define their core concepts, which risks defaulting to implicit interpretations of what they mean. Jones and Grint (2013) remind us that “what may or may not be in the best interests of others is a notoriously difficult judgment to make, as one person's good may be another's evil, not to mention the perpetually unresolved debate of the trade-off of harm to a minority for the sake of the majority” (p. 27). This does not suggest a moral relativity but that engaging with the ill-structured, ambiguous, and complex concepts associated with morality is a necessity that transformational theories have often sidestepped. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2013) shared “there are no universal or agreed upon ethical criteria that make it possible to somehow easily divide up leaders into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ categories depending on their positive faith and good morals” (p. 45).

Reinforcement of Dominant Norms

Heroic leadership is predicated on implicit prototypes that often invoke “great man” imagery. Imagine, for example, a time of crisis in which an elected official enacts emotional

healing on a larger scale, making a public statement to communicate empathy and assuage people's fears. Now imagine that this leader becomes emotional in the process—perhaps a crack in voice while speaking, a pause to collect emotions, or the shedding of a few tears. In situations like this, men, and especially cisgender, White men, are often rewarded for engaging in emotional healing and demonstrating controlled but vulnerable responses. It is not typically expected of them and serves a humanizing function. Presidential reactions to national crises by George W. Bush and Barack Obama offer evidence of this. Women, however, confront a double bind. On one hand, gender norms contribute to an expectation that they engage in emotional healing and demonstrate vulnerability. On the other, this does not align with the heroic leader prototype. This incongruence of social role expectations typically results in decreased perceptions of legitimacy as a leader (Owen, 2020).

Prototypes for transformational, authentic, and servant leaders are linked to whiteness and masculinity in the United States. For example, being perceived as “genuinely” authentic becomes a much more challenging and complex task for women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community whose expressions are often judged against dominant norms (Chin and Trimble 2015; Jones, Kim, and Skendall 2012; Ladkin and Patrick 2022; Ladkin and Spiller 2013).

When minoritized people are forced to manage how they show up within an environment, it constitutes emotional labor (Clarke, Kelliher, and Schedlitzki 2013). Individuals must direct energy toward the “performance” of desirable expressions of authenticity as dictated by the dominant group and sanctioned by the organization or risk negative repercussions. Making this all the more complex is the reality that even when minoritized individuals perform normative expressions of authenticity, the dominant group may fail to recognize them as such given the power of social stratification and embeddedness of implicit prototypes. Not only does this create a double bind for those outside the dominant social group, but it also incurs an emotional toll associated with having to navigate these dynamics.

Limiting Agency

Despite characterizing leadership as a process grounded in mutual development, writing on transformational, authentic, and servant leadership typically presumes a top-down translation to practice based on formal authority. Alvesson and Kärreman (2015) suggested this reduces those involved in the process of leadership to mere “objects or recipients of the leader’s impressive acts” (p. 143). Paradoxically, the stated purpose of these theories is to create more leaders and greater leadership capacity in everyone. Yet the explanations in the original theories come across as paternalistic in describing how this occurs.

RECONSTRUCTING LEADER-DRIVEN THEORIES

This time let's approach reconstruction by sharing a real-world issue that relates to leader-driven theories. We can use the issue to illustrate both concerns from the deconstruction and ways in which the theories could be altered to more fully realize the principles of morality, ethics, and authenticity that undergird them. The reconstruction tool of cultivating agency is particularly helpful in this context. *Cultivating agency* fosters conditions that increase individual or collective capacity to act within systems.

The Issue

Martin (2016) makes a compelling case about a growing phenomenon she calls "the reductive seduction of other people's problems" (§ 5), which is born of the best intentions and grounded in the ideological shortcomings of leadership. This phenomenon describes the stark differences between our recognition of sophisticated, complex, and ill-structured dynamics that shape the social ills that *we* live with and our surprising inability to see the same in the contexts that "*others*" inhabit.

Martin (2016) illustrated the "reductive seduction" phenomena using the example of gun violence in the United States. Most people from the United States recognize the multifaceted nature of the problem and its embeddedness in cultural, social, and political issues that make its resolution complex and difficult. It frustrates us. We grow weary of the inadequacy of response, yet at the same time, we may be quick to point to seemingly reasonable and realistic solutions to everything from water and food shortages to refugee crises in other countries. The complexity of other people's problems somehow goes unnoticed. We can even shrink the sphere of influence to interpersonal issues and witness a similar effect. How many times has a friend or colleague shared a problem and you walk away shaking your head thinking it could be easily fixed if they would just [fill in the blank].

The overriding theme here is that it is difficult to see the complexity of issues if we aren't directly immersed in them. The problem gets exacerbated by "save the world" mantras and leadership theories that fail to name the reality of just how difficult transformation actually is. Martin (2016) argued that "it's not malicious. In many ways, it's psychologically defensible; we don't know what we don't know. If you're young, privileged, and interested in creating a life of meaning, of course you'd be attracted to solving problems that seem urgent and readily solvable" (Martin 2016, § 5).

The "reductive seduction" feeds on savior complexes. It is easier to be a hero running off to another place than to address the problems in our own backyard—the work of which

can seem far less prestigious, with a much greater likelihood of incremental advancement than transformational change. It also allows us to sidestep our own positionality, privilege, and complicity in complex social ills.

When we apply leader-driven theories in contexts we do not fully understand, leadership can easily default to paternalism and colonialism. We may inadvertently decrease the agency of those with whom we are working. We also may become more likely to make assumptions that those living with and experiencing the issues directly simply lack the competency and agency to resolve the problem themselves, as if attention to the issue failed to exist until the external leader acknowledged it. At best this reflects a deficit perspective in which the leader is essential for developing agency in the “other” and at worst presumes no agency exists at all and there is the need for the leader to do *for* the “other.”

Modifying Leader-Driven Theories

Leader-driven theories have the potential to either exacerbate “the reductive seduction” or ameliorate it. When the latter occurs, transformational, authentic, and servant leadership offer powerful tool kits for tackling and making progress on social issues. What checks and balances might be needed to assist with this? Four considerations that could be added to any of the theories include the following:

Clarify Terminology

When terms (e.g. ethics, morals, authenticity) are identified as key in a theory but left undefined or poorly integrated into the overarching concept they have a tendency to get washed out as dominant filters take hold. The application of largely prescriptive theories to complex problems is challenging even when we possess a shared understanding. This requires those engaged in leadership to surface, explore, revisit, and continually evolve a shared understanding of key concepts. Alignment around a shared interpretation can decrease the likelihood of defaulting to dominant prototypes or the seductive reduction that Martin (2016) discusses. It’s an invitation to cocreate a shared understanding

Engage in Critical Self-Reflection

Leader-driven theories almost uniformly stress the importance of self-awareness on the part of leaders, but this is different than critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection offers a broader consideration of one’s positionality within systems. This includes understanding how one’s identities shape access to and uses of power and capital. Engaging in critical

self-reflection assists in mitigating the latent heroic leader ideologies that can emerge from leader-driven theories. It forces intentional engagement with one's ego, which is incredibly important in resisting "the reductive seduction."

Invite Complexity

Although leader-driven theories address people, process, and purpose considerations, the purpose dimension is surprisingly underdeveloped. Understanding the "target" of transformation and complex matrix of factors influencing it should be integrated as an explicitly stated principle for each of the theories. Additionally, the models should include the necessary capacities (e.g. complex cognitive reasoning, systems thinking) that prepare individuals to do this. Martin (2016) keenly suggested that avoiding "the reductive seduction" requires the concomitant recognition of "systemic complexity with a kind of idealistic sobriety" (§ 21). With the invitation of complexity comes the awareness that meaningful change takes time and a long-term commitment to engage in the work.

Redefine Agency

Leader-driven theories position agency as something to be developed in followers by leaders. Essential for reconstructing these theories is the repositioning of agency as mutually co-constructed among everyone involved in leadership processes. This means explicitly attending to agency's importance in group processes, establishing goals and outcomes, and considering impact. It is also essential to position agency as related to power and flowing dynamically, not unidirectionally, from it. Theories should recognize and articulate how agency is derived from multiple forms of capital (e.g. community cultural wealth), not just economic, human, and social capital. Ultimately, redefining agency means stepping out of the heroic leader mindset of "doing to" and instead "engaging with."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

I appreciate that leader-driven theories begin to transgress the traditional boundaries of leadership theory, moving away from its positioning solely as a tool of production. However, leader-driven theories lean toward oversimplification and leader-centricity, perhaps due to their rootedness in an ideology of individualism. Indeed, Heifetz (1994) warned that when engaging with such lofty terms as *transformation* "we need a governor on our tendencies to become arrogant and grandiose in our visions, to flee from harsh

realities” (p. 26). The quote that opened this chapter reminds us that all of us come to the work of leadership with faults. No one and no theory is perfect. It is the recognition of and willingness to work on addressing these faults that is important.

Sheri Brady is vice president of strategy and program at the Children’s Defense Fund, where she ensures that CDF’s efforts in policy advocacy, service delivery, and movement building are aligned to maximize impact on children’s lives. Before CDF, Sheri worked at the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, National Council of Nonprofits, and the Center for Policy Alternatives. Sheri earned her bachelor’s degree from Wheaton College and her law degree from the University of California, Berkeley.

I think about leadership a little differently. At the Children’s Defense Fund, we have an ethos of servant leadership. My leadership is in the service of 74 million children and youth under the age of 18 as well as the 30 million young adults between 19 and 25 years for whom we are advocates. I think leadership comes from a posture of serving the mission and wanting to be the change you want to see in the world.

I grew up in a family where there were expectations of service, whether it was at church or other settings. We were expected to give back. My mother was a single mother. We weren’t wealthy, but we had support and realized that there were people who had it worse than we did. We were expected to be thankful for what we had along with a sense of duty to help where we could. I’ve always taken that to heart.

My life experiences shaped both *how* and *why* I do the work that I do. I remember going to the store with my mother and using food stamps, a book of tickets that had different colors than real money. When we used these at the store, it felt like people knew our circumstances and were judging us. To be honest, some people were judging the choices that we made. I experienced this as a child and have seen it as an adult, where strangers feel they can comment on the choices that people on public benefits make. I remember my mother coming home and telling us that there were things she could not get because she could not buy them with food stamps, and she did not have enough money for them.

These are the decisions that people have to make every day—making sure that the money that they have, whether it be food stamps or real cash, can stretch ‘cause they’ve got to pay bills. What happens when the choice is do I feed my kid, or do I keep my lights on? How do I buy feminine hygiene products when I can’t buy those with food stamps? I remember my family having to make these choices, and no one seemed to understand why this was a problem. This cemented my thinking that

(continued)

it is vital that we include those who have lived experience when designing programs and policies.

Earlier in my career, when I worked at the Kellogg Foundation, I remember being in a meeting on “healthy foods.” At the time, this meant organic food, which was really only sold at specialty stores like Whole Foods. Whole Foods was incredibly expensive and nicknamed “whole paycheck.” This was a conversation without cultural competency—it was Eurocentric, occurring among well-meaning, mostly White people working for one of the largest foundations in the country and earning good salaries. I was an outlier in so many ways at this meeting: I was one of two Black people in the room, I was the heaviest person in the room in terms of weight, and I was the one who remembered her family having to make some hard choices about what to buy to stretch our benefits. I remember thinking how naive and misinformed it felt for those in this meeting to judge other people for not making healthy choices without understanding the *context* and *choices* folks had to make. They could not make “healthy choices,” because they could not *afford* to make them, because of the cost differential. Although things have changed somewhat, even now eating healthily costs more money. For example, fresh vegetables are more expensive than canned vegetables, which have more sodium and preservatives.

I remember saying in the meeting, “I’ve actually been on food stamps. I don’t know if anybody else in this room has been.” It’s depressing. It was hard as a child to feel like people were judging my mom for needing help. It’s so frustrating that people felt like they had a right to judge choices. For me, that was a real turning point.

I’m a big believer of asking who’s *not* at the table and addressing why they are not at the table. We have to make sure that we are inclusive in our approach to decision making and get input from a variety of voices, especially those closest to the concern at hand. As a leader, you have to take in these voices and make the best decision possible, knowing that you will not be able to please everyone. Be clear about why and how decisions were made as well as close the loop with those that you brought into the process.

A couple of years ago, I had to decide about what path I saw myself taking. Did I want to be a CEO? The answer was no, for a variety of reasons. I think the higher you get up the ladder, the less fun you have because you don’t get to do the programmatic work that I really enjoy. Instead, I do stuff like management decisions, which suck. I do paperwork, which sucks. The top is a pain sometimes. I miss focusing on and doing the work.

The hardest thing for me moving into a vice president role is realizing that I can’t do everything myself. I don’t have time to do all the things that I would do myself. I need someone else to do it because I don’t have time to. These days, I manage projects. I dot the i’s, and I cross the t’s in order to get things done. I’m on the phone a lot.

I'm on Zoom a lot. I meet with funders. I have people coming to me with complaints and demands.

I get to go to our retreat where we're training young people—but I haven't really made a connection with them in ways that others on staff have. I don't get the connection to the young people the way that I used to. I miss that. But it is a very different vibe. It's a very different way to make an impact, and I'm contributing in a very different way than I used to.

I've learned to speak up, but I have also learned that sometimes I need to step back and let others have the space to speak. I believe in bringing other voices to the table—those who have been traditionally excluded.

I've always known that there's privilege in the world, and that some people have it and some people don't. I have attained some privilege due to my education and work achievements. I believe in using privilege to open doors for others and to ask questions of the status quo.

I try to be true to my beliefs and values. I believe in speaking the truth as I see it and to call out when there are inequities and exclusion. I also had to learn how to be more diplomatic, and I learned messaging and codeswitching in White spaces. My message did not change, but my delivery did depending on the audience. The funny thing is as I am getting older, I am losing more of my filter; maybe this is me leaning into the privilege I have earned.

For most of my time in professional spaces (I include college and law school in that statement), I thought that other Black people would pay the price for my disregard or my disrespect. The reality that I was raised with is that Black women's behavior is judged. The people who come after us are judged based on our behavior and the impression that we left on people. I don't think it's fair, but I think there's some truth to that.

Black women have to represent. If you don't look a certain way, people think you don't have a job of importance or that you don't have stuff to say. So when I show up . . . I show up. I try to dress for my day. I try to show up intelligently. I try to show up to be thoughtful. I show up not to necessarily be seen or heard, which is sometimes a problem when you have a role where you need to be. I speak when I have something to say, but no longer feel the need to speak to prove I belong or to get noticed. There are some rooms where I am the only person of color. I will probably speak more often in those spaces because I need for people to know that there's a perspective that is missing, and I'm going to constantly ask about it and bring these things up. I believe that if you speak just to hear yourself speak, when you really want people to pay attention, they don't. That's something I really believe.

(continued)



Reflection Questions

1. Sheri's story highlights the realities of taking on greater formal authority within an organization. What might you glean from her story to aid in deconstructing and reconstructing leader-driven theories?
2. Sheri's narrative provides insights into how to leverage and interrogate positionality and social location in efforts to effectuate change. How might you translate these insights into actions that could enhance leader-driven theories?
3. What stands out from Sheri's narrative about negotiating terms such as morals, authenticity, transformation, and servant in the context of organizational leadership?

Group-Driven Theories

“In crowds we have unison, in groups harmony. We want the single voice but not the single note; that is the secret of the group.”

—MARY PARKER FOLLETT

Group-driven leadership theories strongly emphasize the process dimension, examining how leadership unfolds in teams and in particular the role of leaders in shaping this. Follett’s quote that opens the chapter recognizes the central thrust of this cluster of theories: the importance of moving from simple groups acting in unison to increasingly complex understandings of teams acting synergistically. Theories constituting this cluster include leader-member exchange theory (LMX), team leadership, and shared leadership, each of which represents an evolution of thinking about how groups and teams function. It is important, here, to set up a key differentiation between group-driven theories, explored in this chapter, and relationship-driven theories, discussed in Chapter 8. With group-driven theories, any investment in process is functional and in service of organizational goal achievement rather than the deeper understanding of relationships, interdependence, and mutual development that characterize relationship-driven theories. Thus, synergy in group-driven theories remains in service of productivity or goal achievement.

LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE THEORY

LMX holds an important place in the leadership literature and serves as a point of departure from earlier theories that treated followers as an aggregated work group rather than unique individuals, each with distinctive needs. It shifted leadership from being viewed as

the unidirectional influence of a leader on a group of followers to bidirectional relationships between leaders and each of their subordinates.

Why, then, is LMX included in a cluster defined by its attention to groups if it stresses individual, dyadic relationships? This is an astute question. LMX offers both a richly *descriptive* picture of how dyadic relationships play out in organizational life contributing to the formation of in-groups and out-groups as well as *prescriptive* recommendations on how to shape these groups in service of goal achievement.

I should state up front that I have a love/hate relationship with LMX—and yes, I know this represents a false dichotomy. The truth is that LMX in its earliest forms unabashedly described inequitable social and organizational realities. The creation of hierarchies of in- and out-groups, whether consciously or subconsciously constructed, may not seem fair but are all too often an accurate depiction of what transpires in life everywhere from the playground to the boardroom. Early iterations of the theory capitalized on this to the advantage of the leader and the organization. Gross.

Yet, LMX feels among the most realistic of theories capturing the realities of organizational life for better or for worse, which makes it incredibly useful as an interpretive lens. The challenge, then, becomes disrupting inequitable dynamics and applications of LMX associated with earlier versions of the theory with insights from later versions. The history and roots of LMX as a tool of social stratification remain, though, and require us to avoid solely engaging with contemporary versions that wash out or sometimes mask uncomfortable language and intentions.

Overview

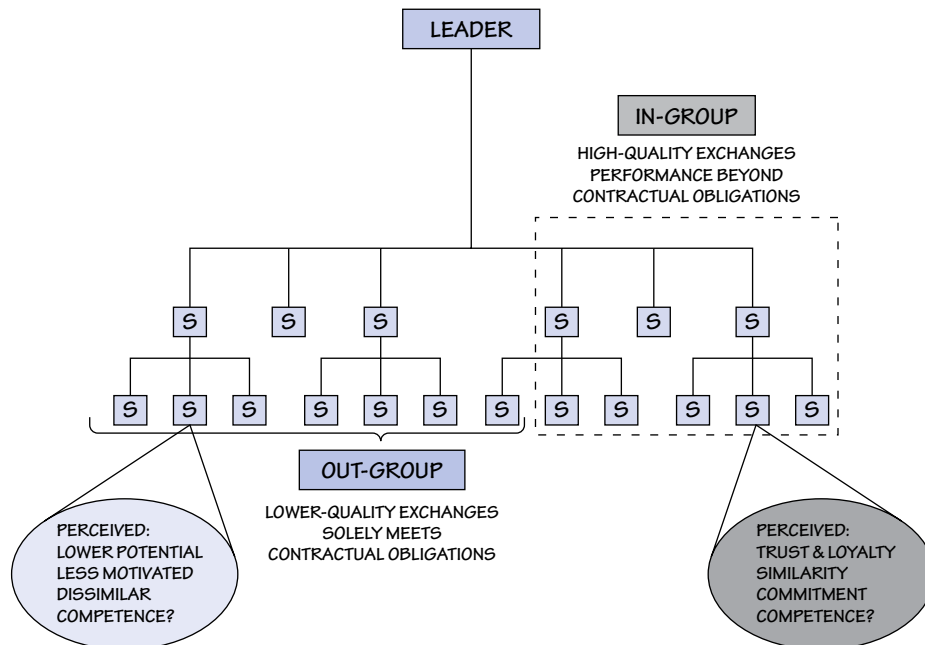
The seeds of LMX originated with the vertical dyad linkage (VDL) approach (Dansereau, Graen, and Haga 1975), which moved away from earlier theories of production and effectiveness that proposed using an “average” leader style to meet the needs of a work group perceived to be homogenous. VDL stressed the importance of establishing individual links between a leader and each direct report. LMX built on this assumption by defining effective leadership as a result of incremental gains in influence that emerge “when leaders and followers are able to develop mature leadership relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring” (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995, 225). Over time, the theory has evolved in response to both empirical research and changing social conditions.

LMX, although marketed as a relational theory of leadership, was originally conceived as a way to maximize efficiency by directing a leader’s finite resources toward a

select subset of productive team members. The *descriptive* approach to LMX represents its earliest incarnation, emphasizing the formation of organizational in- and out-groups into which leaders actively classify subordinates. *In-group members* receive a disproportionate amount of time, energy, and investment on the part of the leader, taking on additional responsibility and reaping greater organizational rewards. These rewards include increased influence, greater access to information and resources, and more opportunities for mentoring and learning (Erdogan and Bauer 2014).

Out-group members, on the other hand, are managed based on minimal contractual obligations functioning largely “like a part in a complex machine” (Dansereau, Graen, and Haga 1975, 49). It is important to note here that the theory never calls for out-group members to be treated poorly, but they are also not treated equitably. Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) suggested leaders engage with in-group members using the principles and skills of leadership while supervision is all that is necessary to work with out-group members. Figure 7.1 provides a visual depiction of LMX relationships between the leader and subordinates based on the descriptive approach.

FIGURE 7.1 LMX relationships.



Understanding the differential characterization of in- and out-group members in LMX is important given the deficit perspectives often perpetuated by early iterations. Out-group members are characterized as “less fortunate” (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1991, 35) or no more than hired hands (Zalesny and Graen 1987). This is despite evidence that many out-group members actually desire greater involvement and attention from the leader than what is offered (Dansereau, Graen, and Haga 1975). Conversely, in-group members are characterized as trusted assistants who are self-initiating, motivated beyond base expectations, and who demonstrate concern for supporting their leader’s success (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1991, 1995). These polarizing characterizations result in more favorable treatment of in-group members on the part of leaders.

Fairhurst (2007) described LMX as “based on a simple premise: leaders discriminate in their treatment of direct reports or ‘members’ in forming relationships” (p. 119). This discrimination was blatant and purposeful in early versions of the model, with the leader as the sole determinant of followers’ classifications into in- or out-groups. Later versions of the theory suggested that the goal of the leader should be to extend offers to build the high-quality relationships characteristic of in-group membership with everyone in an organization. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) acknowledged that not all of these offers may be accepted but that this would go a long way toward improving organizational perceptions as well as making LMX “more palatable to practitioners and students who may have been uncomfortable with the inequity issue” (p. 229). One of my students summed it up best when she reacted to this by sharing, “Oh, I get it. LMX is no longer about discriminating, but it’s also not about not discriminating.” Damn that pesky “inequity issue.”

Applying the Concept

LMX eventually adopted a more *prescriptive* approach exploring how leaders could influence dyadic relationships as a means to increase organizational success. This occurs through the leadership-making process and cultivation of high-quality exchanges.

The Leadership-Making Process

The leadership-making process was conceived as a vehicle to cultivate high-quality, dyadic partnerships between leaders and all members of an organization essentially attempting to create the largest possible in-group. It is important to note, however, that with the introduction of the prescriptive approach LMX sought to move away from the descriptive use

of in-group and out-group characterizations. That having been said, it is easy to see how the leadership-making process contributes to the same types of social stratifications, simply altering the terminology and process by which individuals are classified.

The leadership-making process consists of three phases in which leaders and followers engage in increasingly reciprocal investments in one another that contribute to relational maturity (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1991).

The Stranger Phase

In the first phase, the leader and follower recognize an inherent interconnection between their roles but interactions are strictly contractual. The leader engages more formally, and the follower adheres to duties as assigned and nothing more.

The Acquaintance Phase

The second phase represents a testing period based on mutual self-interest in which increasing interactions result in the leader, the follower, or both individuals engaging beyond minimal contractual expectations. This may involve sharing more sensitive personal or professional information, opportunities for measured increases in responsibility, and/or provision of limited additional resources. The quality of the relationship is essentially being vetted through these actions to see how they are received.

The Partnership Phase

The third phase reflects a long-term, reciprocal investment that manifests through behaviors as well as emotional connection. It is characterized by mutual loyalty, support, and a high degree of trust, obligation, and respect that translates into going above and beyond personal and professional expectations for one another.

It is important to state here that movement through the phases in the leadership-making model is not based on coercion, authority compliance, or threat, but through a growing sense of interdependence between the leader and subordinate that emphasizes the needs of the larger team (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1991). The goal is to create the opportunity for relational maturation with all followers, but this may not universally occur. Some relationships may not move beyond the stranger phase, functioning solely based on contractual obligations. This could be because a subordinate has no desire to engage beyond contractual obligations or because interactions between the leader and subordinate never

transition to the testing phase. Other relationships may shift into the acquaintance phase but stagnate there. Still others might progress to the second or third phases only to devolve back to earlier ones. Typically, however, those relationships that mature to the partnership phase are long-lasting and stable (Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell 1993; Nahrgang, Morgeson, and Ilies 2009).

Cultivating High-Quality Exchanges

The leadership-making process is premised on the concept that leaders should extend invitations to all subordinates to build high-quality exchanges even if not all subordinates will accept those invitations. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) suggested that invitations “will not be made and accepted without (1) mutual respect for the capabilities of the other, (2) the anticipation of deepening reciprocal trust with the other, and (3) the expectation that interacting obligation will grow over time as career-oriented social exchanges blossom into a partnership” (p. 237). These core tenets provide the foundation for cultivating the high-quality exchanges that translate into relational maturation within the leadership-making process.

Synthesizing a broad body of research, Erdogan and Bauer (2014) suggested that leaders can stimulate maturation through delegation and engaging in behaviors that communicate empathy, fairness, and ethical values. Above and beyond this, though, exactly *how* relationships are cultivated is less clear. The leadership-making process may be prescriptive, but its prescriptions are relatively vague, with more attention directed toward describing the quality of the relationships at each phase than specifics on what stimulates movement between phases.

Dyadic Relationships in Complex Organizations

A final shift in theorizing on LMX acknowledged that high-quality dyadic exchanges do not just occur between those with formal positional power and the subordinates who report directly to them (Erdogan and Bauer 2014; Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995). Rather, these partnerships occur both inside and outside the lines of traditional organizational charts. Indeed, some of the most mature partnerships may function among peers at the same level of the organization or among individuals across organizational units. This disrupts traditional notions of where power lies organizationally through the recognition that multiple partnerships (as well as in- and out-groups) operate simultaneously and often in overlapping ways in complex organizational systems.

How Research Evolves the Concept

LMX continues to serve as a basis for a large volume of empirical research, although the interpretation of findings across studies is complicated by the lack of agreement among scholars about the most appropriate research designs and measurement approaches (Anand et al. 2011; Buengeler, Piccolo, and Locklear 2021; Gottfredson, Wright, and Heaphy 2020; Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995; Yukl 2013). Additionally, despite theorists' attempts to leave behind the descriptive approach's language of in- and out-group membership, the concepts still permeate contemporary research. Let's look at two themes from research on LMX.

Factors Contributing to High-Quality Exchanges

Much of the research on LMX examines factors that contribute to low- versus high-quality exchanges between leaders and subordinates. Scholars agree that the leadership-making process is initiated quickly, with early interactions forming important foundations from which the relationship is assessed (Bauer and Green 1996; Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell 1993; Nahrgang, Morgeson, and Ilies 2009). Research also suggests that exchange relationships are not always based on a person's level of competence but on perceptions of similarity in terms of values, attitude, and personality as well as "liking" (Bernerth et al. 2008; Dulebohn et al. 2012; Harris, Harris, and Eplion 2007; Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell 1993; Nahrgang, Morgeson, and Ilies 2009). In other words, being liked by and sharing values and personality traits with the leader may trump subordinates' actual levels of competence and productivity in determining whether a leader invests in cultivating a high-quality relationship with them. Just think about that for a minute. I know I can't be the only one thinking, "Well, that explains what was happening in my last job."

Historically, researchers reported that demographic similarity based on race, gender, sex, age, sexual orientation, and educational level do *not* influence the relative quality of the relational exchange (Erdogan and Bauer 2014; Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell 1993; Matkin and Barbutto 2012). Other scholars contested this assertion, stating that the extent to which differences associated with gender and race along with other minoritized identities have been tested is insufficient and existing research should be considered inconclusive at best (Ayman and Korabik 2010; Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, and George 2004; Chin and Trimble 2015; Lianidou 2021). This argument is supported by research indicating that similarity between leaders' and subordinates' implicit assumptions about the role and behaviors of leaders contributes to higher-quality relationships (Engle and Lord 1997; Epitropaki and Martin 2005). More recent research exploring empirical influences of race

on LMX substantiated the presence of cross-racial differences on LMX quality and subordinate performance (Randolph-Seng et al. 2016).

Interestingly, the level of political skill (i.e. the ability to navigate interpersonal dynamics effectively and leverage them to achieve desired goals) of subordinates is an important mediator of LMX relationships. Brouer et al. (2009) found that political skill could be used to compensate for dissimilarities in values, attitudes, and personality between the leader and subordinate that might otherwise reduce the quality of exchanges. Similarly, Epitropaki, et al. (2016) found that individuals in environments with a strong differentiation between high- and low-quality exchange groupings could use political skills to increase the quality of relationships with leaders above and beyond that achieved by peers. This positions political skills as an incredibly important form of capital that can be leveraged in organizational environments in the navigation of inequitable leadership-making processes.

Influences on Leadership Outcomes

Researchers demonstrate the clear and positive impact of fostering in-group membership and high-quality exchanges on a variety of leadership outcomes, including follower attitude, satisfaction, and performance; role clarity; organizational commitment; organizational citizenship behaviors; trust in the leader; turnover intent; and unit-level performance and goal attainment (Dulebohn et al. 2012; Gerstner and Day 1997; Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995; Ilies, Nahrgang, and Morgeson 2007; Martin et al. 2015; Rahn et al. 2016; Seo et al. 2018; Yuan et al. 2023).

Results from research also offer some words of caution. Although LMX suggests the importance of cultivating high-quality relationships with as many members of an organization as possible, “most leaders tend to form exchanges of differing quality with their subordinates; only in rare cases do leaders establish similar quality relationship[s] with all subordinates” (Anand et al. 2011, 312). This is both a function of a leader’s limited time, human, and material resources and a by-product of how people successfully or unsuccessfully make connections with one another.

Thus, we find ourselves back at the reality that in- and out-group dynamics often constitute our organizational experiences. Several studies detail the risks associated with subordinates in low-quality relationships perceiving favoritism, which in turn can deteriorate interpersonal relationships as well as have an adverse effect on individual leadership outcomes such as work performance (Boies and Howell 2006; Bolino and Turnly 2009; Erdogan and Bauer 2010; Ford and Seers 2006; Hooper and Martin 2008; Sias and Jablin 1995; Van Breukelen, Konst, and Van der Vlist 2002).

However, research also suggests that the negative impact on individual outcomes may or may not translate into an adverse effect on organizational outcomes (Henderson et al. 2008; Liden et al. 2006). In other words, just because *some* subordinates are unhappy with their out-group status does not necessarily diminish goal achievement for the group as a whole. Group goal achievement is largely dependent on the context along with factors such as the level of interdependence in work functions and the degree to which fairness, justice, and equity are valued. This is the type of disconcerting logic that raises equity issues as well as clearly situates LMX as a theory concerned with leveraging interpersonal linkages in service of outcome achievement. Yukl (2013) perhaps offered the best advice about how to navigate this dynamic by suggesting that “not every subordinate may desire more responsibility, but each person should perceive an equal opportunity based on competence rather than arbitrary favoritism” (p. 225).

Wrap-Up

LMX shepherded in a new wave of theorizing and research examining the reciprocal, dyadic relationships between leaders and individual subordinates. The theory examines the uncomfortable reality that most organizational experiences are characterized by varying qualities of relationships between a leader and each subordinate that influence levels of responsibility and commitment to the organization. This in turn contributes to the formation of organizational groups with differing levels of support. The question becomes: to what degree does a leader purposefully create opportunities for high-quality relationships based on subordinates’ desires, potential, and competence versus as a function of social stratification? Table 7.1 identifies additional strengths and weaknesses.

TABLE 7.1 Strengths and weaknesses of LMX

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes and increases the importance of dyadic relationships in the process of leadership • Realistically assesses the influence of social stratification in organizations and states the importance of equitable opportunities to develop high-quality relationships based on competence • Extensive empirical research establishes the validity of the theory and the positive impact of high-quality relationships on leadership outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient attention toward movement between phases of the leadership-making process and how leaders cultivate mature, high-quality relationships with followers • Research overemphasizes hierarchical and authoritative relationships with little focus on other types of relationships (e.g. peer, cross-unit) that exist in organizations • Left unquestioned the roles of similarity and affinity create potential for inequitable approaches to leadership reinforcing dominant narratives

Making Connections

- LMX does not hide how it can contribute to social stratification. How might organizational ideologies exacerbate the creation and maintenance of inequitable in- and out-groups?
- What stands out as useful about LMX? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

TEAM LEADERSHIP

The study of small group dynamics and how teams function is the source of abundant research and theorizing across a wide range of disciplines, from industrial psychology to communications. Its purposeful connection to leadership, however, was largely implicit until more recently. Increased attention is driven at least in part by the critical role teams now play in the workforce as a necessary vehicle for accomplishing complex goals. Although there is no universal conceptualization of team leadership, a strong basis of theorizing exists from which to examine common themes.

