THIRD EDITION

A VERY SHORT,
FAIRLY INTERESTING AND
REASONABLY CHEAP BOOK ABOUT

STUDYING LEADERSHIP

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Leadership through the Follower

> New insights into the processes of leadership can be gained by focusing attention squarely on processes connected to followers and their contexts, independently of what leaders are actually doing.
>
> (Meindl et al., 2004: 1347)

Introducing the follower

At the beginning of the presentation on leadership that Brad gives to undergraduate students he conducts a quick poll. He asks how many of them aspire to be a 'good leader'. Invariably, between 10 and 15 of the class of 200 will put up their hands. When he asks how many of them aspire to be good followers, either none or one lone maverick student will put up a hand. This does not change even when Brad puts up his hand – such is the level of influence that he exerts on the class!

Setting aside the concern that the vast majority of undergraduates aspire to be neither a good leader nor a good follower – or at least are not willing to publicly declare their intentions, good or bad – the almost non-existent desire to be a good follower is striking and potentially unsettling. Even the most powerful world leaders, whether it's the president of the United States, the pope, or even Bono, will spend most of their lives as following too. In fact, the public are quite amused when they catch prominent leaders acting as followers, whether it's being cajoled by an adviser or a protester or being gently reprimanded by their spouse or children. We all have to follow; as Bob Dylan wryly observes, you 'Gotta Serve Somebody'.

Being reticent or reluctant to follow is not something that is peculiar to undergraduate students but, as we will see in Chapter 6 on 'Leadership through Place', it is a strong feature of individualistically oriented Western societies, especially those that are characterized by low power distance values. Part of the problem is the word 'follower'

itself. Being a follower implies that you are second best, that you are not good enough to lead. Clearly, there is a pejorative tone to it. For some, the notion of following has strong religious overtones, suggesting blind devotion, which further serves to undermine the currency of the term.

One response to the reluctance to acknowledge the term 'follower' has been to look for alternative terms. Various replacements have been proposed from 'team member' to 'collaborator', 'associate', 'colleague', 'partner' or even 'peer', but none of them has caught on in either popular or academic discourse. The word 'follower' persists, albeit with grudging and somewhat embarrassed acceptance, in our leadership lexicon. We will, however, be using the term in this chapter with unbridled enthusiasm as we strive to show that it is not the act of following that is necessarily problematic – indeed it is vital to leadership – but, as with leading, there are more and less effective ways in which we may follow. The vast majority of discourse is about 'leader' or 'leadership', and not about 'follower' or 'followership'.

However, the interest in followership is increasing to such a point that it has prompted Michelle Bligh, in her review of follower-centred research, to conclude that 'there is evidence that followership is entering the second stage of conceptual development, one of evaluation and conceptual development' (2011: 431).

Those who have made followership a focus for study have tended to engage in three types of studies (Crossman and Crossman, 2011): *descriptive*: identifying actual behaviours exhibited by followers which can be active or passive, disregarding, supporting, or in opposition to their leaders; *prescriptive*: concentrating on the idealized behaviours that relate to the behaviour followers should exhibit rather than those they necessarily do; and *situational*: a relatively small body of literature that examines situational factors of followership in terms of how compatible particular leadership and followership styles are when operating in relation to one another in certain contexts (Crossman and Crossman, 2011).

The leadership scholar who did more than anyone to build the case for the 'Leadership through the Follower' lens was the great Jim Meindl, the Director of the Center for Leadership Studies at the State University of New York, at Buffalo, who sadly passed away at the peak of his career in 2004. Meindl's major contribution to leadership studies was to head up a 'follower-centric' approach to leadership studies offered by way of a much-needed counterweight to an almost exclusive preoccupation with leader-centric approaches (Bligh, 2011). Consolidating earlier arguments made by Pfeffer (1977), Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) and Calder (1977), he observed that while most leadership scholars would have little difficulty in recognizing that leadership is fundamentally

predicated on the relationship between leaders and followers, the follower almost invariably took a minor supporting role in the analysis of leadership.

However troublesome that might sound, the book *Follower-Centered Perspectives on Leadership* (Shamir et al., 2007) collected together, in a tribute to the memory of James Meindl a number of researchers who actively work towards the development of new follower-centric approaches to leadership. In the book's introduction, Boas Shamir provides a helpful overview of this work and identifies five roles that followers have traditionally played in leadership theories: 'followers as recipients of leader influence', 'followers as moderators of leader impact', 'followers as substitutes for leadership', 'followers as constructors of leadership' and 'followers as leaders'. We have used these categories to organize our discussion. We will close the chapter by considering a sixth role that Shamir and his colleagues have advocated for followers: 'followers as co-producers of leadership'. This perspective has been developed as a critical alternative to the five ways in which followers have been traditionally conceptualized. This is a conceptualization very much in tune with our own thinking and also ripe for further study and investigation.