Overview

Burke et al. (2006) argued that “at its most basic level, ‘team’ leadership is about what the leader or leaders do to facilitate team performance” (p. 303). It represents a shift away from solely examining linkages between leaders and subordinates and toward interactions between leaders and teams as well as the ways in which teams can be afforded greater agency for their collective work. Before we go deeper with our understanding of team leadership, let’s make sure we have a common understanding of key concepts associated with it.

What exactly do we mean when we use the term *team*? *Teams* are defined as any grouping of two or more people with specifically defined roles, engaging in interdependent work to advance a set of shared goals (Salas, Goodwin, and Burke 2009; Shuffler et al. 2013; Yukl 2013). Teams can be further subdivided into varying types based on how authority influences the group’s structure (e.g. selection of members, distribution of resources) and functioning (Hackman 2002). Table 7.2 provides an overview of the key

TABLE 7.2 Key features of different types of teams

Team type	Locus of authority	Role of team members	Process orientation	Influences on structure
Manager-led	Formal leader	Execute tasks	Tight control by leader	Determined by authority
Self-managing	Team members with formal leader oversight	Execute tasks, make decisions, and monitor performance	Managed by team members	Determined by authority
Self-designing	Team members with limited oversight	Execute tasks, make decisions, and monitor performance	Managed by team members	Team members influence all but purpose of group
Self-governing	Team members	Execute tasks, make decisions, and monitor performance	Managed by team members	Team members influence all aspects

features of four different types of teams. Additionally, *teamwork* is the process of enacting collective team knowledge, skills, and abilities in service of a group's shared goals and differs from task work, which reflects capacities individuals need to complete responsibilities on their own (Marks, Mathieu, and Zaccaro 2001; Salas et al. 2009). Thus, teamwork requires both individual task capacities *and* competencies related to social group functioning.

Now that we have greater clarity about what teams are, let's turn our focus back to team leadership. Team leadership relies on the functional leadership perspective, which emphasizes that the role of leadership is "to do, or get done, whatever is not being adequately handled for group needs" (McGrath 1962, 5). According to this perspective, a leader is any individual working toward goal accomplishment and satisfaction of group needs, not just a formal leader holding authority (Morgeson, DeRue, and Karam 2010; Shuffler et al. 2013; Wageman and Fisher 2014; Zaccaro, Heinen, and Shuffler 2009). Therefore, the focus is on leadership instead of leaders and acknowledges that multiple individuals may shift in and out of leader roles as a team works toward goal achievement. This is not, however, a rebuttal of formal leaders or authority. Indeed, team leadership in organizational practice most often takes the form of self-managed teams, with some level of formal authority or oversight (Wageman and Fisher 2014). Thus, team leadership asks us to hold constant the seemingly contradictory ideas that (1) leaders exist both informally and formally in teams, and (2) leaders may influence teams either from within the team itself or from the external environment.

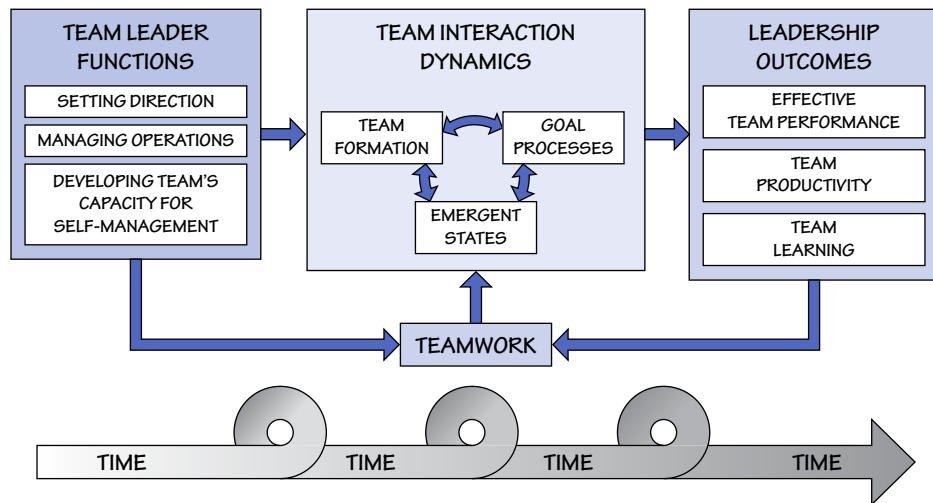
Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks (2001) pointed to the distinctiveness of the functional perspective as it defines team leadership “as social problem solving, where leaders are responsible for (a) diagnosing any problems that could potentially impede group and organizational goal attainment, (b) generating and planning appropriate solutions, and (c) implementing solutions within typically complex social domains” (p. 454). They go on to share that this uniqueness stems from at least three considerations. First, an important role of leaders becomes *boundary spanning*, which involves serving as a bridge to the external environment. The leader interprets and communicates to the team external factors that might influence the social problem-solving process.

Second, if team leadership serves the function of problem solving, then those in formal leader positions must discern when and how to intervene in the team process. For example, when problems have relatively clear solutions that a team can negotiate collectively with minimal influence from external factors, there is less need for a formal leader to intervene. Finally, the functional perspective of team leadership is unique as it does not attempt to determine a full range of behavioral styles that should be enacted for effectiveness. Thus, the practice of team leadership may involve the use of behavioral styles (e.g. task, relational), more empowering styles (e.g. transformational, relational), or any combination of pertinent behaviors. This gives greater freedom to leaders to engage in team leadership using a variety of approaches given conditions vary from context to context, task to task, and team to team.

Applying the Concept

Whether a leader is a formal authority or member acting as an informal leader within the group, creating “effective leadership processes represent perhaps the most critical factor in the success of organizational teams” (Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks 2001, 452). This requires providing considerable attention and resources to the collective while not losing sight of individual needs along the way (Burke et al. 2006; Hackman and Walton 1986; Morgeson, DeRue, and Karam 2010; Shuffler et al. 2013). Integrating the mountain of literature on teams into a cohesive perspective on how best to do this is no small feat.

A number of scholars offer models operationalizing team leadership (Burke et al. 2006; Kogler Hill 2016; Kozlowski et al. 2009; Morgeson, DeRue, and Karam 2010; Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks 2001; Zaccaro, Heinen, and Shuffler 2009). Figure 7.2 provides an adapted conceptual model drawing heavily on Zaccaro, Heinen, and Shuffler’s (2009) work as well as key elements from other models. This adaptation consists of team

FIGURE 7.2 Adapted conceptual model of team leadership.

leader functions, team interaction dynamics, teamwork, and considerations associated with time (which are discussed in the next section).

Team Leader Functions

There is extensive scholarship examining the functions that formal or informal team leaders should engage in to increase the likelihood that team leadership will emerge and contribute to group effectiveness (Burke et al. 2006; Fleishman et al. 1992; Hackman 2002; Hackman and Walton 1986; Kogler Hill 2016; Kozlowski et al. 2009; Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks 2001; Zaccaro, Heinen, and Shuffler 2009). This scholarship converges around the four functions of planning, organizing, monitoring, and acting. Zaccaro, Heinen, and Shuffler (2009) narrowed these further to three key functions:

Setting Direction

The direction-setting function sets the stage for team processes drawing heavily on a leader's responsibility for boundary spanning. Recall that this involves the process of analyzing the external environment in which the team is nested to gather information regarding potential influences on team processes and desired outcomes. It also includes developing a deep awareness of the team, its dynamics, and capacities.

As a leader makes meaning of the information gained through boundary spanning, it serves as crucial data for team planning and action. Leaders must also engage in *sense-giving*, or translating this information to the team and helping them to see and understand external influences as well as how they influence collective actions.

Managing Operations

Managing operations serves as a coordinating function in which a leader supports the actions of the group as they engage in leadership. This requires keen discernment about when to intervene versus share information versus allow the team to act independently. Of primary importance is providing a foundation that supports the ongoing creation, reexamination, and upholding of group norms, particularly around expectations and communication dynamics. Managing operations also includes a wide array of behaviors that can vary based on the nature of the team, its primary tasks, and its context. These include, but are not limited to, selecting team members, aligning team member capacities with task requirements, monitoring actions and providing feedback, acquiring resources for the team, and representing the team to external constituencies.

Developing the Team's Capacity for Self-Management

A key function of any formal or informal leader is to increase the capacity of members of the team to engage in these three functions on their own. This distributes the essential leader functions across a wider group of people. When a team does have a formal leader, this provides that person with more time to engage in boundary spanning efforts, acquisition of resources, and learning necessary to respond to crises or unique issues that may arise. Developing a team's capacity for self-management typically involves coaching efforts that focus on enhancing motivation and commitment to the group and its goals, fostering innovation, and investing in the development of members' leadership capacities. The overarching goal, then, is to increase the efficacy and capacity for autonomy, self-direction, and self-management.

Team Interaction Dynamics

Team leader functions directly influence team interaction dynamics shaping how the team operates. Interaction dynamics in turn play an important role in shaping how effective a team is in meeting leadership outcomes as well as the degree to which teamwork emerges. Zaccaro, Heinen, and Shuffler (2009) emphasized three specific elements of team interaction dynamics, each of which influence one another. Key to understanding this is the fact that each of its elements reflects collective team perspectives that exist either consciously or

subconsciously and inform how the team operates rather than characteristics of individuals within the team. Team interaction dynamics include:

Team Formation

Just because a group is referred to as a team does not mean that it operates as one. The development of a cohesive sense of team is formed over time through interaction dynamics. Tuckman's (1965) classic model of group development suggested a process of movement through predictable stages (e.g. forming, storming, norming, and performing) that shift the group's focus from individual goals, values, and needs to collective ones. Other scholars suggest the process is more complicated and less linear (Salas et al. 2009) but concur that the developmental formation of the team influences goal processes and emergent states and is influenced by them in return.

Goal Processes

Goal processes reflect the ways in which teams work collectively and interdependently to achieve outcomes. Marks, Mathieu, and Zaccaro (2001) differentiated between *transition processes*, in which the team engages in reflection and planning, and *action processes*, in which they actively work toward goals. Providing a foundation for both of these are *interpersonal processes*, which involve navigating and negotiating team relationships. Each of the processes is associated with specific team behaviors. For example, key to transition processes are collective goal specification and planning, while key to action processes are collective performance monitoring and synchronization of activities. Examples of interpersonal processes include collective negotiation of conflict. Additionally, progress toward goals is not linear but episodic, with previous experiences often influencing future directions. Given most teams work toward multiple goals simultaneously, a team may experience action and transition phases concurrently.

Emergent States

Emergent states are characteristics of the group that surface through interaction dynamics, becoming properties of the team that can be leveraged in service of goals. As a team works together, enhanced *cognitive states* (i.e. mental models or understandings of the team, its purpose, norms, and goals) emerge. *Motivational states* include the development of greater team cohesion, group trust, and collective efficacy. *Affective states* reflect the collective emotional well-being of the group. Each of the emergent states is driven by goal processes and team formation, and influences them in return.

Teamwork

Teamwork reflects the enactment of team knowledge, attitudes, and skills. It is the leveraging of collective assets in service of team goals. There are direct and reciprocal relationships between leadership functions, interaction dynamics, and teamwork. In other words, each of the constructs influences the others. As one increases, so may the others and, similarly, as one falters, so may the others. Additionally, outcome achievement influences teamwork with positive results contributing to important gains in team efficacy and learning.

Time

A final consideration in the adapted model of team leadership is the representation of time. As noted in the previous sections, initial conceptualizations of elements such as team formation and group processes suggested linear understandings in which teams marched continuously forward. There is now, however, a recognition that aspects of team leadership can occur simultaneously, reflect regressions in progress, or involve revisiting previously resolved elements. The influence of time is illustrated in Figure 6.2 via the arrow, with the loops conveying its nonlinear nature and the complexity of its impact on team leadership.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Despite the volume of research on teams in general, a great deal remains unknown about team leadership (Shuffler et al. 2013). Empirical research contributed directly to the conceptual model of team leadership presented in this chapter, with studies validating component parts as well as establishing links between various elements. Separate lines of inquiry also explore unique considerations associated with the application of team leadership with virtual teams consisting of members reliant on technology to engage across vast geographical distances as well as cross-cultural teams based on global cultural differences. Both lines of inquiry stress the importance of formal leaders in providing structure, establishing norms, and emphasizing effective communication.

As is the case with most leadership theories, initial research on team leadership focused on establishing connections to leadership outcomes. However, many of these studies defaulted to the examination of a narrow set of behaviors established in prior theories rather than examining the unique effects associated with team leader functions, team interaction dynamics, and teamwork. Results do establish that the enactment of different types of leadership behaviors (e.g. task, relational, transformational) contribute to positive team dynamics as well as leadership outcomes such as team performance, productivity, and

learning (Bass et al. 2003; Burke et al. 2006; Purvanova and Bono 2009; Wu, Tsui, and Kinicki 2010). Although this research is important, remember that one of the core tenets of team leadership is that there should be no universal set of leadership behaviors.

Finally, much of team leadership is predicated on the “turning over” of leadership responsibilities from a formal, authoritative leader to the team itself by increasing the team’s capacity for self-management. This is a key goal of team leader functions, and research largely demonstrates that when formal leaders engage in this, the result is a positive effect on the team’s sense of empowerment and capacity for self-management (Maynard, Gilson, and Mathieu 2012; Maynard et al., 2013). However, two studies found that formal leaders’ use of team leader functions did *not* contribute to team empowerment when the organizational climate acted in supportive ways and team coaches (i.e. outside facilitators who support team empowerment but are disconnected from the authority structure) were employed (Mathieu and Taylor 2006; Rapp et al. 2016). In other words, teams *did* develop empowering behaviors associated with self-management, but the source of this was not their formal leader.

Wrap-Up

Team leadership shifts the focus of group-driven leadership theories from groups as a by-product of multiple varying relationships with a formal leader to being purposefully created to better achieve organizational goals. The vast amount of research and theorizing on teams and teamwork in general is making its way into the literature on team leadership, although no universal agreement exists among scholars on its conceptualization. Table 7.3 offers additional strengths and weaknesses.

TABLE 7.3 Strengths and weaknesses of team leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for greater participatory involvement of everyone involved in leadership • States the importance of investing in both individual team members’ development and collective development • Frames the enactment of leader behaviors broadly, allowing for a wide range of approaches rather than prescriptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically remains reliant on a formal authority either inside or outside of the team • Research on outcomes largely replicates those in other research rather than examining unique contributions • Offers little attention to how team norms may reflect and reinforce dominant stocks of knowledge and ideologies

Making Connections

- Consider past team experiences you've had. How did a formal leader with oversight for the team reduce dependency and create agency for the group? To what extent does team leadership address how to diminish dominant ideologies that may reinforce leader-centricity?
- What stands out as useful about team leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

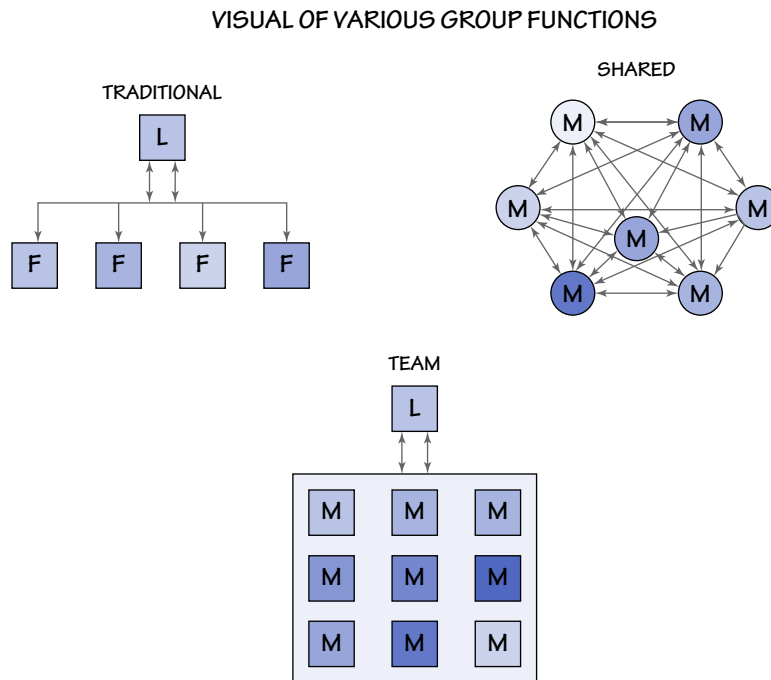
SHARED LEADERSHIP

Nearly every publication on shared leadership begins by positioning it as a necessary response to globalization, specialization of workers, and technological advances that require collaboration across great distances—all of which create compelling challenges that demand decentralized approaches to group leadership. Sometimes referred to as distributive leadership, shared leadership differs from team leadership in its shift away from a singular leader attempting to shepherd group effectiveness and toward the simultaneous emergence of multiple leaders in a group process. The importance of shared leadership in the broader leadership landscape is perhaps best evidenced by its application across a variety of fields, ranging from human resources and sales to nursing and education.

Overview

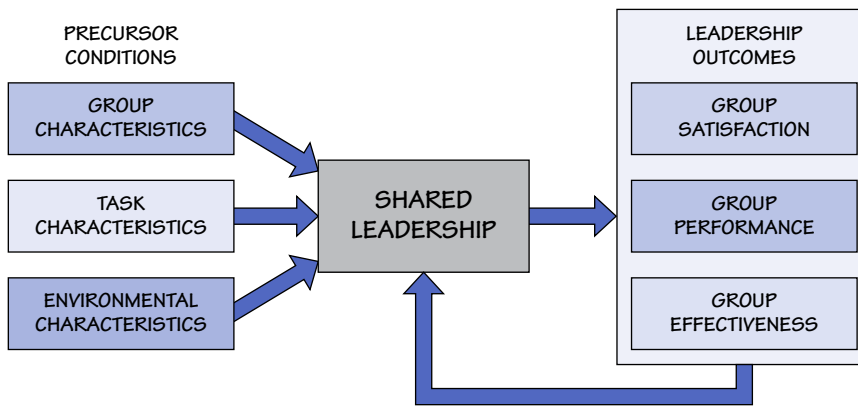
Shared leadership is defined by Pearce and Conger (2003) as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals” (p. 1). Its key distinguishing feature, then, is the belief that influence can arise from any direction in a group, be it top-down, bottom-up, laterally, or from multiple locations simultaneously. Pearce, Wassenaar, and Manz (2014) asserted that “shared leadership rests on the notion that nearly every human is capable of sharing the burden and responsibility of leading, at least to some extent, in nearly all types of organizational circumstances” (p. 277).

Figure 7.3 provides a visual representation of what shared leadership may look like in terms of social linkages in comparison with other approaches. Note that in the traditional

FIGURE 7.3 Vertical versus shared approaches.

approach there are individual linkages between followers and a leader with formal authority that may or may not be reciprocal. The team approach typically shifts to an external, formal authority providing varying degrees of oversight and coordination to members of a team. Shared leadership depicts a collective, with all members influencing one another reciprocally, and leadership as a collective capacity emerging dynamically as needed from within the group.

It is important to note here that shared leadership is not viewed as oppositional to or incongruent with more hierarchical theories. Rather, it serves as a natural extension of these approaches that moves group processes beyond leader-centricity. Thus, shared leadership mutes staunch leader/follower differentiations as it is not driven by authority and “followers” play more than just a small part in the process, serving as sources of leadership as well (Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone 2007; Houghton et al. 2015; Nicolaidis et al. 2014; Pearce and Sims 2000; Wang, Waldman, and Zhang 2014). In essence, leadership becomes the property of the group.

FIGURE 7.4 Adapted shared leadership conceptual model.

Pearce and Conger (2003) do an excellent job of providing a clear definition for shared leadership, along with describing what it looks like. Exactly *how* shared leadership plays out is less clear. Pearce and Sims (2000) offered a conceptual framework (see Figure 7.4) identifying precursor conditions (i.e. group, task, and environmental characteristics) that influence the enactment of shared leadership. Shared leadership in turn influences and is influenced by the achievement of leadership outcomes (i.e. increased group satisfaction, performance, and effectiveness). In other words, as groups experience the positive results associated with engaging in shared leadership they invest in it even more. But what exactly is occurring in the box representing shared leadership that allows it to manifest?

Applying the Concept

Beginning to make sense of the shared leadership “box” requires a shift in thinking—leadership is no longer about what the leader does but about a group’s set of shared beliefs. These beliefs define how and what type of leadership behaviors emerge and the conditions that best support them. Scholars of shared leadership hypothesize long lists of conditions and behaviors that facilitate this, some of which are confirmed by empirical research and others that simply remain speculative.

Wassenaar and Pearce (2012) argued that shared leadership emerges “when group members actively and intentionally shift the role of leader to one another as needed by the environment or circumstances in which the group operates” (p. 363). If a formal leader is present, shared leadership reconceives of their role as one of culture setting, attempting to

provide agency to members and diffuse the ability to influence among all team members (Pearce and Conger 2003). This contributes to greater “flexibility and more optimal use of the capacities and expertise of individual employees . . . [and] the opportunity for members to experience an increasing sense of meaning, psychological ownership, social support and belonging, and respect and dignity within the work setting” (Houghton et al. 2015, 313).

I recognize that the content provided here about how to apply shared leadership is thin. The truth is that this is underdeveloped in its theoretical conceptualization as well. This is at least in part because shared leadership is not a prescriptive approach. It does a much better job of describing what shared leadership *should* look like than *how* one engages in it, although empirical research on the theory does help clarify this some.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Original research and meta-analyses (i.e. studies of studies) on shared leadership increased over the past decade. Findings begin to flesh out specific aspects of the Pearce and Sims (2000) conceptual model and how they influence shared leadership in groups.

Precursor Conditions

Precursor conditions set the stage and prime the environment so that shared leadership is more likely to emerge. Research situates the following five conditions as important for shared leadership. Note that these conditions expand on the three original categories reflected in Figure 7.4:

Team Environment

When the environment in which a group operates is characterized by a sense of common purpose, emotional and psychological support among members, and opportunities to participate fully and share input, it “fosters team members’ willingness to offer leadership influence as well as to rely on the leadership of other team members” (Serban and Roberts 2016, 4; Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone 2007).

Support of Positional Leaders

Formal leaders can play a critical role in the possibility of shared leadership emerging by adopting an empowerment approach that provides strong social support, encourages members to take on responsibility and work collaboratively, and cultivates the positive characteristics of a team environment (Fausing et al. 2015; Serban and Roberts 2016; Tillmann et al. 2022).

Interdependence of Work

Multiple studies confirm that shared leadership is more likely to emerge when work functions are interdependent and group members recognize the need to work together to accomplish goals (Fausing et al. 2015; Nicolaides et al. 2014; Wang, Waldman, and Zhang 2014). This research also demonstrated that not only does interdependence of work functions cultivate shared leadership but also that shared leadership is a particularly effective approach under these conditions.

Team Tenure

There is some evidence that the longer that a group works together, the less likely shared leadership is to emerge or offer benefits (Nicolaides et al. 2014). Nicolaides et al. (2014) speculated that this may be because the work of the group becomes increasingly routinized and less interdependent; changing membership may make enacting shared leadership practices difficult to maintain; or the longer a group stays together, the more likely it is that conflict or power struggles will arise. Conversely, D’Innocenzo et al. (2021) found that shared leadership demonstrated a consistent, positive benefit on performance over time. Clearly, more research is needed, and engaging in shared leadership over time requires a continuous revisiting of process dynamics, assumptions, and work expectations/functions.

Collective Efficacy

We have largely referred to individual leader or leadership efficacy so far in this book. *Collective efficacy* captures the group’s communal belief in the likelihood of success. Nicolaides et al. (2014) affirmed the important role of collective efficacy in predicting the emergence of shared leadership, suggesting it serves as a source of agency and motivation that both individual members and the group as a whole can draw upon.

Leadership Outcomes

The majority of research on shared leadership explores its influence on leadership outcome achievement, demonstrating a significant and positive effect on team performance (Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone 2007; D’Innocenzo et al. 2021; D’Innocenzo, Mathieu, and Kukenberger 2016; Fausing et al. 2015; Nicolaides et al. 2014; Pearce and Sims 2002; Serban and Roberts 2016; Wang, Waldman, and Zhang 2014). This effect is above and beyond that of vertical or hierarchical approaches, particularly when work functions are interdependent. Drescher and Garbers (2016) identified similar results but added the

nuance that the influence of shared leadership on team performance was a function of the degree to which members perceived a high degree of similarity among one another in terms of personality, attitudes, and beliefs. Yep—there’s that pesky “I like and work best with people who are like me” issue again.

Engaging in shared leadership is also linked to greater team satisfaction (Drescher and Garbers 2016; Serban and Roberts 2016), innovation and knowledge creation (Serban and Roberts 2016), and individual and team learning (Liu et al. 2014). Liu et al. (2014) noted that the influence on individual and team learning was a function of how shared leadership augmented a collective sense that the group was a healthy environment in which members could take interpersonal risks.

A Note of Caution

In summarizing how research helps evolve our understanding of shared leadership, two notes of caution are warranted. First and foremost, shared leadership is *not* conceived as a vehicle to replace vertical or hierarchical approaches but one that should be coupled with them (Fox and Comeau-Vallée 2020; Pearce and Conger 2003; Wassenaar and Pearce 2012). Fox and Comeau-Vallée argue that “sharing leadership and hierarchical leadership can be co-present and even intertwined in an interaction . . . leadership is shared (or not) as a result of how the professional hierarchy gets negotiated in interactions” (p. 568). This bears out in research demonstrating that shared leadership approaches may not be necessary or even effective in every situation. For example, if tasks are already routinized, lack complexity, are not interdependent, or there is little need for the team to learn together to accomplish goals, then shared leadership may not be appropriate.

The second point of caution relates to how research on shared leadership is conducted. There is concern about the extent to which researchers default to using a simple average of group members’ leadership behaviors to represent collective functioning (D’Innocenzo, Mathieu, and Kukenberger 2016). This goes against the core assumption that shared group functioning is more than just the sum total of its individual parts. Scholars also express concern that many studies measure shared leadership solely through behavioral styles that typically reinforce leader-centricity and unidirectional influence (Cook, Zill, and Meyer 2020; DeRue 2011; D’Innocenzo, Mathieu, and Kukenberger 2016). These concerns are important because they not only point out the need to carefully consider the methods used in research on shared leadership before interpreting results but also illustrate how dominant approaches to leadership sneak their way into research designs even with theories that challenge those same assumptions.

TABLE 7.4 Strengths and weaknesses of shared leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offers explicit definitional parameters and clear purpose• Positions leadership as a property of the group that reflects shared beliefs and commitments• Role of formal leaders shifts from control to cultivation with an emphasis on building agency of individuals and the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to enact the concept remains vague• May not be an appropriate approach in all contexts and is best suited when work functions are interdependent• Most positive effects appear to be the result of high degrees of perceived similarity among group members

Wrap-Up

Pearce, Wassenaar, and Manz (2014) remind us that “all leadership is shared leadership; it is simply a matter of degree—sometimes it is shared completely while at other times it is not shared at all” (p. 276). Thus, the degree to which power, authority, and leadership are shared almost always falls along a continuum, and that continuum is constantly in flux. Shared leadership simply represents an end of that continuum that is too frequently left unexplored by leadership scholars. Table 7.4 identifies strengths and weaknesses associated with shared leadership.

Making Connections

- If shared leadership functions best in the context of perceived group similarity, how might it replicate stratifications based on social location? Why is similarity so important?
- What stands out as useful about shared leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

DECONSTRUCTING GROUP-DRIVEN THEORIES

Several themes emerge from group-driven leadership theories that merit deconstruction. These include (1) the shift toward and commodification of group dynamics as a mechanism for production, (2) tension from the stated importance of groups and teams but continued focus on individual leaders, (3) neglect of more complex considerations of group dynamics

in LMX and in-/out-group differentiation in team and shared leadership, and (4) failure to explore social location as a factor that shapes power and authority. *Flow of power* is an ideal tool of deconstruction to explore these themes given its focus on directionality in power dynamics and their entanglement with social location.

Before we start, though, let's explicitly name two considerations. First, we need to acknowledge the importance of dialectical thinking (i.e. the process of holding two seemingly contradictory concepts in unison). Not all in- and out-group dynamics are negative, and not all team and shared approaches are positive. This is a fact that is often obscured in the literature. Second, it may feel redundant to further deconstruct in- and out-group stratification already covered in the synthesis of LMX. However, simply naming inequitable relationships is insufficient for altering them. We have to look more closely at how they emerge and are reinforced as well as how similar dynamics surface in other theories if we wish to disrupt these dynamics.

Relationships with Authority

Flow of power is inherently concerned with power dynamics, which are treated uniquely in each of the group-driven theories but share a common characteristic of underestimating the complexity of individuals' psychological relationships with authority. Has anyone ever accused you of having authority issues? This typically infers a personality flaw tied to difficulty with accepting direction from those with formal authority. Well, guess what? We all have authority issues in one way or another. They are engrained in us over time through stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location.

Some struggle with distrust of authority due to damaging, negative interactions with parents, religious figures, teachers, police, or supervisors (Lipman-Blumen 2005). For others, it reflects frustration that emerges when mature partnerships or teamwork are used as masks for "an underlying demand for obedience. The mixture of cooperation and authority implies that directions are given by more highly valued individuals and carried out by less worthy others" (Lipman-Blumen 1996, 74). Struggles can also reflect an opposite reaction in which individuals seek to please or default to dependency, offering those with authority compliance in exchange for avoiding conflict, securing protection, or safeguarding power.

Flow of power reminds us that having "authority issues" isn't just a bottom-up phenomenon since power doesn't move unidirectionally. The literature on team and shared leadership states the importance of preparing groups to accept lateral authority from peers, although few details are offered about how or why peer leadership may evoke resistance tied to individuals' psychological relationships with authority.

Furthermore, how we manage our own power is a function of our relationship with authority. This can play out in a variety of ways. Lipman-Blumen (1996) argued that whether it is consciously acknowledged or not, many in positions of authority “still yearn for people who will do what they are told and do it well” (p. 73). They seek compliance from others even though they would resist complying were the roles reversed. Others may respond by trying to give away their power, perhaps conflating any use of authority with authoritarianism or abuse of power. A wise mentor once shared that power can be distributed to some extent, but formal authority cannot be given away and therefore necessitates judicious use and a clear understanding of one’s relationship to it and its effect on others.

Understanding individuals’ psychological relationships with authority is critical to identifying and disrupting inequitable power dynamics in group-driven leadership theories. Let’s further our deconstruction along two lines: manipulation and rejection.

Ease of Manipulation

LMX explicitly names authoritative power and how its use can contribute to either equitable or inequitable relationships with subordinates. Team and shared leadership, on the other hand, acknowledge authority but limit its role to largely supporting the group. These are very different suggestions about how authority relationships should be structured. Both, however, operate on assumptions that those with authoritative power should or will direct it toward altruistic ends—which seems dangerously naive.

To what extent do group-driven theories stress the importance of understanding one’s psychological relationship to authority or offer instruction on how to wield power? The answer is very little beyond encouragement to try to be developmental and equitable. Because of this, there is greater risk that unfair in- and out-group dynamics will form. There is also increased risk of authority figures manipulating subordinates either purposely or inadvertently. For example, we know from scholarship that subordinates take cues from authorities about the legitimacy of peers’ concerns, perceptions of organizational fairness, and relative competence (Henderson et al. 2009). If formal authorities are not careful, they can easily contribute to or exacerbate in- and out-group differentiation and risk dehumanizing those perceived to be in the out-group.

Imagine a situation in which an authority figure dismisses the contribution from someone new to the organization. If an in-group member whose psychological relationship with authority is characterized by a need to please reads this as a cue about the new person’s overall value and mimics the dismissiveness in other situations, it could make integration into the organization and the leadership-making process more difficult.

The same concern applies to team and shared contexts. Imagine a self-managing team in which the external leader prefers a particular course of action about which the team is unsure. If the external leader's relationship with authority is one of compliance, they may foster strong in- and out-group differentiation *within* the team as a manipulation tool. This could allow the leader to leverage greater influence on the eventual decision and increase the likelihood that it will align with their desires. Some might argue that this wouldn't constitute a team approach, but teams are almost always composed of multiple subgroups with differing relationships with the external leader. It also demonstrates how easily the concepts of team and shared leadership can fall apart when power dynamics and psychological relationships with authority are not taken into consideration.

Rejection of Authority

The absence of a complex analysis of how individuals relate to authority in group-driven theories might give one the impression that both authorities and subordinates simply accept their assigned roles. This couldn't be further from the truth. We know that authority is conferred by subordinates as part of a social contract.

Subordinates are hardly autonomic lemmings, yet group-driven theories often fail to recognize them as fully agentic. Couldn't concepts such as teamwork and collective efficacy just as likely be leveraged to reject authority as to deliver on productivity? Now, this doesn't suggest that rejecting authority is a simple feat. Authority, once enmeshed, is difficult to remove. As Frederick Douglass proclaimed in his famed "West India Emancipation" speech in 1957, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." The point, here, is that power flows in multidirectional ways, and psychological relationships to authority shape the degree to which subordinates and teams accept or reject formal authorities and one another.

Minimal emphasis on follower agency and individuals' psychological relationships with authority can also compound, contributing to another troubling power dynamic. Out-groups could actually be the source attempting to perpetuate stratification and inequality. Early in my career I found myself in a work environment where strong in- and out-group differentiation resulted from a massive reorganization that shifted not just titles and positions but institutional values as well. This reflected a move toward more collaborative practice, an emphasis on diversity, and the infusion of justice into decision making. As a new employee I could see clearly how in- and out-group differentiation reflected those on board with the changes and those resisting them. Moreover, the out-group wasn't just disenfranchised but actively attempted to disrupt progress on new goals, dragging their

feet, refusing to participate, and causing conflict. For some, the resistance was tied to disagreement with the principles of equity and inclusion now guiding the work. For others, they just weren't going to be told what to do. No one was going to be the boss of them! Group-driven theories offer little help in recognizing or navigating the ways subordinates and teams may reject authority in the first place.

Inattention to Social Location

Okay, to be candid, this is where I start to get really frustrated with group-driven theories. Collectively, they stress the importance of equitable, high-quality relationships between authorities and subordinates, team formation, and group cohesion. Yet they direct almost no attention to how the impact of social location across the major fault lines of social stratification in the United States plays a significant role in shaping these. Instead, they examine more benign factors such as personality, attitudes, values, and relative “liking” determining that . . . yep, stratification occurs based on perceived similarity rather than competence. They even go as far as to argue that social identity dimensions such as gender, sex, race, sexual orientation, and age do *not* influence “perceived similarity” using limited and often flawed empirical research to support this claim.

For some unknown reason (ahem . . . hegemony), studies offering clear evidence of the role that social identity and stereotyping play in perceptions of similarity are given less weight (Heckman et al. 2016; Hoyt and Simon 2016; Liu and Baker 2016; Randolph-Seng et al. 2016; Zhu, Shen, and Hillman 2014). Newsflash! The values, attitudes, and “liking” that inform “similarity” are predicated on social location. Chin and Trimble (2015) remind us that “in-group favoritism and out-group derogation in society are often mirrored in the workplace” (p. 189), positioning whiteness and masculinity as normative qualities that often define “similarity.”

Unfortunately, group-driven leadership theories offer limited advice beyond the development of political skills on how to mitigate the role that social location plays in shaping perceived similarity. At best, they tacitly endorse an approach to applying these theories based on an equity perspective. However, research shows that when women and people of color engage in diversity-valuing behaviors consistent with an equity approach, it can trigger subconscious, negative stereotypes about their relative competence that result in lower performance evaluations (Heckman et al. 2016). White males were the only group in this research for which demonstration of diversity-valuing behaviors did not yield

negative consequences. This sets up a no-win situation with frightening implications for how minoritized populations experience both formal leadership roles as well as navigate the leadership-making, team development, team formation, and teamwork processes. It also places the burden of figuring out how to navigate these dynamics squarely on the backs of those most affected by them.

RECONSTRUCTING GROUP-DRIVEN THEORIES

Let's approach the reconstruction of group-driven leadership theories through the integration of a secondary body of literature that can assist in ameliorating concerns identified in the deconstruction. Leadership studies simply do not address psychological relationships with authority or issues of social location sufficiently. Therefore, an effective reconstruction necessitates the infusion of outside knowledge and perspectives.

The use of *interest convergence* as a tool for reconstruction is ideal for both identifying the content knowledge that would best aid in addressing concerns with group-driven theories and pragmatic ways to integrate that content into their application. Interest convergence accepts that people will typically only alter behaviors and beliefs when they perceive a reciprocal benefit. The work of interest convergence centers on building an awareness of social stratification and sense of interdependence, both of which are central themes in our evolving understanding of group-driven theories. Thus, the goal of this reconstruction is to redress inequitable power dynamics through the integration of literature on inclusion.

Core Dimensions of Inclusion

Let's start by defining what inclusion is and its core components. Note that the body of knowledge on inclusion is complex and rich. We will be covering just a narrow slice of it to demonstrate the advantages of integrating a secondary body of literature in the reconstruction process. Ferdman (2014) defined inclusion as addressing the following:

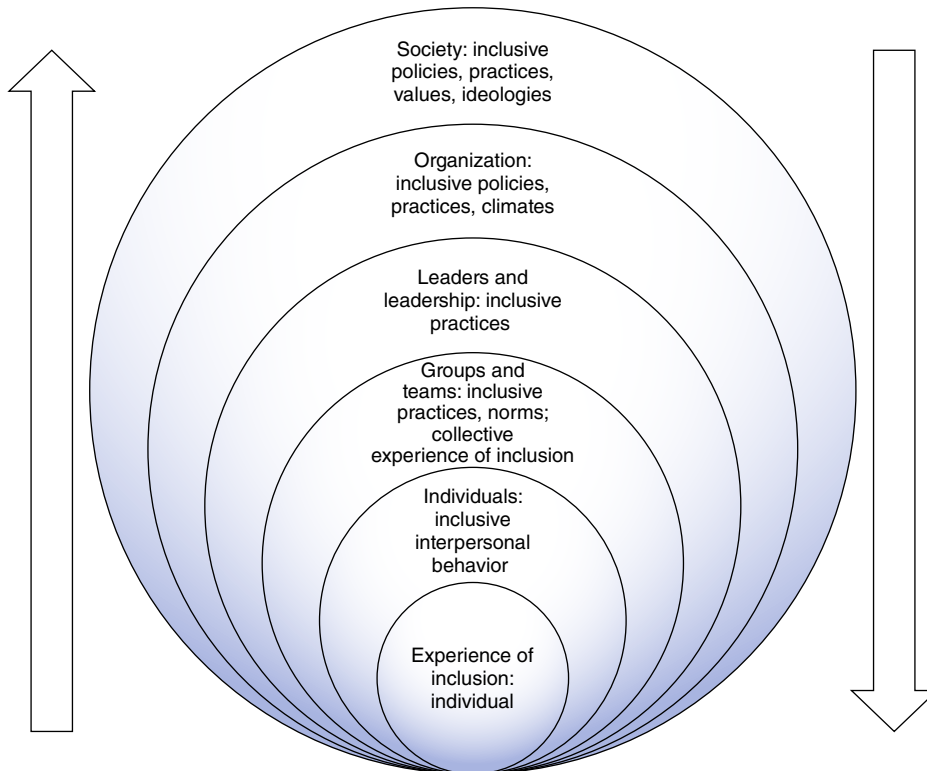
How organizations, groups, their leaders, and their members provide ways that allow everyone, across multiple types of differences, to participate, contribute, have a voice, and feel that they are connected and belong, all without losing individual uniqueness or having to give up valuable identities or aspects of themselves. Inclusion involves recognizing, appreciating, and leveraging diversity so as to allow members of different

cultural and identity groups . . . to work together productively without subsuming those differences and, when possible, using those differences for the common good. (p. 12, italics in original)

This definition is accompanied by a number of key principles, including the following:

- Inclusion is not episodic or static, but an ongoing and dynamic practice.
- Inclusion operates at multiple levels ranging from societal norms to individual experiences (see Figure 7.5).
- Inclusion requires a set of individual competencies that are behaviorally enacted.
- Inclusion involves addressing both human processes and social structures.
- Inclusion stimulates periods of both comfort and discomfort associated with learning.

FIGURE 7.5 Multiple and nested systems of inclusion.



Source: Ferdman (2014). Copyright © 2014 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Inclusion as a Catalyst for Interest Convergence

So how does the integration of literature on inclusion leverage interest convergence to improve group-driven leadership theories? First, it acknowledges and makes explicit power dynamics and the reality of social stratification. In doing so, it positions responsibility for authority relationships on *both* authorities *and* members and recognizes the need to negotiate and navigate these dynamics to pursue goals that are inherently interdependent.

Second, and perhaps more powerfully, inclusion literature articulates its practical benefits. Consistently working to advance inclusion is not just the right thing to do but also contributes to tangible benefits ranging from increased productivity and financial gain to employee satisfaction and engagement (Downey et al. 2015; Ferdman and Deane 2014; Herring 2009; Nishii 2013; Richard 2000). Making inclusive practice pervasive in organizations and the responsibility of *all* parties not only enhances group processes but improves the overhead as well. It's just smart business.

Using Inclusive Practice to Reconstruct Group-Driven Leadership

Integrating the inclusion literature into group-driven leadership theories redresses some of the pressing concerns related to unhealthy authority dynamics and inattention to social location. Here are a number of process considerations that illustrate how inclusion could guide the translation of group-driven theories to practice:

It starts with critical self-reflection: Critical self-reflection involves the deep examination of one's own positionality within inherently stratified social systems. It is a tool for recognizing how stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location shape not just our perspectives but also how these perspectives play out in relationships with others. Inclusive practice demands that critical self-reflection serve as both a starting point and continuous component of group-driven leadership. Engaging in critical self-reflection requires us to ask important questions about our assumptions. Does my psychological relationship with authority make me inclined to reject particular types of formal authority? How do my stocks of knowledge and social location interact to influence who I perceive as "similar"? These types of questions begin to unpack our areas for learning related to inclusive practice.

Use descriptive LMX as a diagnostic tool: The descriptive approach to LMX and its articulation of in- and out-group dynamics may seem to run counter to values of

inclusion, but it also provides a realistic lens. Remember that critical perspectives presume structural inequality, which allows us to address them more effectively. This positions LMX as an important diagnostic tool for examining group relations. Ferdman (2014) argued that inclusive practice “means reframing both what it means to be an insider in a work group or organization and who gets to define that” (p. 12). This reminds us that power flows not just from authority but through organizations, and in- and out-group formation should be attended to at all levels. It also challenges us to examine more closely how the leadership-making process unfolds, to challenge what constitutes “similarity,” and to monitor that team formation and group cohesion do not come with the cost of assimilation or disenfranchisement.

Make inclusion everyone’s responsibility: Infusing group-driven leadership with inclusive practice means that the work of inclusion becomes everyone’s responsibility at the individual, process, and structural levels. A base expectation of the group should be that individuals engage in the continuous learning associated with building multicultural competence and enacting behaviors that contribute to a culture of equity. Team processes should also be grounded by inclusive practice. This means that each of the dimensions of group-driven leadership (e.g. precursor conditions, development of high-quality relationships, team development) explicitly integrate considerations associated with inclusive practice. This also needs to be supported at the organizational level through policies that drive equity and inclusion. Table 7.5 offers insights into how dimensions of inclusion intersect with organizational structures and the types of questions that should shape individual and group behaviors.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Group-driven leadership theories often elicit strong responses from those learning them. For some, there is a visceral, negative reaction to the blatant differentiation of relationship quality in LMX. For others, team and shared leadership generate enthusiastic responses based on how they reposition authority and afford greater agency to group members. These are legitimate reactions likely grounded in one’s psychological relationship with authority. It is important to remember, though, that the process orientations that characterize group-driven leadership remain in service of productivity. Losing sight of this not only obscures the power dynamics that undergird group-driven leadership but also risks overlooking the ways in which these theories can be used to perpetuate power differentials and social stratification.

TABLE 7.5 Inclusive structural and behavioral considerations

Dimensions of Inclusion	Dimensions of the Organization									
	Socialization	Career planning	Recruitment, selection, promotion	Training and education	Performance appraisal	Reward systems	Work/life policies and practices	Communication	Measurement	Structural and informal integration
Openness	How much are variability, complexity, and ambiguity embraced? To what extent are the system and its boundaries open rather than hard? How acceptable is rigidity? Are there multiple solutions and many best ways? Is there a broad bandwidth of acceptance?									
Representation and voice	To what extent are differences, both apparent and not, attended to and represented across situations? Is there a critical mass of diverse members, with a mix of dimensions represented in making decisions and benefiting from them?									
Climate	How valued do individuals and groups feel? Are they fully present, free to express themselves, accepted, and integrated? How does it feel to be in the organization?									
Fairness	To what extent do individuals and groups receive what they need and deserve? How much and in what ways is fairness considered? Are there mechanisms for resolving or addressing fairness? To what extent and in what ways has oppression and its effects (such as unearned privilege) been eliminated or reduced?									
Leadership and commitment	To what degree and in what ways are the strategies, vision, and mission of the organization connected to inclusion? How are resources allocated? How well do leaders model inclusion? How accountable and committed is leadership? How strategically is inclusion positioned and addressed? How central is inclusion to the core values and strategy of the organization?									
Continuous improvement	What is the capacity, ability, and mindset regarding necessary and possible improvement? How much and in what ways are employees empowered to be responsible for continuous improvement? What is the capacity to take advantage of all resources?									
Social responsibility	How much awareness is there of the world outside the organization? What is the vision of the organization as a member of a larger community? What kinds of contributions (such as time and resources) are made to societal needs?									

Source: Ferdman (2014). Copyright © 2014 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reprinted with permission from Wiley.

Felice Gorordo is the World Bank Group alternate executive director for the United States. Felice cofounded Roots of Hope, Inc., a national nonprofit focused on youth empowerment in Cuba and served in the White House under Presidents Bush and Obama. He brings two decades of leadership experience in management and governance, serving as CEO of three venture-backed technology companies, investor and advisor at two venture capital funds with global mandates in health care and infrastructure, and board member on several for-profit and nonprofit boards.

Certain stories in my life repeat themselves again and again, each time slightly changing form but always addressing similar underlying issues. One of the most important lessons I've learned is that you don't have to be defined on other people's terms. With this has come personal and professional growth and a sense that I can persist . . . even in contexts where I'm not an "insider," however that is defined.

I was born into a working-, middle-class, Cuban, immigrant/exile family of a socially active father (social worker turned police officer), and my mother dedicated her entire career to education administration. For these reasons, my childhood was filled with stories of social justice and public service. Between my family's influence and my Jesuit schooling, I developed a strong passion for serving others and got involved with Key Club, which is a youth affiliate of Kiwanis International. Although Key Club is a service organization, it also took on a lot of politics, and there were elected offices you could run for. Being as passionate and engaged as I was, I made the decision to run for state office and was elected lieutenant governor. From that experience, I was encouraged to run for an international office. Keep in mind that Key Club was historically one of those "good old boys" groups. In fact, one of the governors of Florida and a US senator had both held the same position I was running for. So, as the son of working-, middle-class immigrants, I was campaigning without the same "pedigree" or background as most of the other candidates. The reality was I saw myself as incredibly fortunate to even attend my high school, let alone get involved in these ways. I was on scholarship since my parents couldn't afford the full tuition. But those facts compelled me to take full advantage of every opportunity I had. So I decided to go ahead and run for office.

Although I received unanimous endorsements from both my school and the state governing body, I was told by a group of administrators and students that I was not qualified to run, that I was not prepared enough, and essentially I shouldn't be aspiring to an international position. I went home that day feeling defeated—it was only two or three days before we were supposed to go to the international convention to formally campaign. I remember telling my father what happened and him saying, "Well, I don't understand what's holding you back from going anyway. You meet all of the formal requirements, and you have all of their endorsements." I told him that I would actually have to ride in a bus to the convention with the same individuals who explicitly told me that they didn't want me to run and would do everything in their power to undercut me

and hold me back. My father looked at me and said, “If you really want it bad enough, you’ve got to go out there and fight for it! It’s not going to be given to you on a silver platter.”

As nervous as I was, I took my father’s advice and boarded that bus to the convention. I ran a campaign across 60-some districts and actually ended up winning, becoming the first Hispanic to be elected Key Club international vice president. See, I realized that my network of support was from outside, not from within. So I actually leveraged that and brought folks who were not actively involved into the fold to become my base of support. Looking back, that was an important lesson for me—it engrained in me the importance of fighting for something you believe in, building coalitions around shared interests, and not letting others define you by *their* terms.

This lesson about engaging in the struggle for the things you believe in shows up again and again in my life. When I applied for an internship at the White House I didn’t fit the prescribed mold and was initially declined. I had to fight for it. I had to appeal and make my case to my future boss as to why I should get the position over, say, a senator’s son. And then again when I was seeking a presidential appointment, I faced an initial decline and had to make my case. Because I didn’t fit the mold of the type of person that they were looking for, whether that was ideological or otherwise, I felt that I had something to offer and contribute. Not fitting the mold was an *asset* I brought to the table, not a constraint. Sometimes I’ve been able to communicate that and make the case for myself. Other times I haven’t. Nevertheless, the takeaway is that you have to fight for the things that you want and that you believe in. You have to be resilient. Most of all, you have to believe in yourself and that you can be successful even when others don’t.



Reflection Questions

1. Felice’s story provides a powerful example of how authority can be leveraged to repress versus empower. Yet he found ways to circumvent the abuse of power. How have you navigated, survived, and thrived in a situation where authority targeted you? What lessons can you apply from Felice’s story or your own that could aid in reconstructing group-driven theories?
2. Felice’s narrative is filled with examples of in- and out-group dynamics. What lessons would you distill from his story about persisting in the face of opposition as well as navigating in- and out-group dynamics that might be helpful for leadership practice?
3. The reality that perceived “similarity” can contribute to social stratification and exclusion is a troubling aspect of group-driven leadership theories. Felice reframed “not fitting the mold” as an asset as well as the importance of not being defined on other people’s terms. How might these assertions offer important insights into agency in leadership?

Relationship-Driven Theories

“We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.”

—THICH NHAT HANH

Responding to the leader-centricity and potential for paternalism in early leader-driven and group-driven theories, relationship-driven theories attempt to elevate and center the power of reciprocity, connectedness, and interdependence. Thus, relationship-driven theories emphasize both the people and process dimensions of leadership. As the quote that opens this chapter captures, there is an interconnectedness among all things. When this is neglected in leadership theories, not only do they fail to capitalize on enormous untapped human potential, but they also implicitly reinforce production mindsets and heroic leader myths.

Central to the study of relationship-driven theories is a differentiation that scholars make between *entity perspectives* (i.e. focus on the identification and augmentation of individual capacities to engage in group processes) and *constructionist perspectives* (i.e. leadership as a process that emerges from social relationships in which knowledge is co-constructed). Uhl-Bien (2006) argued that although these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, they do have implications for how leadership is understood, experienced, and enacted. Connective leadership, the relational leadership model, and philosophies of relational leadership all negotiate entity versus constructionist perspectives in their attempts to more intentionally examine the power of relationships in shaping and reshaping leadership.

CONNECTIVE LEADERSHIP

One of the earliest relationship-driven theories is connective leadership, which first appeared in the Pulitzer Prize–nominated book *Connective Edge* by Lipman-Blumen (1996). At its core, connective leadership outlines an approach crucial for operating in an increasingly relational, diverse, and interdependent world. It resulted in the connective leadership model, assessment instruments that serve as training and development tools for translating the concepts to practice, and leadership development institutes. For over 25 years, connective leadership has influenced how leadership is enacted across sectors and particularly in government, business, and public policy. The omission of connective leadership from many leadership texts is inexplicable given the breadth of its impact in organizational training and development. Beyond that, I'm not quite sure how a leadership book once nominated for a Pulitzer gets left out of theoretical discussions. This says a great deal about how the dominant leadership literature privileges works that often do little to challenge the status quo.

Overview

Let's start by reviewing the underlying principles that frame connective leadership. Lipman-Blumen (1996, 2000) hypothesized the emergence of more relational ways of engaging in leadership due to significant alterations in how the world operated based on (1) science and technology, (2) internationalization, (3) increasing recognition of diversity, (4) radical questioning of ideological assumptions, institutions, and leaders, (5) fundamental restructuring of how organizations operate, and (6) the emergence of new social crises. All of these contribute to a key tension between increasing demands for interdependence *and* diversity. In other words, we exist in a culture that requires us to work interdependently to address complex personal, organizational, and societal issues, but interdependence in and of itself challenges the highly engrained cultural values of individualism that permeate US norms. This can lead to uncomfortable ambiguity and the desire to retreat to more comfortable approaches to leadership grounded in individualism. But this retreat to individualism further exacerbates the interdependent issues we are attempting to address.

Similarly, radical shifts in how diversity is recognized and plays out across relationships and within organizations complicate leadership even further. Our responses to increasing diversity can range from seeking "safety" through entrenchment in individualistic and separatist isolation to leveraging diversity as a source of interdependence, synergistic

learning, and collective action. Essentially, connective leadership is a call to engage in the dialectic thinking necessary to negotiate more complex approaches to leadership that reflect shifting societal demands.

Of particular interest are the ways in which connective leadership explicitly addresses issues of inclusion and commodification, employing critical perspectives that were well ahead of their time for leadership theory. For example, Lipman-Blumen (2000) argued that “leaders in the connective era have to emphasize both *mutuality* (a focus on common interests and values) and *inclusiveness* (the willingness to include even those very different from the rest, without requiring their homogenization)” (p. 12, emphasis in original). She goes on to name the historical and intentional exclusion from leader roles and leadership processes of groups that would challenge the status quo, including women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. She suggested that “only leaders who can assemble multiple changing coalitions, rather than enduring elites will find the common ground within divisive issues. They are the ones who can best reweave the social fabric and build genuine community” (p. 20). It merits restatement that this commitment to engaging with leadership tensions grounded in ideology and social location was well ahead of its time.

Connective leadership also takes on the issues of commodification and authority omnipresent in earlier theories. Engaging in connective leadership reflects a movement beyond just the bottom line and increasing productivity. It expresses explicit concern for issues of social justice (e.g. humanization of workers, care for environment, equity, peace initiatives) and argues that pursuing resolution to these issues is congruent with and runs parallel to productivity rather than oppositional to it. This may be because of the increasing recognition that leaderful organizations that demonstrate concern for people and broader social issues tend to augment rather than constrain their bottom lines (Raelin 2005). Indeed, Lipman-Blumen (2000) shared that “competitive and authoritarian leaders are destined to fail. To be sure, simply seasoning authoritarianism with collaboration (presumably based on more and better ‘teams’) will not provide a sufficiently potent remedy for what ails leadership” (p. 6).

So how does connective leadership actually work? As one of the earliest relationship-driven theories, it is grounded in behavioral theories through its attention to achieving styles. *Achieving styles* represent varying behavioral approaches to enacting the leader role (Lipman-Blumen 1996, 2000). The expansion in types of behaviors and attention to the ways in which they interact allows the leader to be more effective and responsive to the increasingly relational, diverse, and interdependent environments in which leadership unfolds.

Three principles provide the essential architecture for the connective leadership model including that (1) it provides insights on *how* to achieve goals, but not *what* those goals should be, (2) individuals must expand the range of achieving styles that they employ rather than defaulting to those that are most comfortable, and (3) preferred achieving styles are learned through socialization, but because they are learned can be adapted or altered. This situates achieving styles as powerful framers of how a person sees the world and in particular understands, experiences, and enacts leadership. What might the implications of this look like? Well, if we operate from a limited set of behaviors, those behaviors can begin to shape the types of problems we see as well as how we approach their resolution. We run the risk of projecting onto others our preferred leadership styles and diminishing the potential to work synergistically to accomplish goals.

Applying the Concept

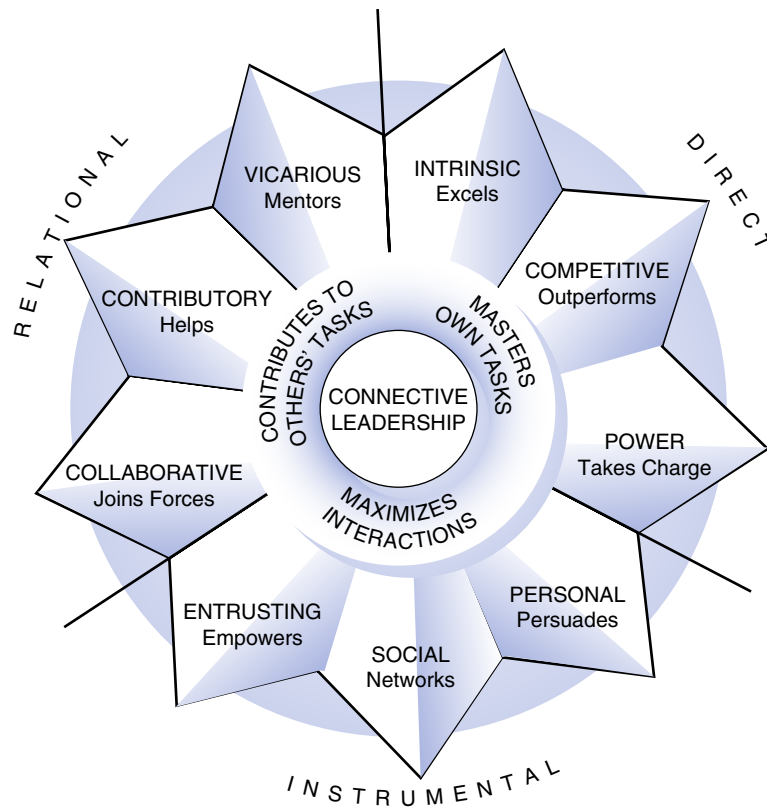
The connective leadership model (see Figure 8.1) takes an entity perspective, focusing on how individuals can increase their leadership capacities to engage in more relational ways. This is accomplished in the model through three meta-categorical “sets” of leader behaviors, under which are nested nine achieving styles, or specific behaviors. Each of the three meta-categorical sets is explained here:

Direct

Emphasizes behaviors that take an individual approach with a strong degree of control over goal specification and task coordination. The primary behaviors include *intrinsic*, *competitive*, and *power*, each of which emerges as a function of the heightened individualism that can develop due to increasing diversity. Note that direct set behaviors are the least characteristic of connective leaders but still may be useful in conjunction with other behaviors.

Relational

Focuses on identification with others (e.g. individuals, groups, or organizations) and behaviors that use these connections to advance goal attainment. This set includes *collaborative*, *contributory*, and *vicarious* behaviors, all of which demonstrate a willingness to let go of control to a greater extent. These behaviors arise as a response to the increased need for interdependence in society.

FIGURE 8.1 The connective leadership model.

Source: *Connective Leadership: Managing in a Changing World* by Jean Lipman-Blumen. Copyright © 1996 by Jean Lipman-Blumen. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, USA.

Instrumental

Serves as a bridge helping to negotiate what can feel like contradictory experiences of leadership when both direct and relational behaviors are enacted. Contradictory experiences arise as a result of the tensions between interdependence and diversity that undergird connective leadership. Behaviors associated with the instrumental set explicitly incorporate ethical action and attention to

politics through the leveraging of resources (e.g. personal, relational, situational) to accomplish goals typically through identifying and capitalizing on connections between and among people. Specific behaviors include *personal*, *social*, and *entrusting*, all of which reflect retention of control over goals yet allow others to shape how they are achieved.

Lipman-Blumen (1996, 2000) suggested that individuals typically operate using a preferred achieving style that represents two to three key behaviors. She referred to these as “peak” styles that, when combined with nonpreferred styles, contribute to a unique, overall behavioral profile of how a person enacts leader roles. Table 8.1 provides definitions and sample behaviors associated with each achieving style. Connective leadership occurs when individuals increase their capacity to engage across all nine behaviors. This does not mean using them all simultaneously but increasing adeptness with enacting well-matched combinations of behaviors that fit the demands of a particular environment.

Lipman-Blumen (1996, 2000) argued that the connective leadership model goes beyond simple description providing a framework from which leaders can diagnose and take three types of action: (1) identification of the most appropriate and effective achieving style based on situational factors, (2) assessment of constituents’ achievement styles and their ability to complement those employed by the leader, and (3) redesign of the structures and environments in which leadership occurs to better reflect the achieving styles and needs of all those involved in working toward goals. These actions indeed go beyond mere description, but also mirror closely the prescriptive approaches that characterized theories of production and effectiveness.

Of particular importance to connective leadership is the ability to read situational cues from the group and environment about which combination of achieving styles is most needed. Assessing situational cues requires considerations of (1) the nature of the task, (2) its degree of importance, (3) the nature and availability of key resources, (4) existing conditions in the context, (5) influential conditions external to the context, and (6) the leader’s authority and capital within the context (Lipman-Blumen 2000). Further complicating this process is the need to consider how individuals not only possess preferred achieving styles but groups and organizations do as well. A preferred organizational achieving style shapes everything from who is valued and rewarded to the way in which power and work flow.

TABLE 8.1 Nine achieving styles associated with connective leadership

Behavior Definitions/ Motivations	Looks Like. . .
Direct set	
Intrinsic Motivation from the challenge of individually mastering content or the intrinsic appeal of the task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Guided by internal metrics and standards for success ♦ Compares personal performance against past peak performance ♦ Desires autonomy and excels when it is provided ♦ Demonstrates self-reliance sometimes to a fault
Competitive Driven by comparisons with others and desire to surpass others' performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Guided by external metrics and standards for success ♦ Winning is of utmost importance with satisfaction derived from beating others ♦ Frames most activities as contests ♦ Can restrict resource sharing
Power Motivated by possession and use of power and maintenance of control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Thrives by creating order and structure ♦ Delegates or assigns tasks with exceptional levels of detail maintaining control through deadlines and careful review of others' work ♦ May reorganize reporting lines to protect power and reward loyalty ♦ Regulates the perceptions and distributions of resources
Relational set	
Collaborative Group process and synergy serve as motivating factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Preference for working in groups and teams in which interactions stimulate individuals to their best efforts ♦ Shares ownership of successes with others while also acknowledging personal role when things do not go well ♦ Invests in interpersonal bonds characterized by trust and reciprocity ♦ Uses group dynamics to engage with and resolve conflict
Contributory Energized by providing support to others to accomplish their goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Wants to contribute to others' successes often by working in the background in service to another ♦ Accepts goals as defined by others as their own ♦ Does not "own" successes ♦ Demonstrates empathy and awareness of others and their needs
Vicarious Motivated by role as indirect facilitator of goal accomplishment for others with whom they identify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Ability to identify and understand the goals of others ♦ Shares insights and knowledge ♦ Provides critical mentoring, coaching, advocacy, and/or endorsement ♦ Builds others' efficacy and motivation

(Continued)

TABLE 8.1 (Continued)

Behavior Definitions/ Motivations	Looks Like. . .
Instrumental set	
Personal Motivated by using their own assets (e.g. traits, knowledge, resources) to achieve goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates charismatically and uses symbolism to connect others to their goals while also engendering a desire for affiliation • Wields personal strengths to facilitate goal accomplishment • Excels at negotiation, influence, and persuasion, and able to build alliances with those perceived as “the opposition” • Often uses self-deprecating humor to disarm situations and reduce threat
Social Fosters, draws upon, and works through relationships serving as networks to achieve desired goals by adeptly connecting people and tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly determines how others may connect to or facilitate goal achievement by linking people with necessary talents to tasks that require them • Understands how group dynamics play out in inherently political social contexts • Seeks out the most diverse coalition of relationships as a means to serve a greater purpose • Nurtures interpersonal capital by maintaining contact with others
Entrusting Holds the belief that those around them will invest in and work toward shared goals setting expectations that help them to accomplish this	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds others to high expectations for shared work and performance • Careful in selection of who they work with, investing in them and engendering trust that in turn empowers, motivates, and builds efficacy in others • Instills a sense of ownership and pride in goals, but leaves the process of how to achieve them to others’ discernment • Comfortable delegating and assigning important and critical tasks to others believing it will achieve better results

How Research Evolves the Concept

The empirical process through which connective leadership and the model that describes it were created was a direct result of research on achieving styles. A number of research publications document the evolution and psychometric rigor of the achieving style survey instruments that led to the development of the theory (Leavitt and Lipman-Blumen 1980; Lipman-Blumen 1992, 2000, 2006; Lipman-Blumen, Handley-Isaksen, and Leavitt 1983; Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt 1976). They provide an important level of validation that the dimensions proposed in the model can indeed be measured, offering support for the concept.

The majority of research employing or extending connective leadership theory, however, reflects unpublished studies, with few articles appearing in academic journals. This diminishes the overall insights that can be accrued about core premises in the model, manifestations across context and social location, and the degree to which it relates to leadership outcomes (e.g. effectiveness, organizational goal attainment). The limited research that does exist offers some empirical support for the premise that use of multiple achievement styles rather than just one or two styles is essential (Beardsley, Stewart, and Wilmes 1987; Gomez and Fassinger 1994; Komives 1992).

Additionally, some research points to gender differences in achieving styles that fall along socially constructed and dominant perceptions of what are masculine styles (e.g. competitive) versus feminine styles (e.g. collaborative), although the research on this is dated (Komives 1992; Lipman-Blumen 1992; Robinson and Lipman-Blumen 2003). Finally, limited research does suggest the transferability of achieving styles outside the United States, that achieving styles are culturally sensitive, and the importance of considering context in the application of the connective leadership model (Gotcheva 2008; Gotcheva and Miettinen 2008).

Sadly, much of connective leadership is left untested particularly in terms of its application in a more contemporary context. There does not appear to be a renaissance ahead for the model either. This is a shame as the contemporary context of the United States seems to reflect the very issues that Lipman-Blumen (1996, 2000, 2017) addresses in terms of the tension between interdependence and diversity.

Wrap-Up

One could argue that connective leadership represents an extension of behavioral/style theory and as such is better suited for inclusion with production-driven theories. However, Lipman-Blumen (1996) explicitly centered relationships and interdependence as essential to the work of leadership, offering a marked departure from production-driven theories. This reflects an early attempt to integrate greater consideration of relationships into more traditional approaches while interrogating their core assumptions.

Connective leadership is an important contribution, albeit one all too often left out of the literature on leadership theory. Maybe we shouldn't be surprised that connective leadership is often excluded. After all, since its inception more than 25 years ago it argued for an approach to leadership that does anything *but* reinforce the status quo. Table 8.2 identifies strengths and weaknesses associated with connective leadership.