Followers as recipients of leadership

The passive conception of the follower's role in leadership has been the traditionally dominant view. As such it has done little to challenge the popular stereotypes about followers and followership. As we saw in Chapter 2, traditional leadership theories posit the leader's traits and behaviour as the independent variables and the followers' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours to be explained as the dependent variables in the leadership equation.

Even with the more recent theories of transformational, transactional and charismatic leadership discussed in Chapter 2, the onus is still firmly placed on the leader to create one or various of these forms of leadership for followers to respond to. If the leader follows the correct procedures, he or she will succeed in creating transactional or charismatic or transformational leadership, irrespective of these followers. Because of the way these theories perceive the leadership process, it does not really matter who you are trying to lead. Followers do not play an active role in the leadership process. It is an essentially linear, one-way relationship between leaders and followers. Each follower is, in effect, a blank slate upon which the leader writes the script.

Followers as moderators of leadership

As we saw in the first chapter, contingency theories of leadership acknowledge that the leader's influence on followers' attitudes and performance depends on the individual follower's characteristics. This view of followers still thinks of them as primarily passive recipients of influence, but also acknowledges that the leader's influence may have to be moderated by the characteristics of the follower.

Brad recalls from the first leadership training course he took, which was on 'situational leadership' (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977), that he had to learn to change his leadership style depending on the level of 'maturity' of the follower. He had to move from a 'telling' style to 'selling', 'participatory' and finally to a 'delegating' style. Some of you might have done this training programme. It still is big business.

This all sounded so enticing in theory, but in practice followers would rarely stick to the same script. They had obviously been on a different course! They kept throwing up all kinds of complications, such as having different opinions, not sharing the same motives, and plunging various spanners into the works. Perhaps they had attended a course inspired by Kelley (1988, 1992), whose provocative explanation of follower communication styles did much to popularize the notion of 'followership'. Based on his own 2 × 2 matrix, which used the twin axes of independent thinking and active engagement, followers could be classified as being either 'the sheep', 'the yes-people', 'the alienated', 'the pragmatic' or 'the star followers'. Now which one of these are you?

Contingency theorists have pointed to a number of other aspects of followers that leaders need to take into account when leading. These include: the follower's initial attitude towards the leader and their acceptance of the leader (Fiedler, 1967); the follower's need for either technical or emotional support (House, 1971); and the follower's knowledge together with the congruence of their values with their leader's (Vroom and Yetton, 1973). While each of the theories tries to point to another aspect of the follower that the leader must take into account when determining how to behave, the overriding expectation is for the leader to be the active partner in the leadership process.

Followers as substitutes for leadership

From time to time human resources consultancy firms produce surveys that highlight the number one reason why most people leave their jobs is because of a bad boss. Money, conditions, benefits and

prospects pale into insignificance compared to an abusive or incon-siderate boss, it would seem. Leaving is, of course, one way to deal with a bad boss. Another way is to find ways to avoid him or her and minimize the damage.

The 'substitutes for leadership' theory originated by Steven Kerr and John Jermier provides some encouragement in this regard (Kerr and Jermier, 1978). It argues that, under certain conditions, the influence of a leader over a follower may actually be neutralized or even substituted. If it is neutralized, this means that it is impossible for either the task-oriented or the relationship-oriented activities of a leader to make a difference to a follower's attitudes or behaviour. If leadership is substituted this means that the leader's activities are not only impossible, but they are also largely unnecessary.

Returning to the problem of avoiding a bad boss, those followers who have high levels of ability, experience, training and knowledge – as well as a high need for independence and a strongly 'professional' orientation – are usually quite self-aware and possess self-efficacy and therefore have little need for a boss's feedback. Moreover, when the task at hand is relatively straightforward and routine, you have little need for a boss. Perhaps not surprisingly, the substitutes for leadership theory has strong intuitive appeal for those who do not subscribe to the impor-tance of leadership in organizational processes. It serves quite effectively to take the wind out of the sails of leadership scholars who trumpet the central importance of leadership in organizational success and failure. It has, however, failed to lead to much in the way of subsequent research, serving primarily as an act of protest (Dionne et al., 2005). The theory has been developed primarily to de-emphasize the signifi-cance of the leader, but it does not do a lot to explicate the role of followers in creating leadership. As we shall see in the following section, the next group of theories have made this task their central concern.