TABLE 8.2 Strengths and weaknesses of connective leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Situates leadership in a social context through description of competing demands for interdependence and diversity• Explicitly names the need for inclusiveness and ways in which social location can marginalize individuals and groups from leadership• Supported by assessment tools along with training programs to facilitate capacity-building related to the theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relies heavily on assumptions regarding leader behaviors and their primacy in shaping leadership processes• Lack of substantive published research to evolve the theory and its application• Positions ethics and altruism as central to theory, but leaves them largely undefined prompting the question of who defines the concepts and how they may reflect dominant or normative assumptions

Making Connections

- The core propositions of connective leadership are grounded in concepts that align with critical perspectives, but the leader behaviors do not address them. How might this diminish the ability of connective leadership to address dominant assumptions?
- What stands out as useful about connective leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

THE RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP MODEL

The relational leadership model initially appeared in the first edition of *Exploring Leadership: For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference* (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon 1998). Now in its third edition (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon 2013), the book is a popular leadership text specifically written for college students. The relational leadership model serves as the framework through which the book examines leadership. It represents another example of a theory from outside the dominant disciplinary contexts of psychology and business that is typically omitted from leadership studies. This is despite the fact that countless college students in formal classrooms and training and development experiences are exposed to the relational leadership model, positioning it as influential in the construction of informal theories.

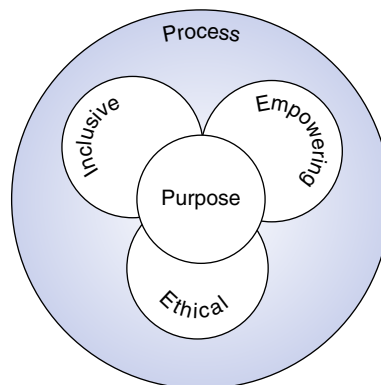
Overview

The relational leadership model is conceptual in nature, offering aspirational insights into how leadership might best emerge through group processes that elevate the importance of relationships. Indeed, as Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) argued, “Relationships are the key to leadership effectiveness” (p. 34). They also situated leadership as learnable and occurring both within and outside of positional roles. Ultimately, the relational leadership model serves as a frame of reference for shaping leadership processes rather than a descriptive or prescriptive checklist.

Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) defined leadership as “a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (p. 33) but explicitly stated that the model does not operate as a formal theory. Rather, the authors argued for the adoption of multiple *philosophies* of leadership that are more adaptive than any single theory or model. Furthermore, Komives, Lucas, and McMahon are clear that their model represents a constructionist perspective focused on ways in which leveraging relationships within group experiences can lead to healthy, influential, and positive co-constructions of what leadership means and how it is enacted. Although it is not designed from an entity perspective, its component parts point to areas in which individuals and groups could expand their capacities to engage in relational leadership.

Figure 8.2 illustrates the five core components, or foundational philosophies and commitments, constituting the relational leadership model.

FIGURE 8.2 The relational leadership model.



Source: Komives, Lucas, McMahon (2013). Copyright © 2013 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Purposeful

Commits to goals through collaborative approaches that identify common ground and a shared vision that can be clearly communicated to motivate collective action.

Inclusive

Engages the complexity of diverse perspectives, experiences, and social identities with a desire to understand, a goal to expand equity, an emphasis on empathy and mutual development, a focus on connectedness, and a willingness to involve external stakeholders.

Empowering

Operates at the individual level through claiming the legitimacy of one's involvement, encouraging others to do the same, actively working to lessen barriers to involvement, and developing a complex understanding of power dynamics. Operates simultaneously at the environmental level by fostering the above along with a learning environment that cultivates trust.

Ethical

Emphasizes ethical and moral values that serve as group standards to guide decision making and behaviors as well as model these for others.

Process-Oriented

Capitalizes on relational synergy to construct an intentional process for creating the group, developing and maintaining cohesion, and acting collaboratively to achieve mission-driven goals. Includes conscious recognition of group functioning that engages in continuous meaning-making about experiences.

The *purposeful* component of the relational leadership model serves as the epicenter as it is through group, community, or organizational purposes that all other components are shaped. For example, how processes play out and empowerment is experienced are functions of the purpose dimension. Purpose also defines the context and informs the nature of change efforts toward which leadership is directed.

Applying the Concept

Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) acknowledged the gap that can exist between the degree to which relationships are valued as central in the relational leadership model

versus the degree to which they are perceived as important in the reality of our communities, organizations, and broader society. The model serves as a platform for narrowing that gap and reshaping informal theories of leadership that replicate and reinforce dominant norms, leader-centricity, and/or command and control approaches. Consistent with constructionist perspectives, the authors are less clear about how this is functionally done, offering only that attending to the five philosophies of the relational model “builds a strong organization with committed participants who know they matter” (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon 2013, 143).

Ultimately, the relational leadership model responds to the question “Leadership for what?” with its emphasis on positive change. It frames change as a shift away from the status quo and in the direction of progress or “a better place” (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon 2013, 107). Yet it does not offer specifics about “the change outcomes for which leadership is intended” (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon 2013, 95) or the motives that drive them. In many ways, the model is reliant on its explicit inclusion of a commitment to being ethical to steer leadership outcomes toward prosocial goals.

A point of internal contradiction in the relational leadership model is the degree to which it positions itself as reflecting a constructionist perspective but then adopts more entity perspectives in the significant attention paid to outlining developmental considerations associated with its core commitments. This includes describing examples of knowledge acquisition, attitude and belief formation, and skill and ability development that must occur to promote relational leadership and enhance individuals’ capacities to enact it within groups. Given Uhl-Bien’s (2006) assertion that entity and relational perspectives can and indeed do coexist, this tension is a strength of the model as it encourages groups to co-construct leadership using the relational commitments as a starting point. This tension also operates as a limitation, given it creates room for the model to be misinterpreted as an entity perspective or for individuals to default to using it in more comfortable and individualistic ways.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Oddly, there is no dedicated research on the relational leadership model published in peer-reviewed journals to date. However, the model did serve as an important framework for a later theory that was empirically generated and tested. The theory of leadership identity development (LID) captures the varying experiences and processes that college students undergo as they situate themselves in the context of leadership

(Komives et al. 1998, 2005). The ability to engage effectively in the core commitments of the relational leadership model served as the basis for selecting participants. What emerged was a grounded theory and applied model that explained the developmental processes associated with the adoption of a relational leader identity (Komives et al. 1998, 2006; Komives et al. 2005).

Although the goal of LID studies was not to validate the relational leadership model, this was a by-product of the research. LID studies provided empirical support for the five core commitments that inform the relational leadership model and their interactions with one another (Komives et al. 2006). Offering further support for both the relational leadership model and LID are the increasing number of validation replicating the research (Bush et al. 2022; Ploskonka et al. 2016; Sorensen, McKim, and Velez 2016; Wolfinbarger et al. 2021) and particularly those that have done so across diverse social locations (e.g. Acosta and Guthrie 2021; McKenzie 2018; Onorato and Musoba 2015; Renn 2007; Renn and Bilodeau 2005; Renn and Ozaki 2010).

Wrap-Up

The relational leadership model offers insights into the philosophical commitments that leverage relationships in group processes enhancing both the experience and impact of leadership. Although positioned from a constructionist perspective, the source material offers extensive entity-based insights into how to develop individuals’ and collectives’ capacities for this work. Additionally, the model may never have been directly validated through empirical research, but benefits from its connection to and confirmation through LID studies. Table 8.3 identifies additional strengths and weaknesses.

TABLE 8.3 Strengths and weaknesses of the relational leadership model

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Centers the relationships of individuals and collectives as assets and drivers of leadershipExplicitly acknowledges concepts such as power, inclusion, and ethicsAdvocates the adoption of leadership philosophies over a singular theory or model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Aspirational in nature, making it challenging to translate to practiceLimited empirical supportContradictory positioning as process-based, while largely attending to developmental considerations

Making Connections

- Relational leadership positions ethics as central to its conceptualization of leadership. How might stocks of knowledge and ideology contribute to interpretations of ethics that fail to advance democratic and just leadership?
- What stands out as useful about the relational leadership model? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHIES

If you think all the way back to the first chapter, we discussed varying research paradigms as key footings for leadership that inform how it is studied, understood, and ultimately enacted. Relational leadership philosophies are born out of and reflect postmodern research paradigms, which view the world as chaotic, ambiguous, and fragmented with reality as transitional and constantly being co-constructed and re-constructed. Postmodern perspectives stress the importance of questioning “truth” because objectivity and universality are impossibilities. As you might imagine, this way of viewing leadership is considerably different from what we’ve encountered thus far and radically reshapes how it is understood.

Relational leadership philosophies are among the most complex and abstract by their very design. If connective leadership begins a shift toward greater considerations of interdependent relationships but largely employs an entity perspective, and the relational leadership model embraces a constructionist perspective but defaults at times to entity-based considerations, then relational leadership philosophies bring us full circle with their immersion in constructionist viewpoints. Because of this, our review of relational leadership philosophies may feel odd—as if it lacked a concrete model, specific details, or something to latch onto in terms of translations to practice, but stay with me. Exposure to these ideas offer important insights that push us toward more powerful and complex considerations of what leadership has the potential to be.

Overview

Relational leadership philosophies represent a shift in focus from entity perspectives (i.e. attention to how leaders enact traits, attributes, and/or behaviors that *happen* to be

relational) to constructionist perspectives that examine *relationships themselves* as the central location through which leadership emerges. This occurs through the ways in which group dynamics contribute to a socially constructed understanding of what leadership is and how it should be manifest. These understandings are influenced by the interdependent connections between individuals nested in groups, organizations, and broader systems, all of which play roles in shaping how leadership is conceived. This often occurs through unwritten and unspoken communication, subconscious understandings that shape individual and group actions, symbolism, and other indirect influences.

Thus, relational leadership philosophies focus on how leadership emerges through dynamic, collective, and interdependent processes that are a function of our interconnected relationships. Understanding this approach rests heavily on being able to differentiate between entity and constructionist perspectives. Table 8.4 provides clear distinctions between these perspectives to aid in understanding how they operate.

Several key tenets arise from scholarship on relational leadership philosophies that are foundational to their understanding (Bradbury and Lichtenstein 2000; Fairhurst 2007; Henry and Wolfgramm 2018; Hosking 2007, 2011; Hosking, Dachler, and Gergen 1995; McCauley and Palus 2021; Uhl-Bien 2006; Uhl-Bien, Maslyn, and Ospina 2012; Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012). These include the following:

Relationality

Relational leadership philosophies are concerned less with the study of individual leaders than collective leadership processes. Thus, there is a refocusing away

TABLE 8.4 Differences between entity and constructionist perspectives of leadership

Emphasis	Entity Perspective	Constructionist Perspective
Concerned with . . .	The outcome “What”	The process “How”
	Relationships	Relational dynamics
	The individual	The social
View of knowledge	Reality exists	Continuously co-constructed through relationships nested in historical, local, and cultural contexts
Relationships are . . .	Stable and linear	Dynamic sense-making processes
	Interpersonal and dyadic	A web of interdependent connections

from dyadic interpersonal relationships occurring between leaders and followers toward the complex web or matrix of social interactions in which relationships unfold. Attending to this web of social interactions allows for a closer examination of relationality (i.e. the space between and among people) and the interdependence that exists between self and others who are constantly coevolving together.

Continuous Co-construction of Knowledge

The interdependent web of social relationships serves as the context in which meaning is co-constructed through both conscious and subconscious negotiation and renegotiation using verbal and nonverbal language, history, and story. Thus, how leadership is conceived as well as how it should be enacted inherently reflects the local, cultural, and historical contexts in which the co-construction of knowledge occurs.

Leadership as Property of the Social System

When leadership shifts away from the embodied possession of an individual to the examination of collective processes, relationality, and the co-construction of knowledge and action, it “becomes the property of the social system, rather than just being a shared idea in people’s minds, or a quality located in a single individual” (Uhl-Bien, Maslyn, and Ospina 2012, 309).

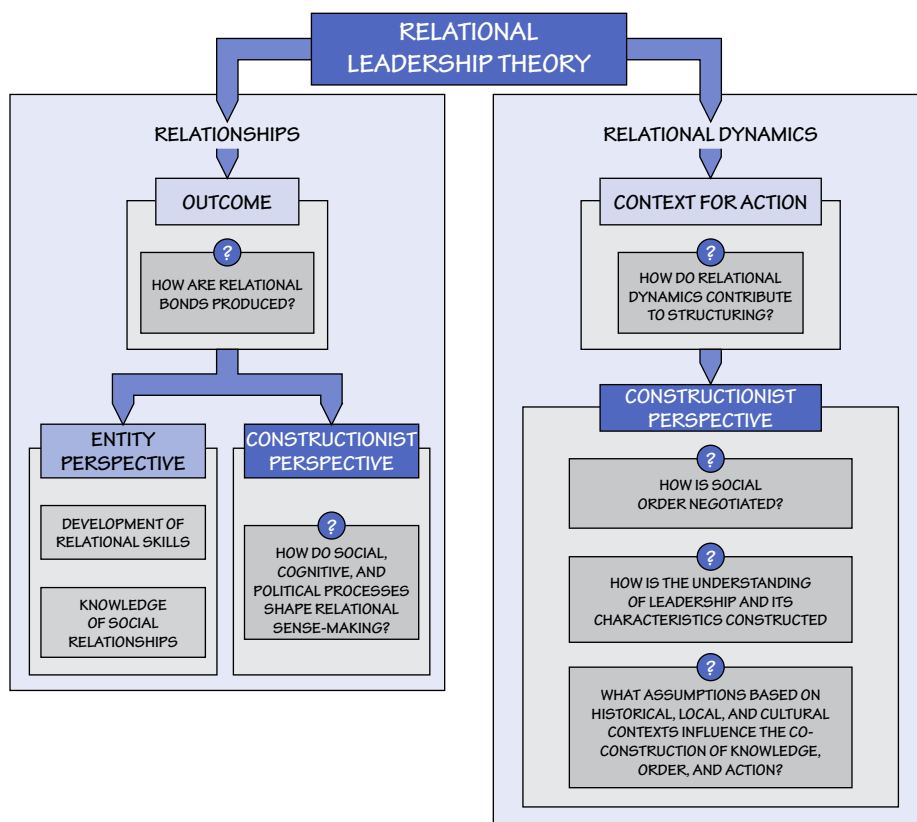
These tenets, and in particular the final one, represent a fundamental departure that re-situates leadership as not just dependent on healthy, interpersonal relationships but continuously constructed, negotiated, and produced through and within social relationships.

Despite a growing body of scholarship and common foundations across relational leadership philosophies, Hosking (2011) argued that “this perspective should *not* be related to as a theory. For example, it is not about causal relationships between variables and it is not stated in a way that invites or is amenable to ‘testing.’ Relational constructionism makes no predictions, has no interest in control, does not offer explanations, and is not oriented towards producing objective knowledge of independently existing entities” (p. 463, emphasis in original). Seemingly in contradiction to this assertion, Uhl-Bien (2006) synthesized the state of relational leadership philosophies and proposed the relational leadership theory. Note that the “theory” does not operate in a traditional sense—it does not focus on leader or leadership effectiveness, nor does it attempt to offer a universal explanatory model. Rather, it provides a framework to more carefully examine the relational dynamics associated with leadership processes. It achieves this by focusing attention on a number of important questions that should be addressed by relational leadership philosophies.

Uhl-Bien (2006) suggested the purpose of “relational leadership theory is the study of both *relationships* (interpersonal relationships as outcomes of or as contexts for interactions) and *relational dynamics* (social interactions, social constructions) of leadership” (p. 667, emphasis in original). Thus, she integrates considerations from both entity and constructionist perspectives. She then defines relational leadership as “a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e. evolving social order) and change (e.g. new values, attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced” (p. 655).

Consistent with the broader tenets of relational leadership philosophies, a number of principles guide relational leadership theory. These include (1) leadership exists both in and outside of formal leader roles, (2) leadership is enacted through relationships across the organization, not just through preestablished hierarchies, (3) these relationships play a role in creating and/or influencing both social order and social action, and (4) relationships are influenced by the contexts in which they are nested. Figure 8.3 provides a visual

FIGURE 8.3 Relational leadership theory considerations.



representation of the core considerations associated with relational leadership theory, providing direction for the theory's core concern about how "people work together to define their relationships in a way that generates leadership influence and structuring" (Uhl-Bien 2006, 668).

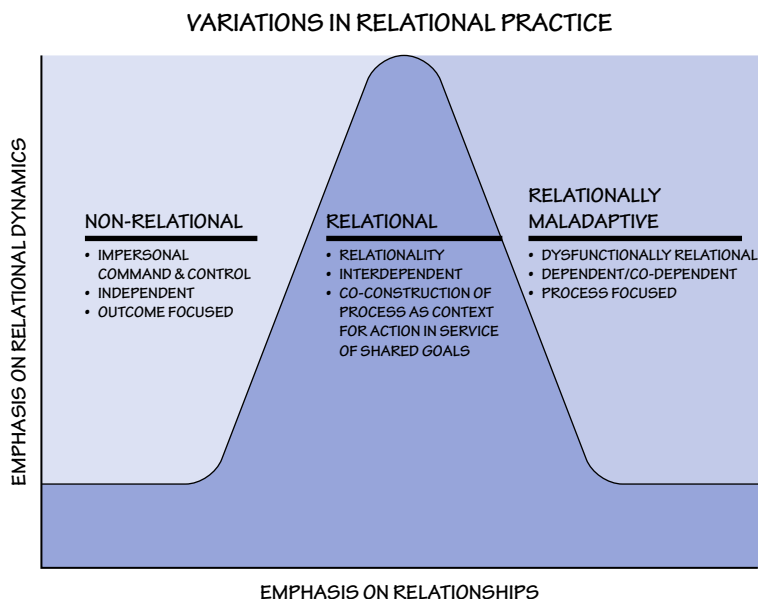
Relational leadership theory suggests the importance of both relationships and relational dynamics. The study of relationships asks the central question of how they are produced, which can be examined either from an entity perspective (e.g., What knowledge acquisition, attitude and belief formation, and skill and ability development contribute to improved interpersonal functioning in relationships?) and constructionist perspectives (e.g., How do social, cognitive, and political considerations influence relational sense-making?). Conversely, the study of relational dynamics solely engages a constructionist perspective to better understand how relational dynamics shape the structuring, or the evolving understanding, of social organization and order.

Applying the Concept

If you haven't guessed by this point, the application of relational leadership philosophies presents a difficult task given that they are neither prescriptive nor descriptive. The fact that leadership is understood as constantly evolving through relational co-constructions of knowledge that are nested in contextual, historical, and cultural influences means there are no universal insights. This is a point of critique of relational leadership philosophies—that they offer few pragmatic recommendations to practical actors engaged in leadership to intervene using the core tenets of relationality, co-construction of knowledge, and leadership as a property of the social system. However, Hosking (2011) argued that they are valuable "as a way of orienting to practice—to ongoing relational processes and the ways they (re)construct particular relational realities" (p. 463). While I'm appreciative of this framing, I'm still not convinced it offers much help or direction. However, if we look across relational leadership philosophies, a number of considerations do emerge as potential points of intervention. Let's walk through these considerations as a means to make relational leadership philosophies a bit more tangible.

Avoiding Relational Malpractice

Fletcher (2010, 2012) pointed out the importance of examining social construction not just of leadership but of what it means to be relational. She argued that conceptualizations of what constitutes "being relational" can lead to collective practices that range from

FIGURE 8.4 Variations in relational practice.

non-relational to relational to relationally maladaptive. Figure 8.4 provides an adaptation of Fletcher's (2010, 2012) work illustrating this. For example, an emphasis on relationships over shared goals can contribute to "not giving colleagues accurate feedback, suppressing rather than airing conflicts or contradictions, and retaining or protecting incompetence rather than confronting it" (Fletcher 2012, 96). Thus, a point for intervention is working with individuals and collectives to unpack what constitutes relationality and to determine how relational interactions can demonstrate both a focus on goal attainment and healthy interdependence.

Examining Assumptions in Knowledge Construction

Because the co-construction of leadership is a property of society, it reflects the ideological assumptions that operate within it often at a subconscious level. Hosking and Morley (1991) identified three interrelated dimensions of relational leadership: social (i.e. the construction of identity in context with and in relation to others), cognitive (i.e. sense-making that informs as well as emerges from the social dimension and in the process structures "reality" in terms of what is considered real and true), and political (i.e. sense-making

shapes and is shaped by broader systems—local, national, societal—privileging certain knowledge). A second point of intervention involves (1) making conscious, (2) negotiating, and (3) renegotiating assumptions that inform knowledge construction associated with relational leadership philosophies related to the three dimensions. Of particular importance is disrupting normative assumptions about how social location influences leadership and moving toward shared understandings.

Engaging in Storytelling and Dialogue

Scholars of relational leadership philosophies almost unanimously situate storytelling and dialogue as primary vehicles for advancing relationality (Fairhurst 2007; Fairhurst and Connaughton 2014; Henry and Wolfram 2018; Hosking 2007, 2011; McCauley and Palus 2021; Uhl-Bien 2006; Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012). Storytelling and dialogue provide the platform for examining assumptions in knowledge construction but also the dynamic tensions that exist in relational leadership, whether these are related to seemingly contradictory concepts (e.g. leader/follower, entity/constructionist perspectives) or gaps between what we articulate as valued (e.g. relationality) versus what may in actuality be valued (e.g. efficient goal attainment). They also provide a means to translate oral history and tradition, demonstrate agency and freedom in sharing one's voice, and pass on generative legacies and values related to collective, relational leadership practices. Hosking (2011) suggested that engaging in dialogue is "characterized: (a) by a very special sort of listening, questioning, and being present; (b) by willingness to suspend one's assumptions and certainties; and (c) by reflexive attention to the ongoing process and one's own part in it" (p. 461).

How Research Evolves the Concept

Hosking (2011) made it clear that testing and validation are not among the goals of relational leadership philosophies. Even more importantly, research on relational leadership philosophies does not attempt to identify universal or even generalizable findings about the nature of leadership. Given this positioning, most writing on relational leadership philosophies focuses on emergent methodological techniques for engaging in this type of research. Additionally, by their very design, studies that employ relational leadership philosophies yield highly contextualized findings, offering fewer pragmatic insights and more often adding to the complexity of how we understand the core tenets that inform the approach.

TABLE 8.5 Strengths and weaknesses of relational leadership philosophies

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trouble the social construction that equates authority or positional roles with leadership• Introduce a more complex approach that shifts from <i>being</i> relational to the understanding of <i>relationships themselves</i> as the site from which leadership emerges• Acknowledge the inherent interdependence that characterizes relationships and leadership processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not offer prescriptive or descriptive recommendations, making translating to practice more difficult• Focus on relationality and co-construction of knowledge through relationships complicates research on the theory• Acknowledge hegemonic norms and ideological assumptions, but provide few points of intervention

Wrap-Up

Relational leadership philosophies push the limits of our understanding of knowledge and how it emerges through complex webs of relational interactions. Leadership and its enactment emerge as a function of this. It’s important to note that entity and constructionist perspectives are not oppositional approaches but that the development of a rich and complex understanding of relational leadership requires *both*, with entity perspectives often focusing on the “what” of leadership and constructionist perspectives offering insights into the “how” (Fairhurst 2007; Hosking 2007; Uhl-Bien 2006; Uhl-Bien, Maslyn, and Ospina 2012). In many ways, relational perspectives engage with critical perspectives by attempting to name and then interrogate what we know and how we’ve come to know it. Table 8.5 offers additional strengths and weaknesses associated with relational leadership philosophies.

Making Connections

- How does social location, and in particular the intertwined nature of knowledge, identity, and power, shape the ways in which knowledge is co-constructed and relationships are structured in relational leadership philosophies?
- What stands out as useful about relational leadership philosophies? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

DECONSTRUCTING RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN THEORIES

Let's approach the deconstruction of relationship-driven theories by examining a unique tension. Each of the theories acknowledges the influence of normative assumptions, social stratification, or ideologies in shaping leadership. However, in most cases little attention is directed toward defining these influences in meaningful ways or articulating their consequences. Even less attention is directed toward disrupting, reducing, or redressing their effects. Yet the core tenets of critical social theory call for more than just an awareness about issues of social justice but for action to be taken to ameliorate them. Thus, *willful blindness* (i.e. a retreat from responsibility) becomes a useful tool for the deconstruction of relationship-driven theories. We typically think of willful blindness as reflecting near total neglect of an issue. Its presence in the context of relationship-driven theories, however, is subtler but nonetheless problematic.

In many ways, relationship-driven theories do more than just about any other cluster in terms of acknowledging the embeddedness of leadership in inequitable norms. Connective leadership explicitly states how dominant approaches to leadership contribute to the marginalization of individuals from various identity groups. The relational leadership model incorporates inclusion as a key dimension promoting leadership that advances social justice. Relational leadership philosophies name the ways in which the co-construction of knowledge reflects sociopolitical, historical, and economic differences based on social location. However, Fletcher (2012) argued that these theories "often take some aspects of this hegemonic context into account but fail to offer help or guidance on how flesh and blood leaders can navigate that context or influence the ways in which a narrative of leadership gets constructed" (p. 95). So what are some of the consequences of this?

Replication of Inequitable Systems

Perhaps the most obvious consequence of willful blindness in relationship-driven theories is that it allows for the ongoing replication of dominant norms. Repressive stocks of knowledge and ideologies continue to influence how leadership is understood and manifest. Socially constructed implicit prototypes that render leadership more accessible to and acceptable from some over others endure. Nothing changes in how leadership is understood simply because a theory says marginalization exists. The statement of its existence needs to be coupled with a nuanced explication of how and why, the negative effects it has on *everyone* (not just those who are minoritized), and substantive recommendations for how to redress it.

Social Stratification of Relationships

Relationship-driven theories, and particularly those that adopt constructivist perspectives, argue that knowledge is co-constructed dynamically through interdependent relationships. Social location argues that knowledge is inextricably tied to power and identity. Therefore, “knowledge” is likely to reflect and reinforce the social locations of those involved in the co-construction process. Said another way, the fault lines of social stratification in society shape who we find ourselves in relationship with, and these groups are often homogenous in their representation of social identity groups (e.g. race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, age). This homogeneity in turn shapes the types of knowledge about leadership that are co-constructed with those who hold power dictating what constitutes the dominant narrative. Should we be surprised, then, that infusing alternative perspectives about what leadership entails is difficult?

Let’s take this argument a step further. Knowledge is not just influenced by power and identity. It influences both of them in return. Therefore, when dominant forms of knowledge are co-constructed through relationships they reinforce the homogeneity of those relationships perpetuating stratification across social identity groups. In essence, they contribute to a self-replicating system.

Benign Neglect as Hegemonic

What messages are being sent when a leadership theory names inequity—perhaps even states the importance of addressing it—but fails to describe it in detail or offer insights into how it can be diminished? I’d argue very confusing ones. First and foremost, when theories “check the social justice box” without offering substantial and sustained attention, they reinforce the status quo. The theory may be lauded for its inclusion of these considerations, but how does it actually alter anything? To what extent might this be unintentionally hegemonic in terms of sensitizing people to the issues of social inequity but simultaneously sending an implicit message that nothing needs to be done about it? At best this reflects a form of benign neglect and at worst a tool for pacification.

Second, that a theory would name considerations of social inequity but allow them to essentially “die on the vine” through inadequate attention is crazy and perhaps the strongest example of willful blindness. “Social justice is of the utmost importance, but we’ll leave this for you to figure out on your own.” “We live in a world of social stratifications. They are horribly unfair and shape everything. . . . Best of luck in finding ways to address them.” Does this not minimize both the importance and complexity of the issues? To what extent does it constrain agency and efficacy for redressing issues?

Diverting Attention from the System

Willful blindness in relationship-driven theories can lead to an oversimplification of the very dynamics of social stratification that they name. This emerges from the lack of explanation of how inequity operates simultaneously through multiple levels, including the individual, institutional, and societal. In the absence of an explanation of its nesting, the attribution of social inequities can easily default to individual-level causes. A particular team member is racist. A specific leader's behaviors are biased in hiring practices. Issues of inequity become anomalies associated with individuals. This obfuscates how individual-level behaviors operate as a function of institutional and societal norms, both of which are largely unaddressed in relationship-driven theories. Fletcher (2004) articulated the dangerous consequences associated with this, arguing that if relational leadership

is understood as simply a new approach that requires integrating relational skills with traditional skills at the individual level, it is likely to be incorporated into the dominant discourse according to the rules of traditional individualism, without an awareness of the deeper changes to structures, systems, and work practices that would be needed to make it work. The result may be that we are left with yet another idealized image of heroic leadership—postheroic heroes—but without an exploration of the systemic changes that would foster relational leadership practices throughout an organization. (p. 657)

My hope is that in reviewing the deconstruction of relationship-driven theories you are able to hold two things constant. This set of theories should be appreciated for the ways in which they name considerations associated with critical perspectives *and* they should be challenged to develop the concepts more fully.

RECONSTRUCTING RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN THEORIES

A challenge in reconstructing relationship-driven theories lies in how to do so without dismantling the very thing that makes them unique. Collectively, connective leadership, the relational leadership model, and relational leadership philosophies represent a movement from entity to constructionist perspectives. As such, their designs reflect varying degrees of pragmatism, and indeed a central critique is their lack of practical insights and utopian perspectives. However, Hosking (2011) argued that this is the point of constructionist views—to avoid the depiction of a singular, stable reality as well as prescriptive recommendations that might reinforce that assumption.

Perhaps, then, the best way to engage in the reconstruction of relationship-driven theories without dismantling the essence of the theories themselves is through disrupting normativity (i.e. purposefully and explicitly identifying, examining, and redressing hegemonic norms). Specifically, we can build on the theories' identification of issues of social inequity by finding ways to integrate greater explanation and intervention as well. We can do this by honing in and expanding on several core premises of relationship-driven theories.

Relationships as the Site of Disruption

Consistent with constructionist approaches, all three theories assert that the understanding and enactment of leadership emerges through interdependent relationships. This positions relationships as the primary site for intervention rather than the work itself or the context, which are frequently viewed as the point of intervention in other theories. Let's walk through two points of intervention related to this.

Developmental Trajectories

How individuals understand relationships is driven by underlying developmental trajectories. Indeed, the concept of relationality is incredibly complex. Uhl-Bien, Maslyn, and Ospina (2012) framed it as "the 'space between people'—it assumes that the self and other are not separable but are coevolving" (p. 307). This requires a cognitive shift in how an individual makes meaning of relationships moving beyond dependence or independence and toward interdependence. Expecting individuals to make that jump naturally is naive.

Thus, an initial intervention should focus on moving individuals' and groups' developmental understandings of relationships in the direction of increasing complexity. One way to approach this is reflected in the flow of theories presented in this chapter, moving from stressing the importance of relationships and development of relational skills to deepening the understanding of how dimensions of relationships play out (e.g. empowerment, inclusion, purpose) to cultivating the cognitive abilities necessary to engage in relationality. Simply jumping to the end of this developmental trajectory risks oversimplification or leaving people behind in the process.

Core Competencies for Critical Perspectives

As the sophistication of understanding relationships and their centrality to leadership deepens, so too should the attention directed toward understanding and acting on issues

of social inequity. The ability to engage with the topic beyond simple knowledge acquisition (i.e. naming it) also reflects a developmental trajectory that is cultivated over time. Chapter 2 introduced a number of fundamental skills associated with the adoption of critical perspectives and a movement toward understanding and acting on issues of social justice. Of particular importance are metacognition (i.e. thinking about how we think), critical self-reflection (i.e. understanding one's positionality within broader systems), and social perspective-taking (i.e. adopting another person's point of view and accurately inferring their thoughts and feelings). If relationships serve as the point of intervention, then infusing opportunities for continued learning associated with these fundamental skills into collective experiences is imperative.

Storytelling and Dialogue as a Tool for Disruption

Relational leadership philosophies position storytelling and dialogue as central to relationality. They argue that they are a critical vehicle for shaping the co-construction of knowledge through the examination of assumptions and tensions related to leadership as well as creating space for generative voice-giving and sharing. The leadership development literature also attributes an enormous amount of influence to dialogue, crediting it as a powerful platform for increasing cognitive reasoning along with enhancing the fundamental skills associated with adopting critical perspectives (Buckley and Oliner 2020; Dugan and Komives 2010; Dugan et al. 2013; Kirk and Shutte 2004; Komives et al. 2011; Nagda and Roper 2019; Raelin 2016).

An important point of intervention, then, is the pervasive integration of storytelling and dialogue into group experiences to explore the role that stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location play in shaping leadership. Storytelling and dialogue serve as powerful tools for diversification of both knowledge and relationships. Because these two concepts are intrinsically tied, engaging in storytelling and dialogue provides an opportunity to challenge normative assumptions and dominant narratives in the process of co-constructing knowledge about leadership. It also may aid in shifting understandings of social justice from solely examining individual perspectives to recognizing the interplay of the individual within institutions and broader societal systems. Additionally, storytelling and dialogues about and across differences fortify relationships and can be leveraged in service of the diversification of relationships. As knowledge shifts, so too do understandings limited by or entrenched in a particular social location, presenting opportunities to reduce the homogeneity of relationships.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Relationship-driven theories provide a unique approach to leadership that positions relational interdependence, the naming of social inequalities, and the co-construction of knowledge as essential. By design, they also offer varying degrees of functional utility and are undergirded by what some might critique as a utopian worldview. The theories themselves even acknowledge that the degree to which they value relationships and relationality often will not align with the degree to which groups and organizations value them. Lipman-Blumen (2000) lamented that “in reality, cooperation and teamwork serve mostly as the *backdrop* for individual performance . . . We preach teamwork, but we idolize individualism” (p. 71, emphasis in original). This has a damaging effect on relationships.

Nevertheless, relationship-driven theories represent a sharp contrast to theories that situate individuals or productivity as the focus of leadership. They recognize the ways in which our collective understanding of leadership emerge through shared experiences and the co-construction of knowledge. Even if their intended purpose is not to identify points of intervention for individual or group capacity building, they provide a compass to guide where and how we invest energies in cultivating leadership.

Mary Morten is the president of Morten Group, a national consulting firm focused on nonprofit, for-profit, governmental, and foundation fields. She built Morten Group with an intentional focus on assembling a multiracial, cross-generational team of professionals with a commitment to social justice while centering diversity, racial equity, and inclusion in executive placements and research. Mary is also known as a documentary filmmaker including her award-winning film *Woke Up Black*.

My formal entrée into political activism occurred when I walked through the doors of the Chicago chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1984. It was during the Mondale-Ferraro presidential campaign, and I was very excited that there was a woman on the Democratic ticket. You know, at the time, I thought I knew it all. I read *Ms.* magazine; I read *Essence*; and so I thought I had it going on. I really wanted to get involved; I really wanted to have the conversations that I thought were important like the women's choice movement. So I walked into the Chicago NOW office . . . and when I did I realized that I was the only Woman of Color in the room. I remember asking the associate director at the time, “Why aren't there any other Black women or Women of Color

in the room?” And she said, “You know, that’s a really good question. I don’t know why Black women aren’t coming.” And I believed her—she wasn’t giving me lip service.

I will never forget attending my first meeting about reproductive rights in that same office. The executive director again reiterated that increasingly familiar phrase, “We just don’t know why Black women aren’t coming. We don’t understand.” I finally said, “Well, let’s see, the meetings are on a Tuesday night, downtown, and at six o’clock. What if you have a job? Or a job that isn’t downtown? Or what if you’re a mother and have children to care for? If you really want to reach the women who are affected by this issue, then you need to have meetings in some other place than this downtown office and maybe at a different time.”

We ended up having a very frank conversation about it, because, you know, there is this idea that “if we build it, they will come.” But that is often not the case—things don’t generally work that way. You can’t just expect people to come out and get involved. You’ve got to bring people to the issues and make it personal for them—now. Some people may understand that a particular cause is eventually going to help them and their community, but that’s not how most people approach it. It’s always sort of “What’s in it for me?”—and I don’t fault people for that. I actually think it’s short-sighted of leaders to not acknowledge that reality. It’s a part of our job as organizers and coalition builders to make sure people understand exactly how the issue will impact them now *and* down the road—and how it will impact their children. That’s part of our work. We have to step out from behind our desks and really connect with people one-on-one.

For the most part, the reality is that we live in a bubble—in a very closed kind of world segregated from the experiences of people who are different from us. But what I’ve learned about this work is that it’s all about community building—and community building is really about relationships. It’s about getting to know people on a one-on-one basis, because at the end of the day the strategy is to build trust. People have to trust you, particularly when you are so very different or you’re coming in trying to move an issue from point A to point B. You have to build those relationships and help people in the community to then go on to activate *their* neighbors. In some ways you are modeling the process of relationship building and catalyzing people with the motivation to go out and continue that relationship building with others compounding shared interests and collective power.

Change is about getting people in the pipeline. But often there is just one magnetic, charismatic leader in the front of a cause and not a damn thing being done about developing people coming behind them. Then, when that person leaves, the organization collapses. It happens all the time, especially in nonprofits—and I think it’s absolutely criminal. You can’t have an organization or cause rise and fall on one person. Everything rests upon relationships—but at the end of the day, the work is bigger than any of us. It requires moving from the individual to the collective.

(continued)



Reflection Questions

1. How does Mary's story reinforce the argument in relationship-driven theories that relationships serve as the site for intervention in leadership?
2. Mary articulates beautifully the importance of dialectical thinking when she shares that everything rests on relationships, yet the work is greater than any single person or even the group as a whole. How might you envision helping others to recognize this when engaging in leadership?
3. Mary's story captures the ways in which social location can get lost in relationship-driven leadership theories. What strategies might you distill from her story and your own experiences that could aid in redressing this issue?

Complexity-Driven Theories

“Those who simplify the universe only reduce the expansion of its meaning.”

—ANAÏS NIN

Complexity-driven theories push the boundaries of leadership theory to explore themes of organizational learning, chaos theory, and the ill-structured nature of leadership problems, processes, and solutions. These theories are referred to as complex for a reason. They deep dive into individual and organizational processes that require adaptation for survival. These theories are about more than just solving technical issues but dealing with grand challenges. Did I mention that they are also really complex? The opening quote by Nin captures this desire to add complexity to our thinking, and complexity-driven theories aid in opening the aperture of our thinking to more expansive understandings of the phenomena of leadership.

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

Adaptive leadership disrupts common sense understandings about leaders and leadership. It was initially introduced by Heifetz (1994) and advanced over the years in collaboration with other scholars (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009; Heifetz and Linsky 2002). The purpose of adaptive leadership is to provide a pragmatic approach. However, pragmatism in Heifetz's world is clearly a relative term; his concepts are complex and disrupt many of the commonly held assumptions about what leadership is, its central purpose, and how it functions.

Overview

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) defined adaptive leadership as “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (p. 14). At the heart of this is getting groups to engage in adaptive work, which involves deep learning that alters the assumptions and values that drive individual and collective behaviors. Hmmm . . . doesn’t this sound a bit like engaging with critical perspectives?

Heifetz (1994) also argued that leadership is anything but values neutral, with adaptive work attempting to reconcile gaps between the espoused and actualized values driving collective action. For example, adaptive work might mean asking the governance board of a company to engage with growing stockholder concerns that their mission explicitly values diversity and their customer base is two-thirds people of color, but the racial composition of the board is almost entirely White. This represents a clear gap between the values that the organization espouses and the reality of how it operates.

It should be no surprise that engaging in adaptive work is not at the top of most people’s bucket lists. It isn’t particularly fun. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) remind us that “adaptive change stimulates resistance because . . . it asks [people] to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures” (p. 30). Thus, leadership becomes about discerning the types of loss that people associate with a particular adaptive challenge and creating a context in which this loss can be examined more closely.

For example, what perceptions of loss might cause members of the governance board in the previous example to resist exploring the gap between valuing diversity and having a racially homogenous board? For some, it might be an issue of loyalty and not wanting to see committed board members leave to make space for new members. For others, resistance might be associated with loss of status, social capital, or wealth tied to membership. Still others may resist because concern for diversity is so deeply tied to their sense of identity that even acknowledging that the values gap exists would be equated with failure. It may be easier to ignore the issue than admit to one’s complicity in contributing to it.

Despite the complexity of and potential resistance to adaptive work, Heifetz (1994) suggested it defines the very emergence of leadership. Successfully engaging in adaptive leadership requires an understanding of three key features.

Authority Considerations

Heifetz (1994, 2010) stressed the importance of clearly defining and disentangling authority from leadership, recognizing that just because individuals have authority does

not mean they practice leadership. Furthermore, adaptive leadership distinguishes between formal and informal authority, each of which leverages power in different ways. Formal authority taps into power via legitimacy and the right to direct others because of a positional role, whereas informal authority reflects the ability to direct others using power acquired via trust relationships and perceived expertise. The two are not mutually exclusive. In other words, a formal authority may or may not also hold informal authority.

Both formal and informal authority reflect a social contract in which power is given by constituents to a leader as a form of exchange whereby the leader agrees to deliver something in return (Heifetz 1994, 2010). This could be representation for a constituency by a politician; efficiency, equitable supervision, and productivity by a business leader; or advocacy, safety, and gains in public awareness by an activist. With formal authority the exchanges and scope of power are well defined, whereas informal authority often relies on implicitly understood exchanges and less defined power parameters. Because authority relationships are predicated on an exchange, leaders must become experts in attending to power dynamics and knowing how and when to use the power they possess or risk it being taken back by constituents.

This recognition of authority dynamics is essential to adaptive leadership. The leadership studies literature disproportionately focuses on those with formal authority, which “leave[s] no room for leadership that challenges the legitimacy of authority or the system of authorization itself” (Heifetz 1994, 21). In other words, adaptive leadership directs attention toward and affords credibility to efforts by informal authorities or those with no authority to challenge the status quo and question how, why, and who is given formal authority in the first place. This is an acknowledgment few leadership theories make.

Technical and Adaptive Problem Solving

Central to adaptive leadership is distinguishing between technical and adaptive challenges, with the former reflecting the work of management and the latter leadership. *Technical problems* can be easily resolved through authoritative responses. This does not mean that the central actor has to be the authority but that the authority can draw on existing knowledge, skills, and organizational structures to resolve the issue. Technical problems can still be incredibly complicated and important, but the expertise of the authority serves as an asset for clear definition of the problem and implementation of a solution. *Adaptive challenges*, on the other hand, necessitate learning as both the problem itself and the resolution are unclear. Adaptive challenges require “going beyond any authoritative expertise to

TABLE 9.1 Adaptive leadership problem classification considerations

	Problem definition	Solution and implementation	Locus of responsibility for the work	Type of situation
Type I	Clear	Clear	Authorities	Technical
Type II	Clear	Requires learning	Authorities and stakeholders	Technical and adaptive
Type III	Requires learning	Requires learning	Stakeholders and authorities	Adaptive

Adapted from Heifetz (2010). Copyright © 2010 by Sage Publications, Inc.

mobilize discovery, shredding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses, and generating the new capacity to thrive” (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 19).

Heifetz (1994, 2010) does not define problems as exclusively technical or exclusively adaptive, acknowledging that complex issues typically include components of both. In these situations, “The problem is definable but no clear-cut solution is available” (Heifetz 1994, 74). The context in which a group operates and the composition of a team also influence whether a problem is technical, adaptive, or both (Heifetz 1994). What presents as a technical issue for one group or in a particular context may actually be adaptive for another group or in a different context. Table 9.1 describes types of situations and their problem classifications.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) identified four common adaptive challenge archetypes. These are by no means exhaustive but aid in identifying patterns associated with adaptive work. Note that these four archetypes often overlap, presenting a complex constellation of adaptive challenges.

A Gap between Espoused Values and Actual Behaviors

Adaptive work often means narrowing the gap between espoused and actualized values. Complicating this process is the fact that it requires collective learning while most organizations operate on individual performance and reward structures. Thus, addressing this archetype involves both adaptive learning associated with the gap issue itself and how organizations mobilize members to address the issue.

Competing Commitments

Working to address complex issues often requires negotiating between conflicting values. For example, educational systems increasingly find themselves under pressure to expand enrollments to meet budgetary needs, which may be perceived as competing with the ability to retain high-quality educational experiences.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) asserted that when competing commitments occur, “People in authority can resolve the situation perhaps only by making decisions that generate losses for some groups and gains for others” (p. 81). They argue that focusing on win-win solutions is ideal, but is often naive or unrealistic, frequently resulting in resolutions that fall far short of addressing the adaptive challenge. Ultimately, competing commitments necessitate determining what potential losses are perceived, how they differ for different groups, and how the group can engage in the learning needed to come to a decision about their commitments.

Speaking the Unspeakable

There are often two narratives occurring simultaneously in groups: the public discourse, typically shaped by organizational or interpersonal politics, and what individuals really think but do not share. When the former dictates group processes, adaptive challenges arise and are more difficult to navigate. The ability for individuals to share thoughts that may seem heretical is essential to adaptive work. Sometimes this archetype arises because authorities create contexts in which it is difficult or threatening to challenge the status quo because of power dynamics. Other times, it arises because members of a group simply do not want to publicly acknowledge a reality.

Work Avoidance

This archetype reflects the conscious or unconscious ways in which individuals and groups avoid having to engage in adaptive work. It includes diverting attention away from the real issue and/or displacing responsibility for resolving it. Diverting attention is typically a benign response involving oversimplification of the issue, distracting with more pressing concerns, using humor to change the focus, or denying the problem even exists. Displacing responsibility, on the other hand, may be more malicious and involves marginalizing those who voice the issue, defaulting blame to authorities alone, scapegoating, or ensuring any progress is derailed (e.g. death by committee, delegation to those lacking authority or competence to move the issue forward). When the archetype of work avoidance emerges, it is a cue that resistance to the adaptive challenge is high.

Holding Environments

The final feature of adaptive leadership is the need to create a holding environment. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) defined this as “a space formed by a network of relationships within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying

apart” (p. 102). Thus, the holding environment must be designed in a way that allows individuals to experience the disequilibrium and discomfort associated with adaptive learning but that regulates the amount of stress and pressure so it does not overwhelm or shut down the process. Trust and group cohesion are often the mitigating factors of how much stress a holding environment can tolerate. Technical tasks induce little disequilibrium. Conversely, “The exposure and orchestration of conflict—internal contradictions—within individuals and constituencies provide the leverage for mobilizing people to learn in new ways” (Heifetz 1994, 22).

Applying the Concept

Technical problems are handled through efficient and effective management given they can be resolved based on existing resources. Adaptive challenges, however, require a different approach. Heifetz and colleagues (Heifetz 1994; Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009; Heifetz and Linsky 2002) suggested adaptive leadership involves an iterative process of observing and interpreting group dynamics and then designing interventions that stimulate adaptive learning. This work has evolved over time, resulting in six strategic principles that are premised on the leader possessing either formal or informal authority.

Get On the Balcony

The process of “getting on the balcony” is a metaphor for purposefully stepping outside of a situation to obtain a greater perspective of what really is happening and more accurately diagnose the problem. The goal is *not* to become a detached observer but to fluidly shift between being immersed in the action of the group and stepping outside it for perspective. This includes examining oneself using critical perspectives.

Getting on the balcony involves carefully differentiating between technical and adaptive dimensions of challenges, taking the time to see how context and composition affect the emergence of each. This requires a complex understanding of the varying perspectives held by those involved. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) remind us that this goes beyond taking what people say at face value but interpreting the meaning behind what is shared.

Similarly, attending to the cues provided by authorities at all levels within a system is an important part of getting on the balcony. Their words and actions provide implicit indicators regarding how long and to what extent the disequilibrium necessary for adaptive learning will be tolerated. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) cautioned that “authority figures

sit at the nodes of a social system and are sensitive to any disturbances. They not only act as indicators of social stability, but will act to restore equilibrium if change efforts go too far” (p. 68). Realistically assessing, accurately interpreting, and strategically responding to cues from both constituents and multiple authorities within a system is imperative. This not only determines how to meet people where they are to initiate the intervention but also allows for modulation so that the level of disequilibrium can be recalibrated to stay engaged in the adaptive learning process.

Identify the Adaptive Challenge

Getting on the balcony provides the raw data from which to accurately identify adaptive challenges. Adaptive work may be driven by one of the four archetypes presented earlier or a unique issue that presents itself. Regardless, the goal is to determine the competing values or gap between espoused and actualized values that shape the challenge, along with the technical problems wrapped up in it.

Identifying the adaptive challenge also involves using observations and interpretations to craft a deep understanding of the types of loss that individuals may be negotiating, anticipating the types of resistance that might emerge, and situating the adaptive challenge in the broader system in which it is nested. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) argued that “the single most common source of leadership failure . . . is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems” (p. 14). This misdiagnosis contributes to the subsequent mistreatment and avoidance of necessary adaptive work. We end up retrofitting solutions to problems that are not fully understood.

Manage Disequilibrium in the Holding Environment

The central task of adaptive leadership is to manage the holding environment. This involves orchestrating conflict so that the level of disequilibrium rises. Without an increase in disequilibrium, the adaptive challenge may be misdiagnosed and mistreated as a technical issue, or individuals may fall into patterns of work avoidance.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) suggested asking tough questions related to values, increasing responsibility beyond comfort zones, and surfacing conflicts as viable ways to increase disequilibrium. At the same time, the amount of disequilibrium must be regulated so that tension does not become counterproductive and stress does not cause individuals or the holding environment to collapse. Techniques for decreasing disequilibrium include temporarily focusing on solvable technical problems bundled in the larger adaptive challenge;

providing clear structure, expectations, and guidelines for the process; and decreasing the depth and rate at which norms and assumptions are challenged.

Focus Attention on Ripening Issues

Determining the ripeness of an issue involves assessing the level of urgency that exists within a system to address the adaptive challenge. Much of this data comes from getting on the balcony and continuously revisiting the degree of disequilibrium in the holding environment. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) suggested that “an issue is ripe when [...] it has become generalized across the system. If only a subgroup or faction cares passionately, but most other groups in the system have other priorities on their mind, then the issue is not yet ripe” (p. 126). Now, this does *not* mean that one has to wait for an adaptive challenge to ripen to address it. If that were the case, we would rarely address the most pressing issues facing our organizations and society because urgency often develops within factions that are most affected and may not be recognized or understood by those from the broader group. The level and pervasiveness of urgency serves as an indicator of how to strategically approach the issue.

Proactively “ripening” an issue begins with understanding how the adaptive challenge is situated. Are other more compelling issues taking center stage? Is the timing appropriate to raise the issue, or is an external impetus such as a crisis needed to elevate its perceived importance? To what extent are individuals in the broader environment directly affected by the issue?

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) remind us that “if people do not feel the pinch of reality, they are unlikely to feel the need to change” (p. 149). Finding ways to attach impact associated with the adaptive challenge to multiple factions or the broader system helps to address this. Additionally, the amount of learning that needs to occur around the issue and the degree of attention afforded to it by authorities are both proportional to the readiness of the group to tackle it. This makes directing attention to the adaptive challenge essential, along with decreasing the degree to which the broader group engages in work avoidance behaviors such as denial or scapegoating.

Give the Work Back

Focusing attention on adaptive challenges and raising the degree of disequilibrium run counter to the normative expectations people hold for authorities. The expectation is for authorities to provide direction and structure alleviating disequilibrium, not increasing it or redirecting responsibility back to the group. This, however, is exactly what adaptive

leadership requires. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) suggested that “one of the most difficult aspects of orchestrating conflict is resisting the temptation to take the conflictual elements of the adaptive work off of other peoples’ shoulders and putting it on your own” (p. 162) and that the pressure to do so is often both internal and external.

Giving work back to a group at a level they can handle typically involves two considerations. First, authorities need to be conscientious in determining what to do when asked to resolve technical concerns. Are they truly technical or really unacknowledged adaptive conflicts? When the latter is the case, the work of resolving the challenge needs to be given back to the constituents to address. “Whenever a senior authority in an organization resolves a hot issue, that person’s position becomes the story. Winners and losers are created simply by virtue of authority, and no learning takes place” (Heifetz and Linsky 2002, 125). This can actually increase tension between factions, making the adaptive challenge more difficult to address given that “issues have to be internalized, owned, and ultimately resolved by the relevant parties to achieve enduring progress” (Heifetz and Linsky 2002, 127).

The second consideration asserts authorities need to clearly understand who to give the responsibility back to and how much responsibility can be handled without overwhelming the learning process. The “who” could be the organization or system as a whole. More frequently, though, it involves a particular faction or getting multiple factions to collectively engage in adaptive work.

Protect Voices without Authority

Because of the social exchange contract that defines authority, those who possess it have limited degrees of freedom in which they can act. This creates boundaries around how far they can push, the amount of disequilibrium they can orchestrate, and the extent to which they can explicitly name values conflicts without exacerbating tension between factions. Here is where those who do not hold authority have more leeway. However, they also engage in this work with greater risk. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) remind us that “in many organizations, dissenters get marginalized, silenced, or even fired, which deprives the organization of their valuable, if unpopular, service” (p. 145).

Thus, a final consideration of adaptive leadership is how those with authority can shield those without it from unfair retribution when they surface adaptive challenges. The most effective technique for doing this involves sharing social capital. Constituents take cues from authorities about how to interpret and react when dissent occurs making one’s response crucial. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) affirmed that “it is vital to

demonstrate openness to seemingly subversive or revolutionary ideas” (p. 145). Consider the ways in which authority can do more than just acknowledge these voices but validate the importance of what is shared, the value of engaging in this type of risk taking, and create space to explore the ideas more deeply.

A note should be made about translating adaptive leadership to practice. Many of its considerations are premised on an individual possessing authority. However, Heifetz (1994, 2010) shared his concern that the clear *absence* of leadership among many of those *with* authority makes it all the more crucial that *all* people engage in the adaptive work necessary to transform our groups, organizations, and society. He is also realistic that there is greater vulnerability for those without authority and that while the above strategic considerations still apply, the way in which they are enacted must be modulated. Greater attention needs to be paid to power dynamics in their implementation as well as ensuring that the focus is not just on altering the perspectives of those with authority but peers as well.

How Research Evolves the Concept

Despite adaptive leadership’s integration across a wide array of fields and its presence in the literature for 30 years, almost no research exists on the concept. A number of scholars have integrated adaptive leadership into tangential work, examining how leadership is learned and approaches to individual and organizational change (Daloiz Parks 2005; Kegan and Lahey 2009). Even more scholars have extended the adaptive framework conceptually or offered details regarding its application in various fields, organizations, and issues (Kuluski, Reid, and Baker 2021; Sunderman, Headrick, and McCain 2021). However, there is virtually no empirical research on adaptive leadership in academic journals. This positions it as a powerful conceptual framework for leadership, but one that remains empirically untested.

What about adaptive leadership has prevented researchers from infusing it into their research? Is it simply too challenging to measure? I can’t help but wonder if the theory calls into question too many of the dominant assumptions about how leadership plays out in organizational and group environments to be attractive to researchers.

Wrap-Up

Adaptive leadership pushes leadership thinking and practice in ways that have not yet been fully realized. It troubles authority, engages in dialectical thinking around management and leadership, and centers learning as key. It does not use the language of critical perspectives,

TABLE 9.2 Strengths and weaknesses of adaptive leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explicitly infuses consideration of power, along with dynamics of engaging in the approach with or without authority• Offers a clear definition of leadership and differentiation from management• Stresses the importance of learning, outlining key elements of how to create a holding environment that catalyzes leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No empirical work exists to validate the framework or provide insights into its application to practice• Requires individuals to engage deeply with values and tensions that may be difficult or painful to acknowledge• Does not address how disequilibrium may create differential levels of risk based on social location

but similar values are nonetheless present. It abandons emphases on specific leader characteristics or sets of functional behaviors to identify processes that contribute to the resolution of adaptive challenges. Table 9.2 offers additional strengths and weaknesses.

Making Connections

- To what extent does adaptive leadership adequately address how hegemony may actively work against learning that disrupts the status quo?
- What stands out as useful about adaptive leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP THEORY

Complexity leadership theory is one of several conceptualizations falling under the umbrella of complex systems leadership theory. These theories reflect a dramatic shift away from understanding leadership through the lens of individual actors or collectives governed by internal or external authorities and toward examining systems as a whole. This represents a novel approach to leadership both in the application of an emergent paradigm to frame its understanding—complexity science—and its movement away from control as a mechanism for coordinating productivity and outcome achievement. Complexity leadership is positioned as a requisite response to rapidly increasing globalization and technological innovations that demand approaches to leadership that are as complex as the organizational contexts in which it unfolds.

Overview

Complexity leadership theory is grounded in complexity science, which is an interdisciplinary body of literature encompassing diverse fields ranging from biology and computer science to philosophy and political science (Goldstein 2008). At its core, complexity science “is the study of dynamic behaviors of complexly interacting, interdependent, and adaptive agents under conditions of internal and external pressure” (Marion 2008, 3). Applied to leadership, complexity science acknowledges that we now live in a world driven by a knowledge-based economy versus an industrial economy (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). In other words, the commodity driving society is no longer production itself but the human and social capital derived from knowledge. This is a dramatic shift from the agricultural, labor-, and service-based economies that previously governed social and organizational life. Surviving and thriving in this new economy means that organizations must operate by the *law of requisite complexity*. In essence, “Organizations must increase their complexity to the level of the environment rather than trying to simplify and rationalize its structures” (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007, 301).

Scholars argue that prior approaches to the study of leadership simply do not meet the complex demands of a knowledge-based economy (Hazy and Uhl-Bien 2014; Uhl-Bien and Marion 2008, 2009). Thus, complexity theory defines leadership as “an *emergent, interactive dynamic*—a complex interplay from which a collective impetus for action and change emerges when heterogeneous agents interact in networks in ways that produce new patterns of behaviors or new modes of operating” (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007, p. 299; emphasis in original). These networks, referred to as complex adaptive systems (CAS), become the sites from which leadership emerges.

Okay, here’s where explaining complexity leadership theory gets dicey. In its initial conceptualization, its authors identified both key premises and orienting assumptions but aren’t exactly clear about how they differ (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). Let’s treat the key premises as the architecture on which the theory is built that provides a reference point for comparison with other theories. These include the following:

Social Construction

Leadership emerges from CAS, and both of these concepts are born from social construction that shapes and is shaped by context. This reflects an important deviation from how leadership is presented in most theories. Think of it this way: in prior theories, context was just a factor to be taken into consideration before enacting

leadership—something that altered the effectiveness of a particular attribute, behavior, or process. In complexity theory, context isn't something to be managed but the source that defines the very nature of leadership.

Process Orientation

The concepts of leader and leadership must be clearly differentiated. Leaders are individual agents within the CAS who may or may not possess authority, whereas leadership is the process of dynamic interaction that emerges from the CAS.

More than Management

Leadership also needs to be differentiated from managerial roles or bureaucratic authority. Both coexist in CAS, but leadership is a dynamic interaction occurring throughout the organization whereas bureaucratic authority is an administrative function focused on coordinating and structuring work.

Adaptive Challenges

The knowledge economy generates far more adaptive challenges than technical problems in comparison with previous economies. This redirects the focus of leadership onto cultivating the ability to engage in adaptive work in highly hierarchical and bureaucratic environments. And yes . . . you should be saying, "Hey, that sounds like Heifetz!" Complexity leadership theory situates adaptive work as key while shifting away from an individual leader focus to a systems perspective.

Four orienting assumptions serve as operating principles that undergird and guide the specifics of complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). These include:

The Bureaucratic Superstructure

Complexity leadership theory "is necessarily enmeshed within a bureaucratic superstructure of planning, organizing, and missions" (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007, 302) from which CAS cannot be separated. The superstructure sets the environment in which agents operate.

Hierarchical Structuring

Complexity leadership theory assumes that the superstructure is characterized by multiple hierarchical levels that differentially influence the ways in which leadership is manifest.

CAS as the Unit of Analysis

CAS serve as the focal point for leadership emergence and reflect open systems that readily interact with and are influenced by external forces.

Leadership as Interaction

The concept of leadership emerges only as a result of interactions.

Applying the Concept

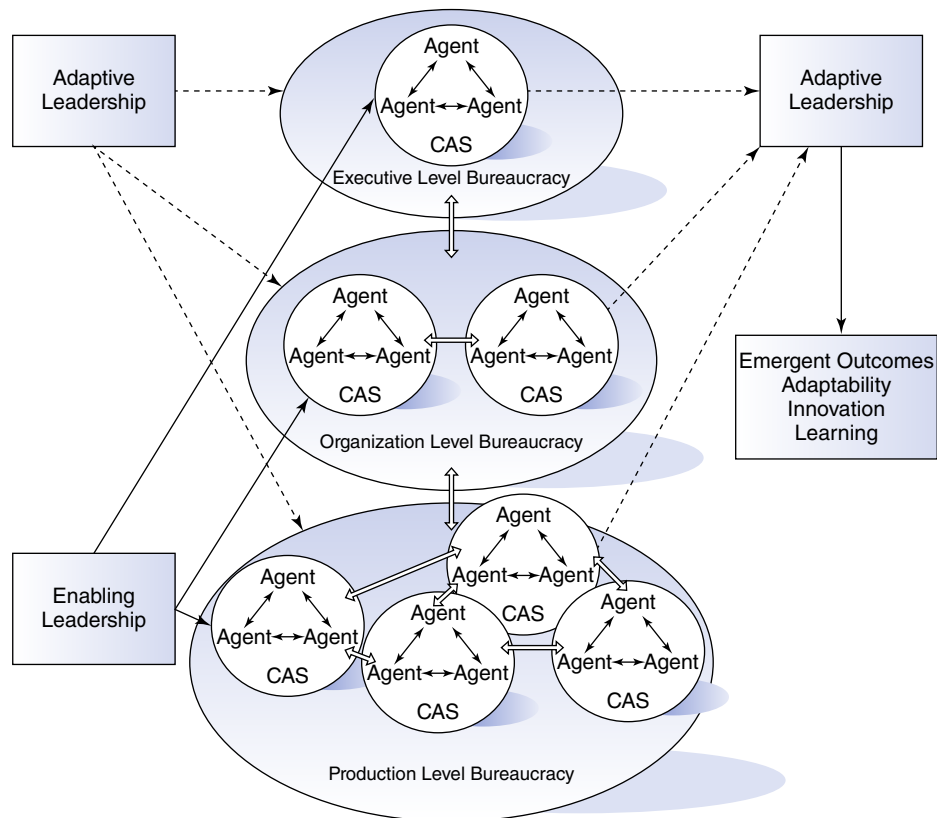
Given complexity leadership theory is so—well—complex, it may be easiest to further explain it through examining ways in which it can be applied to practice. Figure 9.1 provides a visual representation, and I would encourage you to continue referring to this graphic as we go deeper into the theory.

Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS)

Since CAS are the primary unit of analysis in complexity leadership, let's start by examining them more closely. CAS consist of *agents*—individuals who bond and adapt through interactions with one another in the pursuit of cooperative goals. Over time these relationships compound into clusters that form a CAS, and these clusters become the context through which agent behaviors can be understood. CAS develop “naturally in social systems” and are malleable in structure, reflecting “neural-like networks of interacting, interdependent agents who are bonded in a cooperative dynamic by common goal, outlook, [and] need” (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007, 299).

As a reminder, CAS are nested in the bureaucratic superstructure of the organization as depicted in Figure 9.1. Thus, they operate at the executive, organizational, and production levels, each potentially having multiple, overlapping CAS that interact with and influence one another (Hazy and Uhl-Bien 2014). CAS serve as the focal point for adaptive learning in complexity leadership theory.

Understanding the difference between CAS and teams or other traditional perspectives involves differentiating between the terms complicated and complex (Uhl-Bien and Marion 2008, 2009). Most leadership theories acknowledge the complicated environments in which leadership unfolds. When a system is *complicated* it can have a multitude of interconnected moving parts, but the whole can be explained by describing its parts. When something is *complex*, on the other hand, it can only be described by the interaction among its parts and with the environments in which it is nested. The parts do not describe the whole.

FIGURE 9.1 Model of complexity leadership theory.

Source: *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership*, edited by Rumsey (2013b), Fig. 11.3 from Chp. 11 “Organizational Leadership and Complexity Mechanisms,” by Russ Marion, p. 196. By permission of Oxford University Press, USA.

Think of it this way: a KitchenAid Ultra Stand Electric Mixer is complicated. (Note: This is not a product placement although I have to admit I’ve always wanted one . . . preferably a blue one. Why are they so expensive?) A KitchenAid has multiple integrated parts (e.g. the bowl, the stand, the mixers), some of which have their own internal parts (e.g. gears, wiring, switches). It also interacts with the environment, drawing on electricity to make each of the parts act in coordination. That’s complicated, but ultimately you can describe each of the components and how they make up the whole.

Conversely, a loaf of bread that the mixer might be used to make is complex. Sure, you could rattle off the individual ingredients that are required to bake a loaf of bread (e.g. water, yeast, flour), but once those component parts are added together they interact to create something entirely different. For example, the water can no longer be extracted from the flour. These component parts also interact and are transformed by the environment. Heat from an oven causes the dough to change properties and turn into bread, and the nature of the environment (i.e. context) defines how this occurs. For example, different elevations define how quickly the yeast rises and thus the nature of the interactions that contribute to creating the bread.

Three Types of Leadership

Complexity leadership theory identifies three types of leadership operating at all levels of the superstructure by agents as well as CAS:

- *Administrative leadership* is exactly what it sounds like—the traditional behavioral approach to leadership that focuses on coordination of tasks and alignment of actions with organizational goals. Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007) explained that this bureaucratic approach “is a top-down function based on authority and position, thus it [possesses] the power to make decisions for the organization” (p. 306), although authority can reside in an individual or group at any level of the superstructure, not just the executive level.
- *Adaptive leadership* draws on the same principles outlined by Heifetz (1994). It “refers to adaptive, creative, and learning actions that emerge from the interactions of CAS as they strive to adjust to tension” (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007, 305). Because adaptive leadership is a function of the interaction dynamics among agents, between CAS, and with environments, it does not operate based on authority.
- *Enabling leadership* involves cultivating the conditions that allow CAS to engage in adaptive leadership wherever and whenever necessary. This occurs by “(1) fostering interaction, (2) fostering interdependency, and (3) injecting adaptive tension to help motivate and coordinate the interactive dynamic” (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007, 309). Enabling leadership also serves as a tool of translation, working to integrate the results of adaptive leadership throughout the bureaucratic superstructure and in how administrative leadership is manifest.