Followers as constructors of leadership

In this section we will talk about research that has examined the way in which followers make or construct leadership. Researchers here are preoccupied with the thoughts of followers, most especially how they construct and represent leaders in their thought systems. They make the fundamental point that leadership is essentially in the eye of the follower. Unless followers recognize it as leadership, it isn't leadership. We will distinguish between three groups of theories that have identi-fied a different aspect of this construction process: the romance of

leadership theory, the psychoanalytic theory of leadership and the social identity theory of leadership.

The romance of leadership

At the beginning of this chapter we noted that the follower-centric view of leadership emanated from a concern that most leadership scholars had become overly preoccupied with the role of the leader in creating leadership, while virtually ignoring the role of the follower. Essentially, leadership scholars were mirroring, and indeed perpetuating, the hype and unrealistic expectations that are routinely placed on leaders in all spheres of human endeavour, but most especially in the world of business and politics. Rather than turn their back on leadership studies, Jim Meindl and his colleagues decided to make this tendency to overestimate the significance of leadership their central concern.

At the heart of their analysis lies the notion of the 'romance of leadership', which they suggest 'denotes a strong belief – a faith – in the importance of leadership factors to the functioning and dysfunctioning of organized systems' (Meindl and Ehrlich, 1987: 91). They developed the Romance of Leadership Scale (RLS) (Meindl and Ehrlich, 1988). In the absence of direct, unambiguous information about an organization, respondents would tend to ascribe control and responsibility to leaders, with events and outcomes to which they could be plausibly linked (Meindl et al., 1985). In effect, leadership acted as a simplified, biased and attractive way to make sense of organizational performance. Moreover, this romantic tendency seemed to have the greatest sway in extreme cases – when things were going either extremely well or extremely badly observers tended to lay the credit or blame at the leader's door.

Looked at through the romance of leadership lens, you could see that a superior performance was perhaps, in fact, the cause and not the consequence of charismatic leadership (Awamleh and Gardner, 1999: 346). Put succinctly, leaders keep on winning largely because their followers perceive them to be winners. They therefore do everything they can to ensure this continues to be the case. For example, Manchester United players did everything they could to keep Sir Alex Ferguson and his winning ways.

Meindl described the romance of leadership as a social construction. Followers construct their opinion about the leader by interacting with other followers. Central to this process is something he called social contagion, which he described as 'a phenomenon of the spontaneous spread of affective and/or behavioral reactions among the

members of a group or social collective' (Meindl, 1993: 101). As its name suggests, we can think of a leader's reputation (good or bad) as being something akin to influenza that can be passed on from follower to follower until everyone becomes infected. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly where the contagion originated. Suddenly it sweeps through a community, and often disappears just as unexpectedly. Social contagion highlights the interpersonal processes and group dynamics that underpin the widespread dissemination of charismatic effects among followers and subordinates.

The media in both its mainstream and social forms, are important contributors to these social construction and social contagion processes. Media accounts influence and shape the attributions that followers might give to a particular leader. They can also shape our general beliefs about what constitutes effective and ineffective, ethical and unethical leadership. Chen and Meindl (1991) argue that, contrary to popular wisdom, leaders do not control their own destiny, despite the best efforts of public relations professionals.

The 'celebrity CEO' phenomenon takes full advantage of our tendencies to romanticize leadership (Guthey et al., 2009). In an increasingly complicated and impersonal world, the public face of a charismatic and appealing CEO can prove to be a highly effective means for a company to build a symbolic link or brand with its various stakeholders, such as its shareholders, its customers or its suppliers. A 'real' person supplies the human touch that cannot be provided by a mere logo. It is almost impossible to think about Richard Branson without also thinking about the Virgin brand and vice versa. Having a celebrity CEO at the helm can act as a double-edged sword, however. It is difficult to maintain confidence in an organization once the influential founder moves on, as The Body Shop found when Anita Roddick gave up control of the company. It's even more of a challenge when your CEO 'wants his life back' as in the case of BP CEO Tony Hayward in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill or when your founder goes to jail, as was demonstrated in a spectacular fashion with the imprisonment of Martha Stewart.