Because the three leadership types occur simultaneously within the superstructure, they are inextricably intertwined (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). This dynamic is referred to as *entanglement* and acknowledges the tension that can exist between administrative and adaptive leadership as well as the importance of the two functioning together effectively (Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009). Enabling leadership mitigates dominance by either administrative leadership, which can result in an overly controlling authoritarian system, or adaptive leadership, which may contribute to rebellious dissent without cause or an overemphasis on independent actions that fail to consider the whole. Enabling leadership also serves as the arbiter of what best serves the organization given a particular set of conditions and environmental concerns. It regulates the system by fluctuating the amount of focus on administrative versus adaptive leadership. Essentially, it serves as a system of checks and balances.

Emergence

A final major concept of complexity leadership theory is emergence. According to Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007), “creativity and learning occur when *emergence* forms a previously unknown solution to a problem or creates a new, unanticipated outcome (i.e. adaptive change)” (p. 303, emphasis added). Thus, emergence is the product of adaptive leadership and aids the organization in satisfying the law of requisite complexity by meeting or exceeding the level of complexity of the environment to survive and thrive.

How Research Evolves the Concept

A nascent body of research exists in the broader umbrella of complex systems leadership theory, although empirical research specifically on complexity leadership theory is sparse (Rosenhead et al. 2019). This is in part because the ability to study the concept requires a different set of research design approaches than are typically used in the dominant leadership literature (Hazy and Uhl-Bien 2014, 2015; Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009). Of the limited research that does exist on complexity leadership theory there is a focus on understanding the process of emergence and the mechanisms that stimulate it. However, too few empirical studies exist to identify themes. Much of the scholarship on complexity leadership theory is still conceptual and attempts to evolve its core ideas as well as link it to the broader literature on complex systems leadership theory (Rosenhead et al. 2019).

TABLE 9.3 Strengths and weaknesses of complexity leadership theory

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shifts attention from individuals to the dynamics that shape leadership emergence• Takes into consideration the bureaucratic and hierarchical systems that shape leadership• Acknowledges that change emerges not from control and alignment but by engaging with dynamic tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remains in the theory-building stage, with limited empirical research and the need to adopt new paradigms in research to capture the complexity of its ideas• Still barter and trades in commodification but now with knowledge as the commodity• Application can be difficult as points of intervention are unclear

Wrap-Up

Complexity leadership theory is just that—complex. This is both its asset and detriment because it makes it difficult to know precisely where, when, or how to intervene in the concept as presented. It is also important to note that this summary offers just a snapshot into the key concepts informing complexity leadership theory with even greater nuance and refinement of concepts present in the original source materials. Table 9.3 identifies other strengths and weaknesses.

Making Connections

- How does complexity leadership theory challenge dominant stocks of knowledge about leaders, leadership, and organizational functioning?
- What stands out as useful about complexity leadership? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

DECONSTRUCTING COMPLEXITY-DRIVEN THEORIES

In prior chapters, we deconstructed theories as a cluster. This time, let’s approach deconstruction for each theory separately. Because adaptive leadership is a component part of complexity leadership theory, this will add supplemental value to each individual theory as well as the cluster as a whole.

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership's novelty lies in the degree to which it addresses power and authority and centers the construction and maintenance of holding environments as essential to adaptive learning. Let's explore a deconstruction that relies on *commodification*, which involves the dehumanization of workers and reduction of their agency. Let me use a brief story to illuminate this.

A number of years ago I was asked to facilitate a two-day workshop on adaptive leadership and its connection to personal and organizational change for colleagues. The goal was to create a holding environment in which individuals would identify adaptive challenges in their own lives that if addressed would significantly contribute to organizational goals. They would then work in teams to unpack the underlying conflicts and competing values that contributed to the challenges as well as commit to collective actions to support personal and organizational improvement.

I facilitated similar sessions previously and found the process to be deeply personal and compelling with results contributing to significant individual and organizational learning. After I explained the process and goals of the session, however, a colleague refused to participate. Now, this was someone with whom I had a strong relationship and high level of mutual respect both personally and professionally. I also knew him to be extremely committed to the organization and its goals.

After some probing, it became clear that his resistance did not conform to the types discussed in adaptive leadership. It was not about loss, deflection of responsibility, or work avoidance. He simply did not feel that he should be forced by his employer to engage in deep personal exploration as a vehicle for organizational improvement. In his mind, this went above and beyond his contractual obligations in a way that made him incredibly uncomfortable. He wasn't being difficult. He wasn't trying to sabotage efforts. He didn't lack motivation or a sense of urgency around organizational improvement. He simply felt that this type of learning was intrusive.

At the time, the interaction confused me. Now, I can't help but wonder if my colleague was connecting with the concept of commodification. If you overlay concepts from leader-member exchange theory, this was a person who routinely went above and beyond his base job description in a variety of areas. For all intents and purposes, he would be considered a member of the organizational in-group with high-quality relationships with positional leaders. However, the boundary he drew was a reassertion of his agency and delineation that the organization had no right to compel him to disclose personally.

Adaptive leadership asks a great deal of individuals in terms of addressing personal values and loss. What are the boundaries around this? To what extent does an organization have a right to ask a worker to engage in potentially difficult emotional work simply to increase effectiveness?

Adaptive leadership also positions resistance as typically a function of an individual's need to learn or lack of motivational drive. Both reflect deficit perspectives problematizing the resistor. What if the organization is commodifying the individual, demanding a level of disclosure that goes beyond fair expectations? Should a person be compelled to disclose deeply in service of organizational goals? What is the line between a forced or manipulated holding environment and an individual's agency to decline such learning? What types of disequilibrium are acceptable and to whom? Are there greater risks involved for some individuals in these situations based on social location than for others? Who absorbs the emotional toll associated with negotiating the potentially deep tensions that emerge from adaptive learning, and is this fair to ask of an employee? All of these questions are left unanswered by adaptive leadership, suggesting an implicit understanding that the institution may know what's best for the individual and has a right to engage workers in adaptive learning, and/or that organizational learning should trump individual agency.

Complexity Leadership Theory

Let's approach the deconstruction of complexity leadership theory using *flow of power* to examine power dynamics more closely. Complexity leadership addresses power by explaining how CAS are nested in a larger bureaucratic superstructure. It also provides warnings about the ways in which an overemphasis on administrative leadership can lead to authoritarianism. These are keen insights that are typically omitted from leadership theories.

Complexity leadership theory does not, however, examine the flow of power from more pragmatic vantage points that might provide clues as to how to enact the theory. Let's use three questions to explore how attention to the flow of power in the theory overlooks a number of key considerations.

What if authorities resist enabling leadership and emergence?

Authorities exist at all levels of the bureaucratic superstructure but at a greater density at the executive level. Complexity theory is predicated on enabling leadership and emergence, serving as a vehicle for satisfying the law of requisite complexity.

However, does this position formal authorities as arbiters of emergence? The theory suggests that the use of administrative leadership and in particular authority should be judicious to allow for emergence, but what checks are placed on authoritative power? Couldn't a single authority block the integration of adaptive learning into the system? The foundations of complexity leadership theory offer little insight into how administrative leadership becomes open to and supports rather than resists emergence, situating a great deal of power in the hands of authoritative leaders.

How does one intervene in complexity leadership theory?

Complexity theory does an excellent job of asserting the primacy of CAS as a source for constructing organizational meaning and the emergence of leadership. However, what are the impetuses for engaging in leadership from the perspective of complexity leadership theory? How does the theory help with intervening within a system? I might go a step further here and question whether the theory itself is meant to be a tool for enactment or simply a descriptive lens useful for research. The lack of attention to power and authority beyond cautionary notes makes it difficult to discern exactly where and how agents and CAS should begin in their work to acknowledge the complexity of systems-based leadership.

If social location is the function of identity, power, and knowledge, where is the attention to identity?

The continuous co-construction of meaning is at the heart of complexity leadership theory. It acknowledges how the system is both responsive to and a product of the context and nested within larger environmental and social spheres. This acknowledgment of socially constructed thoughts and norms is powerful and aligns well with the intersections of knowledge and power that define social location.

However, the theory also fails to mention the simultaneous influence of identity in shaping power, knowledge, and ultimately one's social location. This removes consideration of how individuals within the system are affected by the norms that it propagates. For example, is attention to individual agents' voices within CAS socially stratified? Is there a disproportionate representation of some identity groups over others across administrative, enabling, and adaptive leadership functions, and if so, how does this shape the ways in which emergence and entanglement play out? What stocks of knowledge or ideologies do agents within CAS bring with them from the broader social system that then replicate inequality?

RECONSTRUCTING COMPLEXITY-DRIVEN THEORIES

The deconstruction of each of the complexity-driven theories highlights a similar gap: a risk of defaulting to normative assumptions or norms dictated by leaders with authoritative power. Reconstructing by *attending to power* allows us to examine the theories with the understanding that identity, knowledge, and power are all inextricably intertwined and must be treated as such. Thus, it becomes important to unpack the ways in which shared understandings are constructed across each of the theories. Each of the theories would benefit from a more explicit infusion of the concept of sense-making.

Sense-making reflects the ongoing cognitive and relational activity of interpreting environments, events, and experiences and assigning meaning to them (Weick 1995). It is a vehicle for engaging with uncertainty and ambiguity that is essential for negotiating contexts “where the need to create and maintain coherent understandings that sustain relationships and enable collective action is especially important” (Maitlis 2005, 21). The absence of conscious and purposeful sense-making all too often results in defaulting to dominant norms.

The organizational and leadership literature sometimes differentiates between sense-making and sense-giving as unique processes, with the latter focused more on unidirectional, leader-centric meaning-making that is then provided to others within a group. Foldy, Goldman, and Ospina (2008) argued that sense-making should be viewed as a collective enterprise that stimulates cognitive shifts, which reflect “a change in how an organizational audience views or understands an important element of the organization’s work” (p. 516). Cognitive shifts reflect a movement beyond dichotomous thinking, which may reinforce false binaries. For example, increasing the sense-making capacity of a group may allow for movement away from staunch differentiations between leaders and followers that contribute to power differentials, particularly around who constructs knowledge. When we purposefully link critical perspectives to sense-making, it not only acknowledges the importance of co-constructing understanding but does so in a way that integrates critical self-reflection, social perspective-taking, and consideration of social location.

So what might it look like to infuse critical sense-making into complexity-driven theories, and how might this redress concerns that emerged in the deconstruction? A rich literature exists on sense-making, but at its heart it “involves coming up with plausible understandings and meanings; testing them with others and via action; and then refining our understandings or abandoning them in favor of new ones that better explain a shifting reality” (Ancona 2012, 5).

How Would Sense-Making Enhance Adaptive Leadership?

Much of adaptive leadership is focused on the individual and typically an individual who possesses authority. The theory cautions against the leader becoming a detached observer, yet offers recommendations that largely reflect a process that is created and implemented *to* a group rather than *with* the group. The leader gets on the balcony to assess the situation. The leader manages the disequilibrium. The leader ripens the issue for the group. This largely reflects sense-giving rather than sense-making processes and poses a risk for commodification of everyone involved.

What if a critical sense-making lens were applied that allowed for a collective process of assessing the situation, differentiating between technical and adaptive problems, and cultivating the holding environment necessary for adaptive learning? Infusing a critical sense-making lens would minimally encourage “the leader” to invite others into the meaning-making process and disruption of assumptions that undergird the theory. Additionally, if meaning is being co-constructed, leaders with authority may be more likely to differentiate healthy worker boundaries from worker resistance. They are also more likely to identify and address differential levels of risk associated with social location when asking individuals to engage in adaptive learning.

How Would Sense-Making Enhance Complexity Leadership Theory?

Can we just be honest? Complexity leadership theory is incredibly innovative and impressive in its comprehensive treatment of how leadership emerges in systems. It's also so insanely complex that it borders on unusable. I would argue that developing even a basic understanding of complexity leadership theory requires a form of sense-making that contributes to several cognitive shifts.

First, to engage with complexity leadership theory requires the ability to see the full system and not just individuals or groups within it. This requires an ongoing process of sense-making that facilitates agents' meaning-making to acknowledge the importance of interdependence. If individuals or CAS are unable to see their embeddedness in a system and how that socially constructs norms, it is difficult to engage in adaptive learning or translate that learning into the bureaucratic superstructure.

Second, the very idea of CAS involves moving beyond complicated to acknowledge the complexity of the system. This requires sense-making that aids agents in seeing how the whole is much more than just a sum of its parts. Finally, critical sense-making is necessary

to engage agents, CAS, and the full system in meaning-making and action that addresses the ways in which the system may reproduce forms of social stratification and inequity. It is particularly important that critical sense-making explores how power across administrative, enabling, and adaptive leadership processes flows and identifies ways to adopt shared understandings that advance rather than constrain democratic and inclusive practices.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Complexity-driven theories play a unique role in the overarching body of leadership theories. They represent novel approaches that attempt to advance how leadership is understood, experienced, and enacted. This does not mean, however, that they always achieve these goals. As we consider the quote that opened this chapter, perhaps the most compelling contribution is their ability to avoid reductive, simple solutions that narrow the complexity of our thinking. Perhaps they push us to understand that it's not just solutions that solve issues through leadership processes but the scaling of those solutions into organizational culture, structure, relationships, and performance. This requires approaches that differentiate between technical and adaptive challenges while also acknowledging that the organizations and holding environments through which these are explored are infinite in their complexity.

Georgianna Torres Reyes serves as the associate vice president for mission and values at DePaul University in Chicago. She is also a consultant and facilitator of dialogue on issues of diversity, social justice, advocacy, education, and leadership. This includes serving as the lead moderator for the Aspen Young Leaders Fellowship.

It is important to know that the link between my socioeconomic status and race are so tightly bound that it's difficult to share a story of significance that doesn't integrate both. I grew up in La Villita, Chicago, where I could live, eat, breath, celebrate, partner, and die in Spanish with folks who were a lot like me. My mother was different than the other *mamás* in the neighborhood, though. She passed on a belief that the world was bigger than the one we knew day-to-day. She tried to expose us to things outside ourselves, our culture, our faith, and this influenced me enormously. It shaped who I've become and my social agency in the universe.

I am a self-professed nerd who was also one of the most popular kids in school, even with my funky hair, buckteeth, thick Coke bottle glasses, worn shoes, and

no-name brand jeans. There were five of us in my class who did well through grammar school and were sent on high school visits. The local schools all seemed dingy, dirty, and depressing. Everything communicated a lack of interest in students. Eventually, we visited a very, very, Irish, Catholic, all-girls high school on the southwest side of Chicago. When I walked inside, it was like hearing angels sing. It was bright, clean, and there were positive messages on the walls about being a woman and a leader and all that you could achieve. Teachers came out and smiled and spoke to us and asked our interests. I was in love.

Now, my friends and I understood that our families didn't have the financial means to pay the tuition at this school, but we sat them down and pitched our case. We told them if they found a way to get us there, we would get jobs at the school, straight A's, and make them proud. If we didn't hold up our end of the bargain, they could pull us out. It was where we wanted to go and we needed to go as a group. We asked if they would support us in doing that with full awareness of the sacrifices that would have to be made. And they did.

Traveling to our new school was a long journey away from the neighborhood we all knew. We walked several blocks to a bus, took another bus to a separate neighborhood, and then transferred from there. Upon arrival, it became clear that the other students and their families weren't happy to see us, and they made sure we felt it. Most of the girls had working-class parents who were either firefighters or police officers on the beats that we had to take to get to school. My friends and I got stopped every single day and were forced to empty our entire bags. They "suspected" we might have weapons or drugs. As the school year progressed, a group of White girls started harassing us on the bus home. Over time it worsened, becoming more and more physical and increasingly racist. We'd get shoved, elbowed, tripped, and our clothes ripped. Through all of this we had to restrain ourselves. This was a school that had very strict policies about fighting of any kind; students would be expelled.

Soon came news that these girls were planning to jump us. We gathered together before school and decided that regardless of the rules, it had to stop—we were going to fight back. At lunch, we approached the group of African American girls who had established themselves at the school several years prior to our arrival. They stayed out of the way of the White girls, but weren't certain how to treat us. We could relate in some ways, but they were not about to go backward in a community where they weren't the majority. At the same time, they wouldn't leave us sweating by ourselves. So we forged a quiet alliance. One of the seniors from their group told us they were going to help, but on their terms. They weren't willing to fight and risk expulsion, but they would cause a distraction so we could defend ourselves and decrease the risk of getting caught.

So our five little selves got on the bus that day, and it was not even two minutes after we pulled out of the parking lot that someone punched my friend in the face.

(continued)

Now, I weighed 70 pounds and stood at just over five feet tall. My friends were small, too. One of them just sat on the floor and cried the whole time. She couldn't fight. I recall being hung upside down from my ankles, kicking and screaming. We were beaten down but had finally taken a stand.

We regrouped at my house, and when my mother got home and saw us, she asked what the hell had happened. She started to call the school to report that we were being harassed, but I begged her not to. "They will throw us out of that school! You cannot identify us! Please, let us handle it." "Well you can't handle it like this," she said. "This is not handling it. It's escalating. You girls clean yourselves up; sew up your skirts, wash your clothes, and get yourselves together. If you're going to stay at that school, you need a plan. What you're doing now is not working. Figure it out and you can explain it to me over dinner. I'll let you know whether I accept it."

As we cleaned up and worked through the problem, we knew we couldn't keep getting the hell beat out of us every day or living with the fear of it. We couldn't be under constant threat. Fighting also wasn't an option, but a plan slowly emerged. First, we decided we would be at school the next day bruised, battered, or otherwise. Second, we decided we would say nothing. This was ours to handle. Third, and most importantly, we took out our school activities lists and identified all of the most important organizations and decided we would become presidents or vice presidents of every one of them.

When we got to school the next day people knew what happened. Our mere presence was an act of resistance that did not go unnoticed. Our courage and resilience caught the attention of everyone. My computer teacher called me aside and said, "Okay, you can stand there and pretend you don't know what I'm talking about, but you can't fight like this. You're better than that. What're you going to do?" I told her we had a plan, and she asked how she could help. I shared that when voting came up for this or that, to please tell other students we were worth supporting. We approached other teachers and staff, too, and they wrote recommendation letters to serve on committees and were advocates for us in the staff room, sharing how bright and talented we were with colleagues. They knew what was happening and spent their social capital in subtle ways to change others' hearts and minds. We also rallied other students. I was good at moving between groups and worked hard to build relationships, whether it was the African American girls around race, other poor kids who understood that we didn't come from money either, or kids who simply felt like the odd ones out. We found our gifts, and we used them. We used them to build a coalition. We were making noise without throwing punches. Over the next year each of us took five groups, and I'll be damned if we didn't get on every one of the executive boards.

All these years later, our pictures are all over the walls of that school. Something about my mother, something about these girls from my neighborhood, something about not failing and really working against messages that you can't, you won't . . . They all made me stronger. I've learned how to change a system from within instead of breaking it down. I had to . . . not just for me, but for all those who would come after.



Reflection Questions

1. Theories in this chapter situate learning as essential for negotiating adaptive challenges. How does Georgianna's narrative bring to life what it means to differentiate technical versus adaptive problems and create a holding environment for learning? Where have you had to do this in your own life?
2. Georgianna's story demonstrates how adopting a systems-level approach allowed her and her friends to infiltrate and alter a complex organization. What lessons can you glean from her story about how and where to intervene when engaging in leadership at a systems level?
3. Georgianna powerfully shares how identity and social location shaped her understanding of, experiences with, and enactment of leadership in a system where dominant norms positioned ethics and morality as anything but just. How does this connect with your own experiences, and what lessons might you distill from this that could be used to enhance vanguard theories?

Justice-Driven Theories

“As an organizer I start from where the world is, as it is, not as I would like it to be. That we accept the world as it is does not in any sense weaken our desire to change it into what we believe it should be—it is necessary to begin where the world is.”

—SAUL ALINSKY (1971)

Our final theoretical chapter focuses on theories offering explicit attention to justice. These theories provide insights into people and process but have an undeniable focus on the purpose of leadership. They also illustrate what the complex treatment of justice can and should look like in a theory if, as scholars suggest (Beatty and Guthrie 2021; Carroll, Ford, and Taylor 2022; Chunoo and Guthrie 2023; Dugan and Henderson 2021; Ospina and Foldy 2009; Owen 2020; Preskill and Brookfield 2009; Western 2019), it is a fundamental component of contemporary understandings.

THE SOCIAL CHANGE MODEL OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The social change model of leadership development was designed specifically for use with college students and is among the most applied theories in the higher education context, often informing the architecture of leadership training, education, and development programs. Since its inception, the theory expanded its audience both in terms of disciplinary contexts (e.g. engineering, K–12 education, military, nonprofit) and geographical reach. Indeed, the social change model, although often omitted from mainstream leadership texts, continues to grow in usage. Coupled with a sound body of empirical research supporting

its suppositions, it offers important insights about the *process* of leadership as well as leadership *development*.

Overview

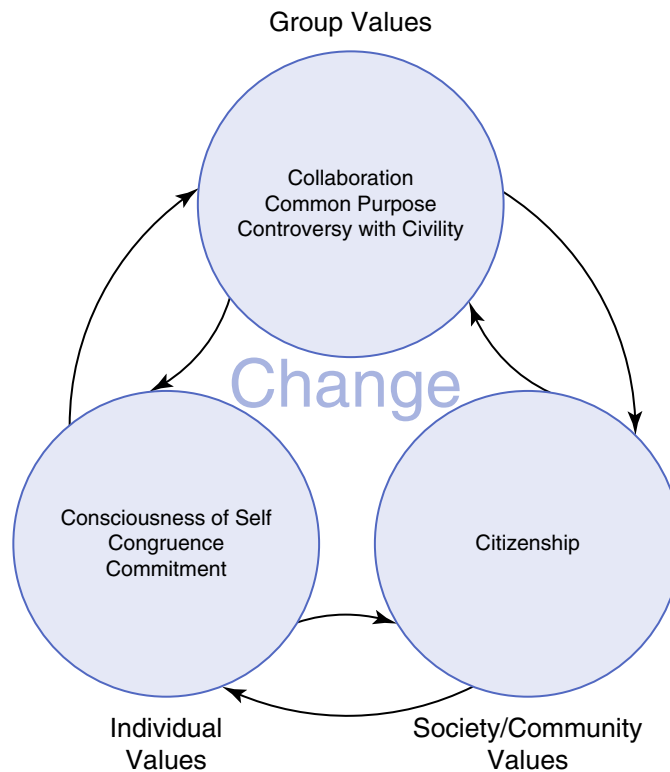
The social change model was initially created as a conceptual framework to explain socially responsible leadership, an extension of emerging theories emphasizing reciprocal relationships, shared responsibility, and mutual development (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI] 1996; Komives et al. 2016). This approach defined leadership as “a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive social change” (Komives et al. 2016, xii). Its goal was to provide a vehicle to more effectively teach and learn about leadership as well as advance an understanding intrinsically tied to social justice.

The social change model functions as both a process and a developmental model (HERI 1996; Komives et al. 2016). The *process* approach illustrates dimensions of leadership enactment essential when emphasizing social change. As a *developmental* model, it offers details about the core values that inform how individuals and collectives can build capacity to engage in socially responsible leadership.

Several key assumptions undergird the social change model. This includes that leadership is inclusive in both the process of how it unfolds and the scope of who can be involved. It situates leadership as a process rather than just a position and is inherently concerned with and promotes “equity, social justice, self-knowledge, personal empowerment, collaboration, citizenship, and change” (HERI 1996, 18).

Additionally, the social change model asserts that leadership capacity is learnable and a function of the meaning-making that occurs through critical life experiences and purposeful training and development. A final premise states that the social change model is a working framework meant to be adapted, altered, and refined based on the context, individuals, and collectives using it. This last premise is fairly unique as it invites users to be more than just consumers but agentic critical learners who shape the form and application of the social change model.

Figure 10.1 provides a visual representation of the social change model, which consists of three domains under which seven key values operate. The individual domain encompasses the values of consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment focusing on the personal assets and developmental work people bring to the leadership process. The group domain includes collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility reflecting capacities associated with healthy and effective group functioning. The value

FIGURE 10.1 The social change model

Source: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles (1996). *A Social Change Model of Leadership Development Guidebook*. © The Regents of The University of California.

of citizenship is nested in the societal domain and addresses the conditions necessary to engage in positive social change. As evidenced by the arrows in Figure 10.1, the domains, along with the values embedded within them, interact dynamically to stimulate progress across the social ends toward which leadership is directed. In other words, social change and the overall capacity for socially responsible leadership provide purpose and meaning to the model, functioning as a “hub” around which all of the other values function.

Applying the Concept

Application of the social change model rests on enacting the seven key values when employed as a process model and building capacity across them when treated as a

developmental model. These values “do not represent a checklist or prescription of how to be a successful leader. One does not finish learning about one value and then start learning about the next. Rather, development in each value is ongoing” (Cilente 2016, 52). So, too, is the enactment of each value in leadership processes.

Each value in the social change model serves as a reference point for capacity-building consisting of knowing (i.e. knowledge acquisition), being (i.e. attitude and belief formation), and doing (i.e. skills and ability development) dimensions. This moves the framing of leadership beyond simple attention to traits, attributes, or behaviors alone. Adapted from a variety of scholars’ works (Astin 1996; Cilente 2016; HERI 1996; Wagner 2007), Table 10.1 captures the definitional parameters for each of the values, along with examples of capacity-building associated with their development. Note that the social change model is among the few theories in which scholars explicitly infuse critical perspectives. This is evident in how capacity-building related to the values is explained (Dugan et al. 2013; Dugan, Turman, and Torrez 2015).

Thus, when the social change model is employed as a process model, the seven values become important individual and collective leadership enactments. They provide a road map for how to enhance individual experiences, group functioning, and prosocial goal achievement. That having been said, the social change model is not prescriptive and as such only points to important dimensions of leadership rather than offering rigid recommendations.

Where the social change model does offer some degree of specificity is in its positioning of social progress as the key focus and outcome of leadership. Note that the authors are clear that this does not mean that the model is only applicable in education or other social sector contexts (HERI 1996; Komives et al. 2016). Rather, social change is viewed more broadly as necessary for addressing the complex, entrenched, and interrelated social, political, and scientific issues facing society. Wagner (2009) explained that “working for social change is focusing one’s attention on the *root causes* of problems rather than the *surface-level* issues that they create” (p. 11, emphasis in original) and that there are possibilities for this work across a diversity of contexts.

How Research Evolves the Concept

For the sake of transparency, I need to share that the validation and study of the social change model is a central component of my own academic career. Much of this work is conducted through the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), an international

TABLE 10.1 Social change model values, definitions, and capacity-building dimensions

Values	Knowledge Acquisition	Attitude and Belief Formation	Skill and Ability Development
Individual domain			
Consciousness of self Self-awareness of values, beliefs, and emotions and how they motivate individuals and groups to action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How values, beliefs, and emotions operate Knowledge of social location and its influences on one's positionality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarification of one's values and beliefs Development of self-efficacy beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to engage in critical self-reflection Healthy emotional self-regulatory skills
Congruence Alignment between convictions (i.e. values, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions) and actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How context influences values and beliefs Ethics and ethical decision making in shaping alignment of values and actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiation between espoused and actual values Appreciation of concepts such as transparency and authenticity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to communicate values effectively Skills in assessing actions and adjusting to align with values
Commitment Motivational drivers (e.g. passion, energy, investment, persistence) of individual and collective efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How motivation functions Knowledge of multiple modes of contributing to individual and collective efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief that individual actions can have effects on broader groups Willingness to invest resources in areas of passion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resilience in addressing complex problems Ability to follow through on responsibilities
Group domain			
Collaboration Synergistic group efforts that capitalize on individual and collective diversity and assets and is predicated on trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team and group dynamics Intercultural awareness and multicultural competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willingness to invest in others and build trust Commitment to building equitable and inclusive environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to engage effectively about and across differences Active listening skills
Common purpose Effort characterized by shared aims and values as well as shared responsibility in the pursuit of them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of and how to develop group cohesion Knowledge about strategic planning, vision, and mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value for finding points of connection Desire to work in groups and teams to accomplish shared goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to cocreate and communicate a shared vision Interpersonal skills associated with team development

(Continued)

TABLE 10.1 (Continued)

Values	Knowledge Acquisition	Attitude and Belief Formation	Skill and Ability Development
Controversy with civility Recognition of the inevitability of differing viewpoints and the advantages of engaging with them in healthy ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict mediation and management principles • Knowledge of power dynamics in social relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that healthy conflict can lead to positive outcomes • Value for empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to engage in social perspective-taking • Critical reasoning skills
Societal domain			
Citizenship Acknowledges the responsible connection between individuals and communities and need for interdependent action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of how social systems function • Understanding of community assets and multiple forms of capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to make a difference in the communities to which one belongs • Sense of interdependence with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy skills • Ability to identify and articulate connections between communities and issues
The “hub”			
Social change Emphasizes movement beyond the status quo and toward the creation of a better world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation between leadership and management • Knowledge regarding the complexity of change processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort with ambiguity, transition, and loss associated with change • Belief that systems can be changed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills in identifying both long- and short-term goals • Coping skills necessary to persist in the face of resistance

Adapted from Astin (1996); Cilente (2016); HERI (1996); Wagner (2007).

research program examining influences of the higher education context on leadership development. MSL data have been collected from more than 600,000 participants in secondary education, higher education, and nonprofit contexts across more than 20 countries with respondents ranging from 12 to 82 years old. Empirical evidence from the MSL and other researchers' work provide insights into (1) measurement and validation, (2) influences on leadership outcomes, and (3) considerations based on social location.

Measurement and Validation

Because the social change model is typically omitted from most summaries of leadership theory, I'm going to provide a bit more information regarding its measurement and validation for context. Tyree's (1998) Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS) is the

primary tool for measuring the social change model. It offered confirmation that the model was more than just a conceptual framework for understanding leadership and could indeed be measured. Since its inception, the SRLS underwent significant restructuring to enhance its psychometric properties (i.e. the degree to which it accurately and robustly measures what it says it does), with the instrument serving as both a tool for empirical research and a training resource for personal assessment (Dugan 2015).

Extensive research provides evidence of the strong reliability and validity of the SRLS and its ability to operationalize the social change model. This includes evidence that the SRLS can be measured at each of its three levels: individual values, leadership domains, and an omnibus measure of overall capacity for socially responsible leadership (Dugan 2015; Dugan et al. 2014). Not only does this offer compelling evidence in support of the model, but it is also a testament to the elegance of the original design in which socially responsible leadership emerges as a function of values nested in domains.

Research also offers insights into the distinctiveness of the social change model. Studies support that it aligns with core conceptualizations of leadership in other theories (i.e. transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, the leadership challenge) yet is unique enough to stand on its own (Dugan 2015; Dugan et al. 2011; Rosch, Joseph, and Newman 2011). Research also demonstrated that each value functions as a leadership capacity and is distinct from the other leadership development domains covered in Chapter 1: motivation, efficacy, and enactment (Dugan et al. 2013; Dugan and Komives 2010; Rosch, Collier, and Thompson 2015).

Validation studies did, however, point to a number of important changes to bring the original conceptual model into alignment with empirical findings. First, research could not establish the values of collaboration and common purpose as mutually exclusive, and this seemed to be less an issue of measurement and more of conceptualization (Dugan 2015). Indeed, the original work seemingly conflated the concepts, positioning them as more than just influencing one another but fundamentally entangled. This led to a recommendation to remove common purpose from the model given it is subsumed in the value of collaboration.

Second, the social change model originally suggested that each of the domains and values were mutually influential. This may be the case in the process approach of enacting it, but from a developmental perspective research consistently suggests a more entangled process that is not linear but still mutually influencing (Dugan et al. 2013, 2014). Values from the individual domain typically influence the development of those from the group domain, which in turn influence the societal domain. For example, as individuals increase

their knowledge, attitudes, and skills associated with consciousness of self, their capacities for conflict with civility have the potential to rise. Conversely, engaging in conflict with civility is significantly more difficult without minimal capacities associated with the values from the individual domain. This is not to suggest that capacities in later domains cannot be developed without those from earlier ones. It does, however, suggest a compounding effect.

Influences on Leadership Outcomes

Research focusing on the developmental approach to the social change model confirms that the capacities that constitute it are indeed learnable, with evidence of gains over time and as a result of a variety of interventions (Buschlen and Dvorak 2011; Dugan et al. 2011; Dugan and Komives 2010; Hevel, Martin, and Pascarella 2014; Martin 2013; Rosch and Caza 2012). Research also demonstrates that socially responsible leadership is related to gains in other leadership-related outcomes, including resilience and educational persistence (Dugan et al. 2013; Wolniak, Mayhew, and Engberg 2012), social perspective-taking (Dugan et al. 2014; Johnson, Dugan, and Soria 2017), and enhanced worldview/spiritual growth (Gehrke 2008; Stonecipher 2012).

Considerations Based on Social Location

Several studies examine differences in capacities across values of the social change model based on social location (Dugan 2006; Dugan and Komives 2007; Dugan, Komives, and Segar 2008; Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet 2012; Dugan and Yurman 2011; Liu, Hu, and Pascarella 2022). Although these studies identified some significant differences in capacities for socially responsible leadership, they did not take into account varying developmental and environmental influences that shape capacity. In most cases, any differences in capacity for socially responsible leadership wash out once additional factors (e.g. leadership efficacy, identity salience) are accounted for in the research (Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet 2012; Dugan and Komives 2010). Once again, this points to individuals and collectives as having equivalent potential to learn capacities, but also to the power of social and organizational contexts in stratifying who has access to leadership development opportunities and how they are expected to enact leadership based on social location.

Collectively, the empirical research on the social change model both validates its central propositions and offers insights on necessary adjustments to its design. This is consistent with the core premise of the model—that it should be altered and adapted to enhance

TABLE 10.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the social change model

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers clear definitions for leadership along with component parts of the model • Benefits from substantial empirical research establishing validity • Offers both process and developmental approaches, infusing considerations of social justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research has not examined direct effects of enacting the model on leadership outcomes • Alterations to the model have yet to be made based on findings from research • Although grounded in justice, the model does not explicitly name a value tied to it

its utility. A notable omission in the research also emerges, though, as the model's actual impact on leadership as a process remains unknown. To what extent does it enhance satisfaction with the leadership process? Does its enactment increase the likelihood of goal accomplishment?

Wrap-Up

Authors of the social change model have long asserted its relevancy beyond the leadership development of college students, with applicability for all those interested in the work of social justice (HERI 1996). Strangely, despite extensive empirical research and the successful application of the model in a variety of contexts and cultures, the dominant leadership literature has yet to acknowledge its value. Most texts on leadership theory fail to include the social change model even though there is substantially more empirical support for it than for many of the theories traditionally included. This is an unfortunate oversight given the alignment of the model with contemporary leadership perspectives. Table 10.2 offers additional strengths and weaknesses.

Making Connections

- The social change model centers social justice and advances prosocial goals, yet none of the values in the model address critical perspectives. How might this inadvertently promote hegemony versus social change?
- What stands out as useful about the social change model? What do you think needs to be addressed in the deconstruction and reconstruction processes?

STRATEGIC SOCIAL CHANGE LEADERSHIP

We close our exploration of leadership theories with Ospina et al.'s (2012) framework for strategic social change, which provides one of the most complex and comprehensive leadership approaches. This framework synthesizes and integrates content from across a wide array of other theories while also introducing new considerations. This demonstrates the conceptual and pragmatic value of an eclectic approach to using theory. The framework also emphasizes the importance of explicitly incorporating considerations of justice and equity in leadership theory and offers insights in how to do so—something omitted from most other theories.

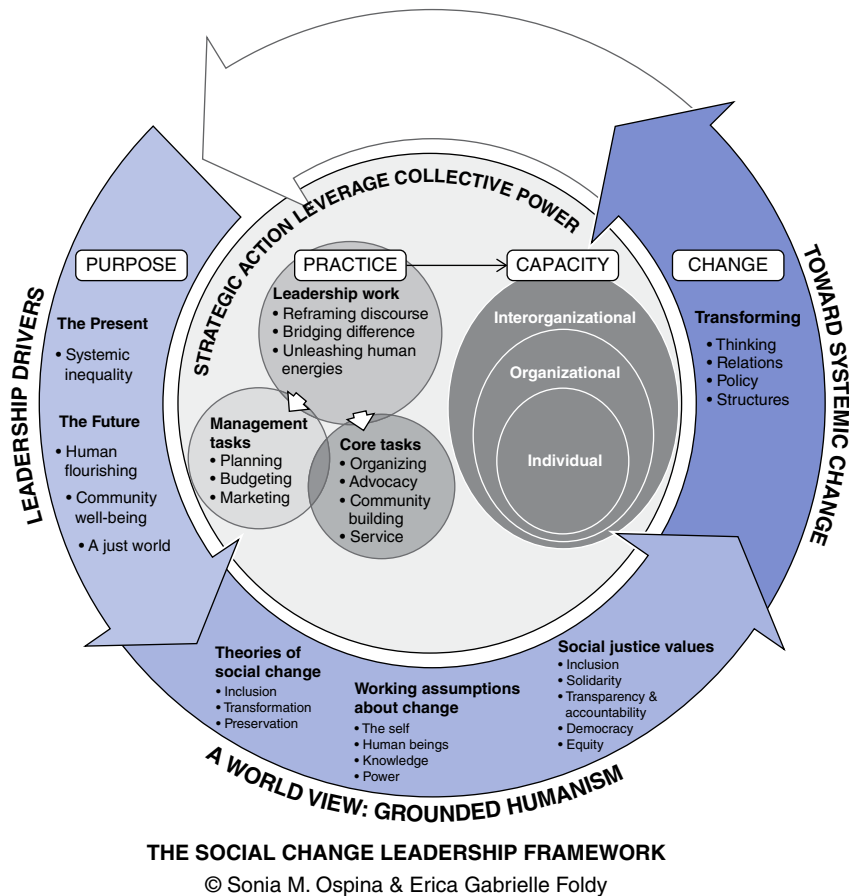
Originating from the field of public administration, strategic social change leadership developed through extensive research with social change organizations, which reflect local, nonprofit groups engaging in grassroots efforts that “go beyond simply serving the disadvantaged to the harnessing of their power so that they can participate in actions that alter their constituents’ material circumstances” (Ospina et al. 2012, 255). This definition differentiates these organizations from large-scale or international nongovernmental organizations or advocacy groups (Ospina and Foldy 2009).

Ospina et al. (2012) recognize that social change organizations may seem like a limited data source from which to develop a theory but that their goal of influencing society mirrors those of many types of organizations (e.g. businesses grounded in social entrepreneurship, faith-based and educational institutions, governmental agencies). They also argued that social change organizations afford unique learning opportunities about “how to strive for ambitious goals within turbulent environments with few material resources” (p. 257) that are pertinent to just about any context.

I’ll add here that to challenge the relative value of a theory based on a narrow data source (i.e. social change organizations) is nothing short of hypocritical given almost every theory initially emerges from the study of a delimited context, discipline, field, or population. To what extent would we question the transferability of a theory just because it emerged from business or psychology? We likely would not. That this might occur with strategic social change leadership says a great deal about the perceived value and/or threat that comes from integrating leadership and social justice.

Overview

The strategic social change leadership framework is represented in Figure 10.2. At first glance, it may appear overwhelming, but don’t fret as it’s actually quite intuitive. To orient

FIGURE 10.2 Strategic social change leadership.

Source: Adapted from Ospina and Foldy (2020).

yourself to the model, let's look at the outermost ring of arrows moving counterclockwise. This outer ring forms the basis of the framework's focus on purpose—which is toward positive, systemic change.

Leadership Drivers

Leadership drivers provide a starting point and *purpose* for the framework that acknowledges the structural reality of systemic inequality in our present while simultaneously envisioning an alternative future characterized by human flourishing,

community well-being, and a just world. Motivations for leadership are driven by a recognition of and desire “to redress identified systemic inequities, that is, injustice that is based not on idiosyncratic or arbitrary considerations, but is built into the implicit rules that govern our society” (Ospina et al. 2012, 269). Hopefully, you see the connection here to stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location. Acknowledging systemic inequality also means recognizing the complexity with which it operates and a willingness to dig into the examination of root causes rather than solely treating symptoms. This understanding of the present and future grounds and drives strategic action to leverage collective power. It is predicated on a sense of critical hope and requires deep sense-making.

Sense-making reflects the ongoing cognitive and relational activity of interpreting environments, events, and experiences and assigning meaning to them (Weick 1995). It is a vehicle for engaging with uncertainty and ambiguity that is essential for negotiating contexts “where the need to create and maintain coherent understandings that sustain relationships and enable collective action is especially important” (Maitlis 2005, 21). The absence of conscious and purposeful sense-making all too often results in defaulting to dominant norms.

As explained in the previous chapter, Foldy, Goldman, and Ospina (2008) argued that sense-making should be viewed as a collective enterprise that stimulates cognitive shifts, which reflect “a change in how an organizational audience views or understands an important element of the organization’s work” (p. 516). Cognitive shifts reflect a movement beyond dichotomous thinking, which may reinforce false binaries. For example, increasing the sense-making capacity of a group may allow for movement away from staunch differentiations between leaders and followers that contribute to power differentials, particularly around who constructs knowledge. It not only acknowledges the importance of cocreating understanding but doing so in the context of our past, present, and future.

A Worldview: Grounded Humanism

Grounded humanism represents the second outer ring shaping the worldviews that inform the work of systemic change. This worldview influences the sense-making for individuals and collectives as they engage in leadership. Grounded humanism includes three elements: theories of social change, working assumptions about change, and social justice values. The “grounded” aspect of humanism is derived from a realistic appraisal of how society functions and recognition of the role power plays in leadership and social change.

Ospina et al. (2012) suggested that “humanism reflects an appreciation of the humanity of all individuals and a faith in their potential to contribute to the work required to transform society” (p. 269). Note that there is an assertion of the agency of *all* those involved in leadership that is typically absent from theory. This positions leadership and social action as collective, emphasizing an approach that is *leadership-centric* versus *leader-centric*.

Theories of social change: The creation of a shared theory of social change is also a driver of leadership, connecting “immediate action with the ultimate goal of eliminating a systemic inequity” (Ospina et al. 2012, 270). Depending on the sphere of influence in which a group is operating and the target of social change, theories of social change will reflect different goals.

- *Theories of inclusion* attempt to alter rather than replace the system in an effort to address social inequity. The goal here is to ensure that benefits associated with the system are distributed equally to all those within it. This approach may address ideology and hegemony but often focuses more on how social location contributes to social stratification. Examples might include social change goals such as increasing access to legal aid for the poor or securing equal protections under employment law for members of the transgender community.
- *Theories of transformation* operate on the largest scale, attempting to “replac[e] the current system with another one. This view sees ‘the system’ as the source of the identified problem” (Ospina et al. 2012, 270). This approach tackles ideology head on. Examples include social change goals that position health care or higher education as a fundamental right that should be provided by government versus paid for by citizens given the theory of social change involves wanting to replace the “system” to alter the “problem.”
- *Theories of preservation* intervene to stop direct harm typically being caused as the result of the interaction of ideology/hegemony and social location. Theories of preservation are typically coupled with either a theory of inclusion or transformation. They represent the need for an immediate stopgap measure. Social change goals that fall into this category might include fighting against governmental and environmental policies that threaten Indigenous cultures or policing and judicial practices that endanger the lives of people of color in the United States.

Working assumptions about change: Theories of social change interact with working assumptions about the nature of change. This requires personal knowledge about one’s own positionality and the ability to engage in continuous critical reflection

and perspective-taking. It also necessitates an understanding about human beings and how individuals and collectives respond to change processes. Finally, it requires knowledge about change processes and how they unfold along with deep understandings and considerations about the role of power in change.

Social justice values: Social justice values and their clear and shared understanding also serve as a driver of leadership. Ospina et al. (2012) defined social justice as “a call for fairness and equality of opportunity for all human beings. It encompasses particular values of inclusion, social solidarity, transparency and accountability, democracy, and equity” (p. 271). Note that social justice is not conceptual or vague but clearly defined and explicitly stated. This provides a core set of values that undergird and direct social change efforts.

Toward systemic change: The final element of the outer ring in Figure 10.2 focuses on the process of transformation. Ospina et al. (2012) stress that leadership drivers and working assumptions about change must influence strategies for “amassing power in some form and leveraging it to influence external actors with the capacity to support transformation” (Ospina et al. 2012, 271). Therefore, the impact of change efforts are *not* described as internal organizational achievements or productivity but the leveraging of power to address the theories of social change driving action (Ospina et al. 2012). They also are *not* characterized solely by the complete eradication of major social inequities (e.g. poverty, racism, or global food scarcity), which reflect long-term outcomes. Rather, the framework positions impact as representing meaningful changes to thinking, relationships, policies, and structures.

Notice that the last arrow in the outer ring is largely empty, conveying that the process of strategic social change is cyclical with impact and outcomes contributing to adapted or new leadership drivers, understandings of systemic inequality, and future visions of justice. Together, all of these inform the purpose of leadership and type of change desired. How this happens functionally is explored in the next section.

Applying the Concept

Let’s continue to explore Figure 10.2 focusing on the interior of the circle reflecting the *practice* of leadership and necessary *capacities* for strategic action to leverage collective power. Together these foster the ability to engage in impact-driven strategic action focused

on building and leveraging power. The term *leveraging power* is important here as it reflects the functional use of power “to attain tangible and enduring benefits for communities” (Ospina et al. 2012, 277).

Note that the degree of attention afforded to each of the elements of the framework should vary depending on the context, organizational dynamics, and theory of social change (Ospina et al. 2012). However, Ospina et al. (2012) argued that “context is not a separate variable to be taken into account or to control for, and it is not the background environment within which leaders relate to followers, enact their behaviors, and make decisions” (p. 284). Rather, context is situated in a similar way as in complexity theory as the source from which leadership emerges.

Practice: Leadership Work

Ospina et al. (2012) argued that leadership *practices* happen in the interdependent and relational spaces between core activities. Leadership practices are the sources from which leadership emerges. In other words, as practices occur, a shared understanding of leadership is cocreated and enacted in service of the social change goals.

Reframing discourse: Reframing discourse necessitates the use of adaptive learning as articulated by Heifetz (1994). It engages groups in the work of negotiating seemingly competing values as well as addressing gaps between espoused and actual values in service of advancing theories of social change (i.e., inclusion, transformation, preservation). The reframing process involves “understanding dominant frames and their permeability, and crafting new repertoires, language, and narratives, and living them through social action. It requires using frames that are recognizable, so that they resonate with people, while rejecting dimensions of them that reinforce the status quo and dehumanize experience” (Ospina et al. 2012, 272).

Building on the tenets of grounded humanism and leadership drivers, reframing is both internally and externally directed. It includes actions such as building a sense of interest convergence as well as personal and collective connections to issues; disrupting structures, language, symbols or perceptions that contribute to differentials in power and agency; and reclaiming the relational processes of organizations (e.g. meeting formats, decision making, teamwork) to increase equity and inclusion.

Bridging differences: Bridging differences involves purposefully constructing a context that fosters the integration of individuals from a diverse array of social locations to advance the theory of social change (i.e. inclusion, transformation, preservation). We typically think of this as occurring between internal members of a group, but it also should occur inter-organizationally as a means to foster powerful partnerships. Two considerations are essential for creating this type of environment. First, bridging differences involves more than just bringing people or organizations together but cultivating a greater sense of interdependence that can be leveraged in service of collective action. Second, bridging differences also draws on adaptive learning as well as dialectical thinking as it attempts to create community between individuals and organizations likely with differing worldviews. Ospina et al. (2012) stressed the importance of “building connections without suppressing difference or ignoring its value, as well as cultivating difference that does not turn into disunity. A key leadership goal is not to reify a community as monolithic, but to find ways to draw unity from diversity” (p. 274).

Unleashing human energies: Ospina et al. (2012) framed unleashing human energies as cultivating “conditions for transformational learning, which allow every member of the group to reclaim their full humanity and, in the process, recognize their inherent power to direct their lives” (p. 274). Thus, this practice is about recognizing, building, and leveraging agency. Drawing on social location’s base premise that knowledge, power, and identity are inextricably intertwined, this allows for an alternative conceptualization of power that situates it not as scarce but as a community resource. What contributes to this? Drawing on Freire (2000) concepts, this work is about liberatory learning. It can occur through formal knowledge-building opportunities, storytelling that legitimizes lived experiences, and “dialogic interaction that enables people to reflect on the structural causes of their situation, their roles in both the current and envisioned societies, and the solutions that will transform society” (Ospina et al. 2012, 275).

Practice: Management Tasks

Management tasks are effects of social and organizational coordination that contribute to efficiency and effectiveness of work (Ospina et al. 2012). These include

a wide array of activities including but not limited to strategic planning, budgeting, and marketing. Think of these as the traditional workstreams associated with project and organizational management.

Practice: Core Tasks

Given its unique grounding in social justice, strategic social change leadership incorporates several unique *core tasks* that serve as tools for advancing the vision of change: organizing, advocacy, community building, and direct service provision. Table 10.3 provides definitions for each of these.

Capacities: Interorganizational, Organizational, and Individual

Creating collective capacity is an intermediate outcome derived from a foundation in grounded humanism and emerging from the combination of practices. All of these interact dynamically to “leverage power” through social action. This is an important distinction in the model. The interaction leads to leveraging or using power whereas creating collective capacity involves developing power. Ospina et al. (2012) referred to *collective capacity* as “power in repose; it is capability waiting to happen . . . [it’s] also an outcome in itself: Achieving individual, organizational and interorganizational capacity—even without gaining concrete social changes—builds confidence, strengthens commitment, and cultivates hope” (p. 277). Let’s walk through each of these dimensions of capacity building.

TABLE 10.3 Core tasks for leadership practice

Core task	Definition
Organizing	Recruiting, educating, and mobilizing a group directly affected by a particular social inequity in service of a vision of justice
Public policy advocacy	Involvement in legislative processes to alter policies that negatively affect a constituency
Community building	Developing the collective efficacy and social capital to act on behalf of a constituency
Direct service provision	Satisfying both immediate and long-term needs of constituents through the provision of necessary resources and opportunities

Adapted from Ospina et al. (2012).

- *Individual capacity* is defined differently than the definition used in this book given the foundation of grounded humanism. It is a more multifaceted concept inclusive of an individual's ability to situate self-worth in the context of but not dictated by structures of social inequity. Development of individual capacity is catalyzed by the recognition that "leadership is not something external to them and that anyone is capable of being a leader" (Ospina et al. 2012, 277). This results in gains in leadership efficacy and a sense of agency.
- *Organizational capacity* reflects increasing potential to use a diverse range of organizational resources to influence the context in which social action occurs. Recognizing this potential contributes to gains in collective efficacy.
- *Interorganizational capacity* is similar to organizational capacity but "is realized in connections with like-minded and 'unlikely' allies" (Ospina et al. 2012, 277).

How Research Evolves the Concept

The framework of strategic social change leadership was created through a seven-year, multimethod empirical research project examining nonprofit, social change organizations. In creating the framework, the goal was not "to produce a testable causal model with propositions about antecedents or outcomes of leadership" (Ospina et al. 2012, 257). Rather, the goal was to theorize about the relational spaces from which leadership emerges in social change efforts. Thus, the framework is not meant to be universal but a call to conversation about leadership and social justice.

Wrap-Up

Strategic social change leadership offers a perspective that challenges dominant assumptions on multiple levels ranging from its deep infusion of principles of social justice to its movement away from a prescriptive, leader-centric emphasis on behaviors. This increases the complexity of the model, but its grounding in core activities and leadership practices point to sites of tangible cocreation of social action. The framework's approach to social change also echoes the quote that opened the chapter from Alinsky calling on those interested in social action to develop a realistic rather than utopian perspective regarding the state of the world. Table 10.4 identifies further strengths and weaknesses associated with strategic social change leadership.

TABLE 10.4 Strengths and weaknesses of strategic social change leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit and clear articulation of values and core principles, including definitional clarity for concepts such as social justice • Escapes the dominant and narrow focus of leadership as leader-driven behaviors • Recognizes the multiple types of leadership outcomes that are necessary for social change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite being created through research, was not designed for causal testing • Foundation in grounded humanism may cause some to interpret the theory as incompatible outside nonprofit or social justice–driven contexts • Complexity of approach necessitates deep learning

DECONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING JUSTICE-DRIVEN THEORIES

In each of the preceding chapters I presented unique approaches to the deconstruction and reconstruction processes, offering a detailed application of a specific set of tools. These were not meant to be exhaustive examinations but to highlight possibilities of how theories could be interpreted and reconstituted in more equitable ways. Hopefully, it also highlighted the creativity that can be infused in the process as well as how our own positionality and ways of making meaning shape the deconstructions and reconstructions that emerge. This means that each of the treatments that you’ve been exposed to so far have my unique impression embedded in them.

So now it’s your turn again. Just like in Chapter 3 when we started this journey of building your capacity as a critical learner, I’m putting the onus and agency in your hands. Think about each of the previous chapters as a developmental exercise in building your efficacy and capacity to apply critical perspectives. Rather than deconstructing and reconstructing the social change model and strategic social change leadership for you, I want to see you enact your capacity and stretch your critical learning muscles.

Let’s see how your unique impression plays out with what you create. Consider drawing on the broader set of critical perspectives (e.g. stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, social location), the tools of deconstruction and reconstruction, or even create your own vehicles for the application of critical perspectives based on your lived experiences or the knowledge you already possessed before reading this book. Below you will find some reflection primers to get you started.

Making Connections: Deconstruction

- The emphasis on social justice is a clear asset of justice-driven theories. Does its framing as a worldview, however, make it an ideology in and of itself? Is there a danger of a social justice ideology becoming rigid and replicating the very types of dehumanization that the framework tries to avoid?
- Justice-driven theories often stress the importance of hope and social progress, but little attention is directed toward the ways in which critical hope is cultivated to ensure that there is not a differential valuing of the varying theories of social change and/or types of systemic change they advance. Despite a focus on immediate needs as well as long-term goals, does the framework adequately address the mechanisms for staying in process for the long haul in social change efforts?

Making Connections: Reconstruction

- To what extent might an individual or group's understanding of social justice reflect a developmental trajectory increasing in complexity over time? How might justice-driven theories address catalysts for this type of development along with ways in which this development is explicitly supported in the theories?
- An argument that the core principles and components of justice-driven theories may be too narrow for application outside nonprofit, educational, or social justice organizations is frustrating but perhaps something to realistically expect. How could the theories be altered to address this? Are there ways to shift implicit leadership prototypes and dominant assumptions that frame equity and productivity as incompatible end goals of leadership?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Let's close the chapter by revisiting why justice-driven theories are positioned as our final theoretical cluster. First, they build on and integrate principles and component parts from multiple theories. They have roots tied to transforming and transformational leadership and an emphasis on reciprocal relationships, the common good, moral uplift, and mutual development. They also draw on elements of group- and relationship-driven theories, including foci on leveraging collective capacities. Relational leadership, and in

particular constructionist perspectives on relationality, provide the glue from which leadership practices emerge via interdependence. Finally, aspects of adaptive leadership associated with disequilibrium, adaptive learning, and creating a holding environment are present along with complexity leadership's understanding of context. Ospina et al. (2012) suggested that "understanding leadership requires attention both to the parts—context, values, practices and activities—and the whole—how these parts interact to create something greater than their sum" (p. 286). This is indicative of both the dynamic interactions present in justice-driven theories as well as how we ought to construct our own informal leadership theories.

Second, the framework for strategic social change leadership is one of the only theories to go beyond a statement of the importance of social justice to offer a complex treatment of it. The framework provides a clearly articulated definition for social justice and a foundation in grounded humanism that offers detailed attention to the assumptions that this entails. It also weaves considerations associated with social justice into each aspect of the framework, so its importance is more than just a passing reference. This affords rich insights for scholars and practitioners alike delivering more fully on the promise that contemporary leadership should be predicated on the principles of equity, justice, and inclusion.

Justice-driven theories provide our final theoretical cluster for exploration given their demonstration of how all theories benefit from a consideration of the full-range of literature and meaningful attention toward issues of social justice. This highlights the need to connect to and draw from a wide array of theories rather than becoming overly reliant on a single perspective if we are to collectively address the complex social, political, and scientific issues that demand leadership.

Art Johnston has been an activist since the 1970s. He is a cofounder of Equality Illinois and co-owner of the iconic Chicago gay bar Sidetrack with his husband, José Peña. They have been together since 1973. Art and José are the subjects of the documentary *Art and Pep*, which tells the inspiring story of the long struggle for equality and their fight to love freely.

I should start by telling you that I have great difficulty in thinking of myself as a leader. To me, leadership has always implied some kind of elevated position—someone who is pronouncing down to people in a hierarchical way. Presidents of companies and elected officials—that's how I've always thought of leadership. I've never thought of myself in those terms, and to be honest I haven't wanted to either. I suspect distancing myself

(continued)

from the concept comes partly from being an outsider most of my life. My family is from a very small town in Pennsylvania in an area called The Pennsylvania Wilds, a name it acquired by the state in an attempt to make it sound more attractive. There was no industry and essentially no jobs. My parents met and married very young and had no wealth. I was actually born near Buffalo (where they had gone to find work) at home on the kitchen table because the doctor's hospital delivery fee was too expensive. Leadership wasn't really a part of my growing up. My parents just didn't raise me to think, "Art, you need to be a leader."

My joining a movement in the 1980s to support a human rights ordinance in Chicago was grounded in a desire to serve the community. At the time we never thought of Chicago as *our* city or ourselves as Chicagoans. As members of the LGBTQIA+ community we were outsiders, strangers in a strange land. I remember I was reading the gay newspaper one day and came across an article about the proposed ordinance. It was designed to protect against harassment and unjust treatment in housing, employment, and public accommodation. Although the topic held much interest to me, I purposefully stayed away from active involvement. My hesitancy was because the newspaper at that time was filled with articles about how we needed a new day in terms of activism and couldn't continue what was perceived as top-down leadership from those who owned bars. I read that and bought every bit of it. I didn't want to be one of those top-down people, so I stayed away. Besides . . . I didn't think I knew anything about organizing. I eventually got a call from a key leader in the movement about a rally they were trying to plan. He said, "Art, you know, I think this is something you ought to know about because you own one of the gay bars. There's a meeting coming up, and they're going to ask all of the bar owners to close for a day to help get people to the rally." So I went to the meeting and sat in the back and listened. As someone possibly perceived to have power in the community, I didn't want anyone to think I was going to try to take over or control the process. I knew there was a high risk for this, and it was the last thing I wanted. I was there to learn myself!

Toward the end of the meeting someone asked what I thought, so I offered a couple of things. First, I asked why there was an assumed connection between closing the bars and people going to the rally. Were the people who went to the bars even the same people who would attend the rally? Instead, I proposed that the bars stay open as assembly points, and that we could coordinate buses to bring groups to the rally and then back to the bars afterward. Hell, we might even convince people at the bars who wouldn't otherwise go to a rally to participate. Second, I saw an issue with asking bar owners—people who had been donors to the movement in the past—to close their doors. If this really was a new day in how we mobilized, did we want to piss off our only possible funders? These were potential partners with shared interests if we could get them to see it that way. People at the meeting loved the idea and charged me with organizing the bar owners and raising money for the buses.

At first, I was in shock. You know, contrary to what most people thought, the bar owners didn't all have breakfast together. I didn't even know most of them. And I've always been, and am still to this day, painfully shy. I didn't know how to pick up the phone and ask for something. But I did it. I had to. There have been many times since then where I just had to sit down and say to myself, "Dammit, you've got to do this. There's no way out." So I picked up the phone and began calling. And you know what? Some of the most unlikely people said, "Absolutely!" I did come across a couple of owners who said, "Honestly, I'm barely paying my rent." I threw in some money on their behalf and made sure their names went on the list. For me, it was more important to stand together to make this happen than to worry about who contributed what.

With everyone's support we ended up with enough money to rent Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) buses. I've got to tell you . . . just riding downtown in a CTA bus full of LGBTQIA+ people was momentous. These buses were an integral part of the city's fabric, and now they were being used to carry us outsiders to City Hall. For many, it was the first time in our lives that we didn't feel like an afterthought or perceived nuisance in the greater Chicago community. When the CTA buses surrounded Daley Plaza and out poured all these LGBTQIA+ folk—it was just magnetic and the symbolism was not lost on anyone.

The rally was a triumph! All the organizers were happy. The bar owners were happy. It felt as if the community was finally mobilizing. The vote on the ordinance in City Council actually occurred two days later and . . . we totally lost. We had heard over and over that the chances were slim, but the rally had gone so well and the mayor had reached out to us, which was the first time a mayor of Chicago had acknowledged the LGBTQIA+ community other than to send police to raid bars and arrest us. In our hearts we thought Mayor Washington was going to somehow get the votes for us. But he didn't. He told us later that the best lesson he could ever teach us was to never rely on him to do it for us. We had to do it for ourselves.

In the aftermath of losing, there were several years of organizing around how to secure the necessary votes. At one point we had a group suggest we rent a blimp to fly over Wrigley Field, the Chicago Cub's baseball stadium, with a message about LGBTQIA+ rights. They were convinced it would land us in the news and were probably right. But if the goal was securing votes, this was unlikely to help, and it took the political savvy of another organizer to point this out. The vast majority of people at Wrigley Field were suburbanites who didn't live in the city and couldn't put pressure on City Council members even if the message resonated. Recognizing this, and the importance of *smart* strategizing, helped us develop our mantra: How many votes will a particular effort produce? As cold and calculating as it sounds, our reality was that in order to get this ordinance passed—an ordinance that could help protect so many people—we needed 26 votes. All the rest was noise. It was that simple.

(continued)

As I reflect now, I realize I went into this whole experience with a high school civics view of government. I thought government was there to solve people's problems and if you showed elected officials an issue, then of course they'd fix it. I call this the justice argument, and it will maybe get you one vote on a good day because it's the right thing to do and because it's fair and decent and human. That's *not* how reality typically works, though, which was a shock to me—a shock to find out how and why aldermen vote for things. Our job was not changing their hearts and minds. Our job was to get 26 votes. Now, this is not to say that changing hearts and minds isn't part of the broader effort and ultimate goal. It absolutely is. But political change is often not about that. It's only about securing votes.

Let me be clear that staying focused on smart strategy does *not* mean you forget about the people involved in the process. It isn't one or the other. It's both. I think you begin by caring about the people you're working with. If you're working in a team trying to move something forward, the chance of accomplishing that goal is always better if people are invested and feel like they can bring their whole selves to it. This means working across differences in ways we are generally unprepared to do, addressing when and where people can't bring their whole selves, and owning when we screw up. This continues to be a real challenge in the LGBTQIA+ community, where we have a hard time acknowledging issues of racism and sexism as well as a bad habit of only including transgender folks when it's convenient. Also, mobilizing people usually involves trying to wake them up to painful realities about the world. Frankly, most people don't know they're second-class citizens unless somebody slaps them with it. Or if they do know, they still don't act because the reality can either feel so overwhelming that they get stuck or they don't see the possibility of change ever happening. Part of our job in getting this ordinance passed was to remind people that they were second-class citizens, but then give them a way out of that second-class status. It was to help people see how they were affected but not let them shut down because of it, or become hopeless, or run away from it . . . and that is a delicate balance.

I learned a powerful lesson, too, about how groups can be purposefully split from one another to keep things the way they are. With the human rights ordinance there were other communities involved. For example, the disability community was highly invested in changing outdated language in the law. After about the first year of this work, aldermen went to leaders in that community and said, "We're ready to pass it, but let's just drop that sexual orientation thing. If you're willing to do that, we can move forward tomorrow." The disability community refused. They stood their ground saying, "We all go through the doorway together." This gets emotional for me because these folks put their own rights on the line for us. That experience later informed my thinking when similar issues arose around the inclusion of transgender people in other proposed laws. I remember what it felt like to be the group that was going to be dropped out based on expediency and self-interest, so it just isn't an option to do the same to others.

It wasn't until 1988 that we finally got the ordinance passed in Chicago, 2002 when it was updated to include transgender individuals, and 2005 when it passed statewide. When people share the history of what we accomplished, I have to say that I get far more credit than I deserve. I see that word *leader* connected to me in stories and smile. It seems a lovely compliment, but my goal has never been to be a leader. I'm a co-owner of a gay bar in Chicago, and my work as a cofounder of Equality Illinois was simply grounded in a desire to serve the community. I can almost guarantee that I'm the last person anybody who knew me growing up would suggest would be involved in these ways today. And it's all because I went somewhere when something was going on and got involved. In fact, I wouldn't have been involved in this life-changing experience had it not been for somebody saying, "Ya know . . . you should go." At the end of the day, I just want to do good. I want to create a place where people can form communities and stand up for what they believe in. As clichéd as it sounds, I want to go to bed at night and feel like I did something to try to make the world a better place.



Reflection Questions

1. Art's story captures a powerful vision of social justice that undergirded individual and collective efforts to effectuate change. What strategies might you extract from his story about how to cultivate a theory of social change and leverage it to mobilize action? How might you apply these strategies in your own leadership efforts?
2. Bridging differences is among the most challenging aspects of engaging in strategic social change leadership. What lessons stand out for you from Art's narrative about the importance of this as well as ways to foster it? How might you envision engaging in the process of bridging differences in your own life?
3. Art's narrative offers multiple examples of how discourse had to be reframed to make progress on leadership goals. Where do you see this in his story? What about in your own life? How might you infuse these insights into leadership theory to increase the understanding of how to functionally engage in the process of reframing discourse?

Integration and the Path Forward

“[I am] a fool who believes that death is waste and love is sweet and that the earth turns and men change every day and that rivers run and that people wanna be better than they are and that the flowers smell good and that I hurt terribly today, and that hurt is desperation and desperation is energy and energy can move things.”

—LORRAINE HANSBERRY

The quote that opens this chapter is perhaps more revealing about me as an author than about leadership theory. As the book comes to a close, it might be easy to fall into cynicism about the state of leadership. There seems to exist an infinite number of perspectives and points of view, some so similar they are difficult to differentiate and others so blatantly oppositional it feels unfathomable that they coexist. Each theory is flawed, often in ways that contribute to more questions than answers regarding how to apply it to practice.