With the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency we have witnessed the dramatic extension of the 'celebrity CEO' phenomenon from the boardroom to the White House. As Bloom and Rhodes (2018: 1) argue in their provocative book *CEO Society*, we now live in a society 'where corporate leadership has become the model for transforming not just business, but all spheres of life, where everyone from politicians to jobseekers to even those seeking love are expected to imitate the qualities of the lionized corporate executive'. They correctly note that it is all the more perplexing that CEOs should

continue to exert such influence on so many citizens in the wake of the widely publicized failings of many business leaders in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

Where the romance of leadership theory is not as strong is in explaining why this 'romance' happens. The following two theories – psychoanalytic theory and social identity theory – provide pointers as to why followers might choose to construct leadership in the way they have been observed to do.

The psychoanalytic theories of leadership

When we addressed the question regarding leaders being born or made in the opening chapter, we pointed to the importance of our early years in shaping and defining our individual philosophies of leadership. Psychoanalytic theories of leadership take this observation several steps further.

Rooted in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Carl Jung's psychopathology, the psychodynamic approach highlights the centrality of our family of origin if we wish to understand our behaviour, whether as a leader or as a follower (Stech, 2004). A leader's style is heavily influenced by the models of leadership exhibited by parents, teachers, coaches and other adults during the maturation process from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood. Most potent of these is the style of parenting, particularly that which happens very early in the impressionable years (Keller, 2003). The way in which we are raised influences the way in which we choose to follow. If adults find themselves in a relationship with either an authoritarian leader or a leader with a more participative style, the reaction of the adult may be influenced by the way their authority figures – parents in particular – behaved and dealt with authority figures in the past.

Psychodynamically, we may react to a leader in either a dependent, a counter-dependent or an independent manner (Stech, 2004). We might become totally dependent on the leader for our livelihood and our emotional support. When we react in a counter-dependent way we react rebelliously, rejecting the directives of the leader. As an independent follower we will look at the leader's directive objectively, assessing whether or not it is reasonable and ethical, before choosing to act.

In explaining why followers construct leaders in a dependent way, psychoanalytic theories of leadership point to two psychodynamic processes: projection and transference (Shamir, 2007). Projection is the process by which we attribute to another person our ideals, wishes, desires and fantasies. We see this tendency being demonstrated

by diehard fans of pop stars, actors and models. Transference, on the other hand, is the process of responding to another person as if that person was one's mother, father or another significant person from early childhood.

Pyschoanalytic theories suggest that these processes are particularly salient during periods of crisis or threat. When people are confused, unsafe or helpless, followers can regress to early childhood patterns and behaviour. They become attached to leaders and idealize and obey them, not because of the leader's special characteristics but because the leader symbolizes a father, a mother or some omnipotent figure. Citing Freud's writings on leadership (Freud, 1921), George Goethals (2005) suggests that strong male leaders, such as George Washington, have the ability to reawaken unconscious archaic images of the powerful male ('The Big Man') who ruled despotically over primitive human societies. Taking up Darwin's notion of the 'primal horde', Freud argued that the father or chief was a strong and independent figure who imposed his will on all other members of the group. Followers had the illusion that their leader loved each of them equally.

Leaders can also provide a means by which followers can reduce their level of anxiety and provide them with a measure of psychological safety. In order to meet these psychological needs followers, through the processes of transference or projection, will sometimes knowingly tolerate – and sometimes prefer and even create – 'toxic leaders'. Jean Lipman-Blumen notes that 'toxic leaders manipulate their followers' ordinary human needs and exploit their existential circumstances. They do this by creating illusions designed to allay the fears and address the human condition to which we all are heir' (2007: 3). By the same token, Lynn Offerman (2004) alerts us to the various ways in which 'toxic followers' might similarly lead their leaders astray.

Cult leaders such as Charles Manson, Jim Jones and David Koresh are held up as infamous prime exemplars of this form of deleterious leadership, which Micha Popper (2001) likens to a process of mass hypnosis in which followers lose their self and the ability to reason autonomously. We can also see elements of this process in more conventional leader–follower relationships. Brad's doctoral research, for example, examined why so many managers chose to follow such management gurus as Stephen Covey, Michael Hammer and Peter Senge (Jackson, 2001). Lindholm (2002) extends this point to the general process of charismatic leadership, noting that if the charismatic leader is able to compel, then the follower must have a matching capacity for being compelled. We therefore need to consider what makes up the personality configuration of the follower, as well as that of the leader, if we are to understand charisma.

The psychodynamic approach to leadership is by no means a mainstream one within the study of leadership. Leadership scholars share the same general discomfort and reticence about working with the unconscious mind that psychologists tend to have.

On the positive side of the ledger, psychodynamic theory does encourage an analysis of the affective relationship between the leader and follower. It encourages us to look to our past (call it reflexivity) to identify deeply ingrained and recurrent patterns that might undermine our ability to become a fully effective and responsible leader and follower. Evolutionary psychology similarly plumbs the murky depths that have underpinned the leader–follower relationship since the origin of homo sapiens (Van Vugt et al., 2008). Both theories ask the awkward questions about leadership that might provoke discomfort but nonetheless should not be left unasked. Goethals (2005) approvingly notes that it dares to suggest that perhaps people have a fundamental instinct to follow that is bolstered by a deep-seated 'thirst for obedience'. Taking this idea further, Cluley posits that 'the psychological distinction between leader and follower is an illusion, albeit a necessary illusion for the longevity of groups' (2008: 210–11). It gives the reassuring impression to groups of followers that leaders are more individual than they are in reality. Perhaps, then, another reason for the spectacular growth in leadership studies that we discussed in Chapter 1 could be attributed to our collective need to identify with a leader who is above the group and separate from its social psychology, someone we may look up to and believe in? How should leaders respond? Drawing upon James MacGregor Burns, Gabriel (1997) helpfully reminds us that a key task for leaders, therefore, is to 'make conscious what lies unconscious among followers' (Burns, 1978: 40), by using power to achieve the ultimate test of leadership – the realization of collective purpose is in unleashing real and intended change (1978: 251).

The social identity theory of leadership

The third and final theory that emphasizes the process by which followers construct leaders is called the social identity theory of leadership. It proposes that the extent to which a leader is either selected or accepted by a particular group will depend on how 'prototypical' (i.e. representative) she or he is to that group (Van Knippenberg and Hogg, 2003). Hogg defines prototypicality as 'a fuzzy set of features that captures ingroup similarities and intergroup differences regarding beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and feelings' (2005: 56).

It draws upon the popular saying that 'like attracts like'. However, instead of the leader being attracted to a follower who shares a similar background and beliefs, and consequently brings a follower into his or her group, social identity theory highlights the reverse process, through which the leader is picked by followers or is chosen to be supported by followers precisely because he or she is most like them. When we talk about 'like' here, we mean how closely the leader represents the group's characteristics as well as its aspirations, values and norms. In a sense, leadership identity construction is a process through which the leader identity *and* follower identity are claimed and granted by both parties on an iterative and repetitive basis (Scott DeRue and Ashford, 2010).

The importance of stereotypes we hold about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour diminishes as group prototypicality becomes more important. That is, group membership becomes psychologically more salient. A group is psychologically salient if being part of it is important for someone as a basis for defining who they are, what they believe in and how they function as an individual. This could be a gang, an Internet discussion group, a sports team, a fan club or a service club. While you might have a general view of what constitutes good or bad leadership, you will put up with leadership behaviour that is at odds with your ideals if belonging to the group is very important to you.

The way social identity theory is set up, the study of leadership begins with the group and not the leader. Assume you are observing a group of people, how does that group go about selecting and supporting an appropriate leader – nominal or otherwise? Social identity theorists suggest that this takes place in three broad phases (Hogg, 2005). First, a group member who is the most prototypical will appear to exercise influence over other group members. Second, because the most prototypical member is consensually liked by the group members (i.e. he or she is socially attractive), this will empower that person and enable him or her to influence other members. Eventually, that person will begin to be imbued with prestige and status. In the final phase of the process, group members will begin to attribute the success of their leader to that person's special personality and not because of their prototypicality. In this way a charismatic personality for the leader is constructed (Shamir, 2007). Michael Hogg has recently brought out a book on social identity theory, yet new research has been scarce of recent years. Nonetheless, we believe that the social identity theory of leadership still has much scope for someone who is studying leadership.

Social identity theory can be helpful in making sense of a number of contemporary leadership issues. For example, research has shown that in Western societies, demographic minorities (e.g. women and ethnic minorities) can find it difficult to attain top leadership positions

because of what is widely described as a 'glass ceiling' (Stafsudd, 2004). As an aside, the glass ceiling has spawned a large number of problematic metaphors – brass ceiling, bamboo ceiling, concrete ceiling, glass closet and sticky floor to name a few, all of which could validly justify further research. If organizational prototypes (e.g. of speech, dress, attitude, interaction styles) are societally cast so that minorities do not match them well, then those minorities are unlikely to be endorsed as leaders under conditions when organizational prototypicality is more important – that is when organizational identification and cohesion are high. This might arise under conditions of uncertainty, such as when a company is under threat from a competitor or a potential takeover. This is an unfortunate tendency for a number of reasons, not least because it is often the case that, when a company is most in need of change, an outsider's perspective is what is most needed to lead that company out of its difficulties.