For me, though, this is where the energy lies. This is where we can move things. These are the spaces where our personal and collective agency emerges and where leadership can be harnessed for improving the various spheres of influence in which we find ourselves. Leadership theories represent imperfect grasps at insight about an imperfect phenomenon—an entirely human phenomenon that alternatively reflects all of the potential and all of the constraints of our shared struggles to connect, achieve, develop, create, and improve.

How do all of these theories fit together? They were never meant to do so. Leadership theory will inevitably continue to evolve, reflecting back to us an image of society with all its wonders as well as failings. The responsibility, then, lies in adopting the role of a critical learner. Knowing a theory or multiple theories is insufficient. The ability to adapt

and modify theory to mold it into a better reflection of the complexity that is our evolving society and that advances the principles of democracy and social justice seems much more important and useful.

I realize I've taken a bit of an abstract turn waxing philosophical about leadership theory, but stay with me for a little longer. In this closing chapter, we review five themes that emerge grounded in the architecture of leadership and the application of critical perspectives. These represent observations of theory writ large. This is followed by a return to the assertion from Chapter 1 that leadership theory and development are inextricably intertwined. An integrated model of how leadership is manifest grounded in critical perspectives is presented to aid in the ongoing process of critical learning. Finally, the chapter closes with a narrative that weaves the emergent themes—and indeed much of the content of the book—into a cohesive whole.

EMERGENT THEMES ACROSS LEADERSHIP THEORIES

At this point we've covered 10 chapters and 20 conceptualizations of leadership. Let's walk through a number of themes that emerge across leadership theories synthesizing the state of play. You'll note that these themes reflect an appeal for a more critically reflective turn in leadership studies that moves away from the cults of heroic romanticism, production, and prescriptive utility that all too frequently drive theory. Acknowledging, engaging with, and ultimately addressing these themes requires that scholars, practitioners, and indeed all of us begin to unpack our own complicity in establishing, contributing to, and perpetuating dominant narratives.

The Western Bias

Chapter 3 notes that there is little to no representation from outside the United States in most syntheses of leadership theory. This is hardly the first book to identify a "Western bias," although the term may be misleading given the dominant global narrative in leadership studies is US-centric. This narrative permeates the discourse on leadership, bringing with it the cultural norms, biases, and assumptions that characterize US culture. Scholars are quick to point out cultural variations in how leadership is experienced, understood, and enacted across societies and the importance of avoiding the projection of norms from one context onto another. Yet the dominance of Western bias in the representation of leadership theory is unquestionable.

The Western bias doesn't just have a negative impact for those outside Western cultures but constrains the understanding of leadership for everyone. The United States could be considered the birthplace of the cults of heroic romanticism, production, and prescriptive utility driven largely by the staunch individualism that characterizes US culture. And damn, the pull toward individualism is strong. At times it seems to border on rapid in our current cultural context. Theories struggle to move beyond leader-centricity, achievement orientations, and individual traits, despite increasing calls for shared leadership and collective development.

Hopefully by now you are thinking, "Hey, but this book does no better! I don't see any representation of theories from outside the United States." You are absolutely right. Nor do you see a significant emphasis on internationalization or globalization. Both are referenced as drivers of leadership theory, but the phenomena themselves are not explored. These are purposeful delimitations. I'd argue that most texts intensify the Western bias through limited treatments of cross-cultural leadership that oversimplify the concepts.

My personal bias is that our work needs to begin at home through the application of critical perspectives that examine more rigorously the ways in which stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location influence leadership in the United States before we start applying concepts in other cultural contexts. Indeed, this is the goal of much of the book. Most of the deconstructions and reconstructions are a function of social dynamics that specifically emerge in the United States. Now, this is not to say that the process of deconstruction and reconstruction cannot be applied in other cultural contexts. The broad concepts of stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location operate in every society, simply manifesting in unique ways. Thus, this theme reflects a call to deeply examine how critical perspectives may frame the understanding of leadership in one's home culture as well as to disrupt the continued overrepresentation of Western theories in the leadership studies canon.

Resistance to Exploring Social Location

Scholars acknowledge international cultural variation in how leadership is understood yet conveniently sidestep exploring domestic cultural differences in a manner that borders on pathological. The key principles of most leadership theories afford limited to no attention to social location, as evidenced by the content presented throughout this book. When theorists do address the importance of social identity, it typically takes one of two forms. Leadership theories may speak to meta-themes, articulating the importance of social identity

broadly without ever naming specific social identities such as race, socioeconomic status, sex, gender identity, sexual identity, or ability status. I'm not quite sure how a theory can address social identity if it remains nondescript. Is the presumption that all social identity differences are equivalent?

Alternatively, attempts to validate leadership theories through quantitative research may include variables representing race and sex. Note that studies rarely go beyond these two groups and frequently confound the constructs of sex and gender. Results from research habitually report no effect based on social identity, which benefits the theory through perceptions of transferability or universality. Yet these same studies typically only ask a single question capturing membership in a particular group. Just because someone is a *member* of a social identity group does not mean that the social identity is *salient* to that person (Dugan et al. 2012; Kodama and Dugan 2020). For example, I may identify as a cisgender male, but that doesn't mean that being a man holds any level of importance to me. Too often research conflates categorical demographic membership with identity salience, potentially masking differences that may exist. Furthermore, these studies typically do not account for considerations associated with one's environmental context. As explained in previous chapters, there may be little difference in one's capacity for leadership based on social identity, but the ability to enact that capacity may look radically different because of the hegemonic normativity that permeates most group and organizational contexts.

So when a theorist ignores social identity considerations entirely or a researcher publicly states that there are no differences in the ability to enact a particular concept based on social identity, I generally want to scream. We know that social location deeply informs how individuals understand, experience, and enact leadership. The contexts in which leadership are manifest are predicated on stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location, which contribute to social stratification. Furthermore, ample empirical evidence demonstrates that the implicit prototypes people hold are shaped by normative assumptions of whiteness, masculinity, and other factors directly influencing the emergence and perceived effectiveness of positional leaders. To deny this is not only hegemonic but insulting.

Now, this is not to suggest that considerations of social identity don't exist at all in the leadership studies literature. In fact, important lessons can be gleaned from the work of a variety of scholars attempting to integrate domestic cultural differences in leadership theory (e.g. Ayman and Korabik 2010; Chin and Trimble 2015; Eagly and Chin 2010; Fassinger, Shullman, and Stevenson 2010; Ospina and Foldy 2009). Unfortunately, though, these works often exist on the periphery when they need to be centered as essential to leadership

theory. I'm also critically hopeful and inspired by the emergent waves of scholarship that stress the importance of critical perspectives on social location offering unique ways to consider their influences on leadership theory, development, and practice (Guthrie and Chunoo 2021; Harper and Kezar 2021; Irwin and Posselt 2022; Irwin et al. 2023; Jones, Guthrie, and Osteen 2016; Liu 2021; Owen 2020).

As leadership theory and research continues to evolve, we have an obligation to name and redress the resistance to acknowledging domestic cultural differences in how leadership is understood, experienced, and enacted. Accomplishing this requires further diversifying the knowledge base, expanding the repertoire of research methods employed to examine domestic cultural considerations, and holding scholars accountable for the infusion of critical perspectives. It also requires us to explore the concept of social location in more complex ways that recognize the intersectionality of identities as well as how identity, knowledge, and power are simultaneously co-constructed.

The Uneven Treatment of Power and Authority

The architecture of leadership explored in Chapter 1 positioned the discussion of power and authority as central elements of leadership. Yet its treatment in most theories is polarized. Theories seem to either presume a basis of authority from which a leader operates or ignore the concept altogether.

When authority is presumed in a leadership theory, there tends to be little attention directed toward specifying its limitations or how to wield it. Why aren't we more concerned with training people to use power and authority effectively and responsibly? Scholarship is rife with examples of how good and otherwise well-adjusted people end up abusing authority (Kellerman 2004; Lipman-Blumen 2005; Zimbardo 2006). What causes us to default to an assumption that people's conscience will guide them in their use of power and authority when history, research, and contemporary events provide such profound evidence that this is not always the case?

Conversely, a number of theories simply avoid naming power and authority altogether. Consider how many theories covered in this book included not a single tenet, core principle, or component on the topic. I can't help but wonder whether power and authority dynamics are perceived as an inconvenient complication to theory. Are power and authority presumed to be negative? Does addressing power and authority de-romanticize the reality of leadership? I can't quite grasp how one engages in leadership, let alone social change, without understanding how power and authority influence systems.

Let's take this theme one step further. All too often people resist their own agency. The socialization to a unidirectional, top-down, authority-compliance mindset is so strong that when traditional power and authority relationships are challenged, individuals may grieve the loss of dependency, self-sabotage, or run from the possibility of equity. Leadership theories that propose multidirectional flows of power rarely address the ways in which this may be resisted even when it is desired. This reflects hegemony operating at its most effective, drawing on our socialized relationships with authority to suppress inversions in the flow of power.

What risks are we taking by allowing leadership theory to opt out of the discussion of how to wield power and authority responsibly? Ultimately, negotiating power and authority dynamics become essential dimensions to engaging in leadership. When absent from leadership theory, critical learners must find ways to insert considerations regarding power and authority on their own.

Acknowledging the Complexity of Change

Many theories of leadership covered in this book focus on effectuating change. There is a greater need, however, for theory to address just how complex engaging in change processes is, regardless of the target or scope of the change effort. All too frequently, theories position change as a natural by-product of following a descriptive or prescriptive theoretical plan for leadership. We know this is rarely the case, and indeed, few theories attempt to address the multifaceted dynamics that frame change processes.

Essential to advancing the translation of leadership theory to practice is the integration of a more comprehensive and complex approach to change. This requires an articulation in theory of the ways that change processes must target efforts at multiple levels: individuals, social groups, institutions, and broader systems. Directing efforts solely toward individuals often fails to provide the agency necessary to push for change in negotiations at the social group level or to navigate institutional attempts to squash change efforts. Conversely, efforts that target the institutional level relying solely on bureaucratic or policy changes fail to recognize that it is people who bring to life institutional realities, often finding ways around changes with which they disagree. Neither of these approaches recognizes the need to simultaneously address the systems-level factors and root causes that undergird most targets of change.

In addition to acknowledging the multiple levels that require attention in change processes, leadership theory could do a much better job of offering insights related to learning

the complex skills of disruption. Much of the content of this book includes considerations about how to disrupt normativity and challenge the status quo. As the narratives throughout the book attest, doing this draws on a wide range of skills, requires a long-term mindset, and occurs both from within and outside of systems. The last of these three considerations merits specific attention.

Critical perspectives on leadership challenge normative assumptions in an attempt to transform our relationships, communities, organizations, and society to better reflect the values of equity and justice. This requires disruption from *both* inside and outside of the systems we navigate. All too often, resistance and disruption from outside of systems are romanticized and positioned as the sole means of effectuating change when in reality both internal and external pressure are often needed.

The tendency to romanticize and privilege external forms of disruption belies the many ways in which resistance plays out as a function of individuals' and collectives' social locations within a system (Collinson 2011; Solórzano and Bernal 2001; Zoller and Fairhurst 2007). There exists no singular way to disrupt, no preferred method of resistance, no sole manner in which to challenge or oppose. I worry about the ways in which privileging one form of resistance over another sends messages about the most "appropriate" ways to negotiate, cope, and thrive within inequitable systems. To what extent do we risk repositioning critical perspectives as their own form of rigid ideology that feeds off prototypes and assumptions? What are the consequences of differentially valuing one form of activism over another or, worse yet, creating a competition to see who can be the "best" activist?

Advancing leadership theory requires greater attention to the complexity of change processes. It demands that we engage with the law of requisite complexity and ask theory to match, if not exceed, the level of complexity of the adaptive challenges we face. It also requires us as critical learners to think deeply about our own relationship with change and how we may contribute to rather than diminish rigid expectations about what disruption and resistance *should* look like.

Ready. Set. Go! But How?

Here is the reality: there is no direct line of translation of theory to practice. Whatever the pathway, it is at best circuitous, necessitating the skills of a critical learner. This does not reduce the relative value of theory, but it does place the onus for translation on those who practice leadership. It should also serve as a cautionary note about the underlying intent and ultimate value of any theory that suggests otherwise.

Where theory could offer greater assistance is in the naming of these dynamics around translation to practice. All too often, theories either present leadership as a prescriptive solution with direct transferability or presume the ability to reboot the way an entire group, community, or organization engages with another one simply through the introduction and use of a particular theory. This makes it incredibly difficult to discern points of intervention in the translation of leadership theory to practice. It's no wonder so many groups and organizations default to atheoretical approaches or informal leadership theories to guide their work.

The reality is that individual actors are nested in social groups that are nested in organizations that are nested in systems. There's that theme about needing to acknowledge multiple levels of analysis in leadership again! In most cases individuals and collectives do not start from scratch, nor are they afforded an opportunity to reboot entirely. Rather, we enter into intact systems with preexisting norms and assumptions about leadership. So how does one then infuse aspects of leader-member exchange theory, servant leadership, or complexity leadership when established scripts about leadership already exist? Or should individuals just adopt the dominant understanding of leadership already in place in the group they are entering?

Leadership theory offers few insights on the above questions. Perhaps a starting point lies in reflective observation about the leadership dynamics at play in a theory. What prototypes inform how leadership is understood? What assumptions underlie how leadership processes unfold? To what extent do these align with your own understandings of leadership? What do areas of convergence and divergence around how leadership is understood say about your own thinking as well as that of the group or organization?

Engaging in these metacognitive processes is essential. So, too, is understanding the multiple spheres of influence at play within a group or organization, along with one's relative ability to influence each. Ultimately, critical learners need to be good stewards of recognizing and responding to the multitude of formal and informal theories guiding leadership practice in a given environment, along with working to co-construct common understandings.

These five themes are not meant to be exhaustive but a synthesis of areas that require attention when engaging with leadership from the standpoint of a critical learner. There are two important caveats to remember here. First, it could be easy to read the above themes, and indeed much of the book, as solely an indictment of leadership—to perceive it as a pessimistic view about the value and role of leadership in society. I encourage you to guard against that perspective.

The extensive reconstructions offered throughout the book and recommendations above are evidence of the potential leadership has to positively shape our experiences. We have to care enough about something to work toward changing it. Otherwise, we would just dismiss it. Indeed, the application of critical perspectives emerges out of an ethic of care. It reflects a healthy skepticism rather than disillusionment.

Second, the content of the book and above themes attempt to echo and amplify existing voices that have long valued approaches to leadership that challenge or go far beyond the limitations of the dominant narrative in leadership theory. This is achieved in part through the inclusion of theories often omitted from syntheses on leadership theory as well as the integration of research that challenges the status quo. However, engaging with critical perspectives does not just mean working to deconstruct and reconstruct elements of the dominant narrative, but restructuring the system itself so that voices that are suppressed, marginalized, or just plain ignored are moved to the center. This involves altering the rules of the game itself. My hope is that this book creates momentum around the use of critical perspectives but also disrupts the continued emergence and proliferation of theories representing dominant norms, instead amplifying voices too often dampened and ideas too often obscured.

Making Connections

- How do the above themes relate to your evolving understanding of leadership? What implications might they have for how you translate leadership theory to practice?
- Are there elements of the above themes with which you strongly agree or disagree? If so, why? What other themes might you add to the list, and how are they important for furthering the understanding of leadership?

THE INTERCONNECTION OF LEADERSHIP THEORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Despite its imperfections, leadership theory serves an essential function in shaping how leadership is manifest in society. Formal leadership theory provides a framework from which to scrutinize the informal theories we hold. Rather than serving as a legitimizing function, formal theories offer a frame of reference from which to shift our informal

theories from subconscious concepts to conscious interpretations. In turn, formal and informal theories jointly provide the foundation for sense-making about leadership, creating a road map for how we understand, experience, and enact it. Integrating critical perspectives into this process advances approaches to leadership grounded in the principles of equity and justice.

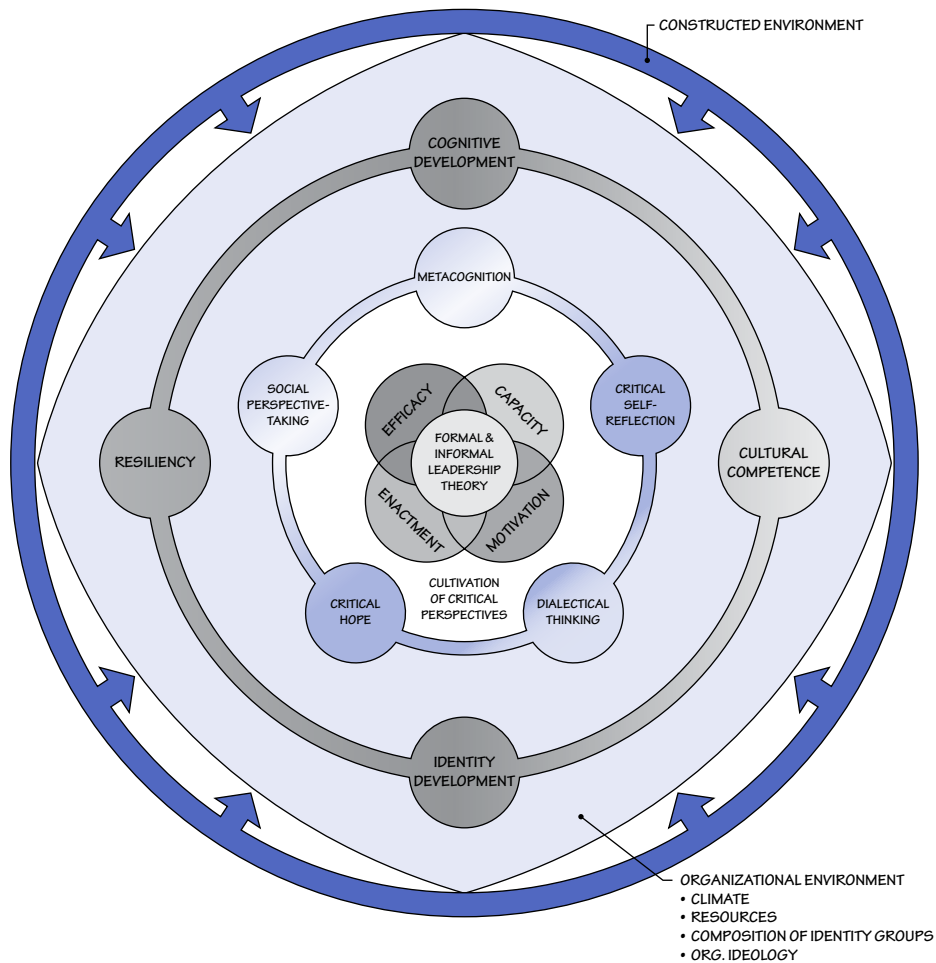
The importance of leadership theory is also tied to its inextricable entwinement with leadership development, highlighted in Chapter 1. The content of leadership theory directly influences leadership development, and vice versa (Dugan and Humbles 2018). For example, exposure to theoretical concepts such as relationality may stimulate cognitive development in our sense-making about leadership. Conversely, as our sense-making increases in complexity it may make concepts such as relationality more accessible and meaningful.

The entanglement of leadership theory and development also reflects a process dimension. There is no “endpoint” to development because leadership learning reflects a lifelong process. Once again, the infusion of critical perspectives is essential. As we develop and change, so too does our ability to apply critical perspectives and engage in the fundamental skills that make them possible. Therefore, what we know about leadership becomes framed through our own development within the evolving social systems in which we are embedded.

Figure 11.1 provides an integrated model for critical leadership development that captures the dynamic ways in which leadership theory, leadership development, and critical perspectives interact to shape how leadership is understood, experienced, and enacted (Dugan and Humbles 2018). Let’s walk through the key elements.

Domains of Leadership Development

Chapter 1 introduced four essential domains of leadership development: leadership capacity (i.e. overarching knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the leader role or leadership processes), leadership efficacy (i.e. internal beliefs regarding the likelihood of success when adopting leader roles or engaging in leadership processes), leadership motivation (i.e. internal drive to engage in leader roles or leadership processes), and leadership enactment (i.e. capacity in action or the functional practice of leadership). Research demonstrates that these four domains are interrelated, with growth in one shaping growth in others. Additionally, the type of theory one adopts—formal or informal—greatly shapes the type of leadership that emerges, which is depicted in the model by placing formal and informal theories at the epicenter of the domains.

FIGURE 11.1 Integrated model of critical leadership development

Now that you've been exposed to a variety of theories, you can see how developing the capacity to engage in strengths-based leadership might look different than situational leadership. Hopefully you also see how one's efficacy or motivation to enact transformational leadership may be different than for adaptive leadership. Even more importantly, the model explicitly captures the need to draw on both formal and informal theories, with a goal for individuals and groups to co-construct an understanding that draws on a variety of components from across theories along with their own lived experiences. This eclectic

approach (1) reduces the likelihood of privileging one theoretical perspective over others, (2) acknowledges the necessity of complex approaches that emerge from and are responsive to the environments in which they are nested, and (3) allows for forms of leadership to emerge that better reflect the realities of those engaging in it.

Fundamental Skills Associated with Critical Perspectives

Circling around the core leadership development domains are the five fundamental skills associated with the adoption of critical perspectives. Discussed in Chapter 2, this is not an exhaustive list, but these skills are positioned as essential tools for the examination of any body of literature using critical perspectives. They include the following abilities: metacognition (i.e. thinking about how we think), critical self-reflection (i.e. deep contemplation about one's own positionality within broader systems), social perspective-taking (i.e. adoption of and empathy for another person's point of view), dialectical thinking (i.e. holding two seemingly contradictory concepts in unison), and critical hope (i.e. realistic appraisal of conditions and the ability to envision a better future). Note that these fundamental skills do not reflect static characteristics or states but dynamic capacities capable of increasing in complexity.

The space in between the fundamental skills and leadership development domains is where the *cultivation of critical perspectives* occurs. These perspectives may be broad, reflecting major themes such as stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location, or they might reflect specific tools of deconstruction and reconstruction similar to those employed throughout the book. The forms that the critical perspectives take are not limited to those presented here. Indeed, my hope is that throughout the book you were drawing on your own knowledge and lived experiences to craft additional tools of deconstruction and reconstruction. Regardless, it is the interpretation of leadership domains—and the formal and informal theories that shape them—in the context of the fundamental skills that cultivates the capacity to apply critical perspectives. Together these directly shape how leadership is understood, experienced, and enacted.

Developmental Factors

The fundamental skills associated with the adoption of critical perspectives emerge as a function of broader developmental constructs. These constructs include cognitive development (i.e. structures of thinking that shape how an individual makes meaning), identity development (i.e. the formation, understanding, and fluid performance of self in context and

as a member of multiple, intersecting social groups), cultural competence (i.e. knowledge, awareness, and skills to engage in learning about, empathize with, and interact effectively across cultures), and resilience (i.e. ability to persist through adversity and positively cope with stress). Again, this list is not exhaustive, but as complexity increases across each of these, so too does the potential for improvement across the fundamental skills.

One can imagine how gains in the developmental construct of resiliency would likely contribute to increases in critical hope or how increases in cognitive development might contribute to a greater capacity for metacognition and dialectical thinking. Essential here is the recognition that leadership development reflects so much more than just the targeting of knowledge, skills, and abilities directly related to a particular theory. Both leadership development and the cultivation of critical perspectives are derived from the investment in a broader range of developmental constructs.

Social, Group, and Organizational Environments

The interior diamond in the model reflects the varied social, group, and organizational contexts in which leadership development unfolds. These environments wield a great deal of influence over the degree to which investments are made in cultivating the developmental factors, fundamental skills, and critical perspectives. They also shape the formal and informal leadership theories that are positioned as credible and valuable.

Whether it is a person's peer group, a community organization in which a person participates, or the organizational environment in which a person works, context matters and exerts its influence both actively and passively. An environment sends implicit and explicit messages about what is valued via the resources it allocates and the mechanisms by which they are distributed. The relative value of leadership and critical perspectives are also communicated by the climate. For example, how do ideological assumptions shape prototypes for positional leaders and leadership processes? To what degree is diversification across social identity groups a priority, or does the environment reflect a strong degree of homogeneity? Considerations associated with the multiple and often overlapping contexts in which leadership unfolds must be taken into account in the process of developing critical leadership.

Broader Social System

Finally, the social, group, and organizational contexts that we navigate are a function of and responsive to the broader social systems in which they are nested. These social systems are

characterized by differential stocks of knowledge and ideologies that influence the ways in which hegemony and social location play out. The broader social system also exerts significant pressure on how environments are constructed, as evidenced by the arrows in the model. It is not as simple as all the other dimensions (e.g. developmental constructs, fundamental skills, leadership domains) just being embedded within the broader social system, but that the system is continuously and actively working to shape them in a particular image. That image is meant to reflect dominant stocks of knowledge and ideologies. This positions the in-between spaces where critical perspectives are cultivated as even more sacred because the broader system typically works to assimilate, diffuse, or diminish them. This makes the purposeful investment in cultivating critical perspectives all the more important.

The integrated model of critical leadership development provides a compass to guide your future thinking about leadership theory as well as leadership development (Dugan and Humbles 2018). The model itself is meant to be adaptive rather than static, shifting to accommodate additional components or respond to unique considerations. The inclusion of fundamental skills and their influence on the cultivation of critical perspectives is unique as it does not presume that this will automatically occur as people learn leadership theory. Rather, the model positions the fundamental skills as essential both to the development of critical learning capacities as well as the advancement of an understanding of leadership grounding in equity and justice.

Making Connections

- How might you envision using the model of critical leadership development to guide your own leadership development? Are there fundamental skills in which you could invest that would pay long-term dividends in terms of how you understand, experience, and enact leadership?
- If you were to apply critical perspectives to the model of critical leadership development, what important considerations would emerge in its deconstruction and reconstruction?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The evolving tides of leadership theory reflect an ebb and flow of central concepts (e.g. traits, the importance of context, service to the common good) that rise and fall based on

where scholars and researchers direct attention along with prevailing social demands. Given leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon, society naturally plays an enormous role in how it is framed. That framing, however, is through the lens of dominant stocks of knowledge, ideology/hegemony, and social location. Without intervention and the application of critical perspectives, leadership theory inherently reflects a “story most often told.” We have the power and agency to disrupt this, but doing so requires critical learning.

This book covered only a selection of theories, synthesizing but a sliver of the content generated about them. The deconstructions and reconstructions presented here are no different. They are but a sampling of the myriad ways in which leadership theory can be altered, modified, or otherwise rebuilt to better serve the advancement of social, political, and scientific goals.

Thus, the purpose of this book is not for you to walk away having consumed a body of knowledge—a burgeoning expert in leadership theory—but to have been exposed to possibilities. My hope is that these possibilities serve as a catalyst for your development as a critical learner who recognizes that the theoretical body of knowledge on leadership will only continue to evolve, and it is the ability to engage with it using critical perspectives that is most valuable. I encourage you to integrate new critical perspectives, create additional tools of deconstruction and reconstruction, and use these lenses not just on existing leadership theory but on theories yet to be written, content from other disciplines and subject matters, and indeed the assumptions of this very book.

Georgianna Torres Reyes serves as the associate vice president for mission and values at DePaul University in Chicago. She is also a consultant and facilitator of dialogue on issues of diversity, social justice, advocacy, education, and leadership. This includes serving as the lead moderator for the Aspen Young Leaders Fellowship.

The skills needed to assess my environment, negotiate issues of ethics and justice, and ultimately effect change in systems while also taking care of myself are abilities I had to start developing early in my career. *Understanding* issues of ethics and justice simply isn't the same as learning how to *navigate* them. My natural tendency is to see something that is wrong and get riled up. I want to jump right into the fray. For a very long time, I didn't understand that not every battle is worth fighting. Energy, resources, integrity, and power come from choosing which battles to engage.

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As a person who grew up poor, Latina, speaking two languages, and who didn't have access to many of the things that other people did, I feel like I've been on the margins a lot in my universe. I've been the color in the room. I've been the woman in the room. I've been the youngest in the room. This is something I am acutely aware of. I mean, heads of institutions have literally patted me on the head and said, "Oh, Georgie" (cue condescending tone). Some of this can be attributed to the various identities I hold and some of it—if I'm being honest—is because of errors I made early in my career, thinking that I had to fight everybody's battles, that I had to share every opinion, and that I had to scream and holler to be heard.

There is a fire that burns within me, and it burns brightly particularly around issues of equity and justice. Sometimes that fire lights the way, and sometimes it burns bridges. Over the course of my career, I've had to find a more sustainable source of energy. Fire is great. It creates light and heat and warmth. But, inevitably, a fire burns itself out. So I've learned how to temper myself in ways that will allow me to be heard as well as engage in the struggle over the long haul. I can have a powerful message. I can know and understand better than everybody else. But if nobody is listening, it's not going to have an impact. And if I'm going to be a voice for somebody who is not at the table, who wasn't even invited to the table, then I need to be heard, and my objective needs to be bringing those voices to the table until they are there to represent themselves.

When I began to learn how to code-switch, to adapt to people's language and words and own them for myself, to finesse a situation and figure out how and where to push and pull and give and meet in the middle instead of barge my way through—that was when I became more impactful as a leader. That contributed to more long-term, systematic, and institutionalized change, rather than just setting fires that shocked people into doing something differently for a moment. This shift also drew on a more sustainable resource for me personally. I actually got invited to the table rather than cast away. I was seen as a builder of collaborative relationships instead of somebody who might be intelligent but just couldn't play well with others. I grew into my leadership in that way.

Life lessons aren't just one and done, though. We don't just learn something and move on. We revisit it throughout our lives. Because this mouth has a mind of its own and so does this heart, I had a powerful experience revisiting the complexity of navigating justice issues again later in my career. By that point, people had seen my long-term impact and were starting to let go of the fire-starter perception that had followed me earlier. Then, a series of meetings occurred around a topic, that for me, was really about doing what was right. Meeting after meeting, things just weren't progressing, and somewhere in these conversations the mission of the institution, which I believed in wholeheartedly, had fallen off the table. We were talking about students like they were widgets, reducing them to mere numbers. We were fixated on solutions that were

shallow and nothing more than bandages slapped onto a much larger problem. I was frustrated. When I spoke, I directed my thoughts to a high-ranking leader, articulating very specifically how *he* was part of the problem. I think I might have said it exactly that way, too, and then elaborated with examples. What I shared had an impact. The person flushed red and looked very, very small. There were colleagues present who agreed with me, but they didn't say a word. I received emails of support afterward, but in the room I got not one vote of support. I did, however, leave the meeting feeling self-satisfied because I had shown him. Right?

My mentor and supervisor walked into my office following the meeting and asked, "Do you feel good about yourself?" I told him I did. "Well, you shouldn't," he continued. "You just made someone feel really small. And what you said today may have been true, but the way you said it set students back at least three years. So go ahead and feel proud. Feel good about yourself for however long it lasts. But what did you intend? Did you intend to make yourself feel good? Did you intend to make somebody else feel small? Or did you intend to work toward our goal of empowering students, securing resources for them, and increasing their ability to be heard? Because if you walked in with the intention of humiliating somebody—well, you did just that. And now everybody you were speaking for is going to have to pay for what you said and how you said it."

I realized he was right. He was absolutely right. I had forgotten what our vision was. I had gotten off track and wasn't focusing on students' needs or advocacy or being a voice for those whose voices were constrained. I was looking for a stage . . . and for somebody to serve as the target for a bunch of crud I'd been carrying around for a really long time. I did to someone else the very same thing that had been done to me again and again and again. There's a lesson here in how to deal with the mountain of justice issues that come at you day in and day out. Speaking truth is one thing. *How* you speak truth is another. Institutional power is institutional power, and you have to nod at it. If you try to ignore it, pretend it doesn't exist, or bulldoze through it, it's not going to help your case. At the same time, you don't have to collude with it.

So this is what I do now. I try to do an examination of conscience daily. I try to line up my values, my ethics, my faith context, and who I espouse to be in the universe with my choices, where I invest my resources, and my actions. There's a balance to be struck. It is imperative that we constantly are learning and engaging with this, because just as I'm standing on the shoulders of others who helped get me to where I am today, others are going to be standing on mine. And for right now, while they're not in the room, I am their mouthpiece. It doesn't matter that I don't want to be the Mexican in the room, the woman in the room, the young person in the room, or any other identity for that matter. I am by default. So I'd better wield the power that I have with integrity, or somebody else is going to suffer the consequences of my choices. This is critically important in dealing with power and privilege.

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Reflection Questions

1. So much of Georgianna's story illustrates her evolving understanding of and relationship with power dynamics. What considerations does this evoke for you about your own understandings of and relationship with power?
2. Georgianna's narrative provides a powerful account of how she negotiates her spheres of influence to engage in leadership within a system. What resonates for you about the strategies and struggles that she shares related to this process? How might this shape how you navigate your spheres of influence when engaging in leadership?
3. Georgianna's story showcases a deep investment in the fundamental skills for applying critical perspectives. In what ways do you see her applying these skills to advance her understanding of leadership and effectiveness in the narrative? What lessons might you apply from this to your own life?

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