Towards a general model

Each of these three follower-centric theories – the romance of leadership, and psychoanalytic and social identity theories – provides a useful insight into the process by which followers construct leadership. Boas Shamir suggests that if they are intertwined, we can begin to develop a general model of the construction of leadership by followers. Beginning with the individual, and drawing on a number of motivational theories, we need to understand that the follower has several unmet needs which a potential leader may or may not be able to fulfil. These are the need for clarity (e.g. what should we be doing, or where are we going?), the need for meaning (e.g. what are we doing this for?), and the need for safety (e.g. will we be OK if we do this?).

Leaders are constructed in light of these unmet needs at the level of the individual and at the social level. Individuals construct leaders through the processes of attribution (e.g. they believe they are responsible for causing certain things); projection (e.g. attributing their ideals, wishes and desires to the leader); transference (e.g. responding to a leader as if they were a significant person from their childhood); and idealization (e.g. believing the leader can do no wrong). At the societal level, leaders are constructed through the twin processes of social information processing and social contagion.

Follower-centric theories have sought to turn a lot of the conventional leader-centric research that was discussed in Chapter 2 on its head. They have shown that there is indeed much to be gained by starting our study of leadership with the follower and not the leader. In this

regard they have provided a much-needed correction and counterbalance to the dominant preoccupations of leadership scholars. In fact we might even go so far as to ask, given the influence that followers can exert over leaders, why we might not consider the possibility of followers acting as leaders. Indeed, why not get rid of the leader–follower dichotomy altogether? It is to this possibility that we now briefly turn.

Followers as leaders: shared leadership

This approach is technically neither leader-centred nor follower-centred because it rejects the distinction between leaders and followers. Leadership is seen not as a role, but as a function or an activity that can be shared among members of a group or organization. Fundamentally, at the core of this approach is a belief that followers can and should be given their chance to lead, as it is not only the right thing to do but also the smartest thing to do. Traditional command-and-control, hierarchically based organizations are seen as being no match for the flat, laterally integrated network organizations in the context of a rapidly changing competitive global economy. People, as leaders or followers or whatever label one pins on them, are doing the flattening (Rost, 2008). Bligh (2011: 431) cites Visa founder Dee Hock as being emblematic in capturing the essence of this view when he remarks that 'in the deepest sense, the distinction between leaders and followers is meaningless. In every moment of life we are simultaneously leading and following' (Hock, 1999: 72).

We can think of the various theories that advocate that followers should act as leaders along a continuum. At the more conservative end of the continuum is the notion of 'co-leadership', which recognizes that leadership is rarely the preserve of one individual but frequently is exercised by a pair of individuals, a 'Number One'/'Number Two' combination such as a CEO and a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or a group of individuals such as a top management team (Alvarez and Svejenova, 2005). A good example of this type of leadership would be the triumvirate that has collectively led Google.

Further along the continuum is 'shared leadership': the notion that the responsibility for guiding a group can rotate among its members, depending on the demands of the situation and the particular skills and resources required at that moment. Any member can lead the group for a certain period, during a key phase in a project, and then leadership can be passed on to someone else. Jospeh Raelin's book *Creating Leaderful Organizations* is typical in this regard as it passionately

argues that we need to create organizations in which ever one has the opportunity to lead, not sequentially but concurrently and collectively (Raelin, 2003).

Even further along the continuum is the notion of 'distributed leadership' in which the team leads its work collectively by creating norms of behaviour, contribution and performance, and by supporting each other and maintaining the morale of the group (Gronn, 2002; Day et al., 2004; Cope et al., 2011). This perspective complements, but does not replace, the perspective of leadership as an input to team processes and performance.

These theories tend to be more normative than descriptive. They talk about how things should be rather than how they necessarily are. However, case studies of exemplary practice are enthusiastically presented from companies as diverse as law firms, car manufacturers and IT service providers as evidence that shared and dispersed leadership are more than a gleam in the organizational theorist's eye. Though still a rarity, these forms of leadership do exist and can succeed.

Notions of shared and distributed leadership are attracting much interest among leadership and organizational scholars as well as practitioners and consultants. Ken recently supervised a PhD student who researched distributed leadership. This interest has served to foreground the 'Leadership through Process' lens, in that it makes the relationship between leaders and followers, or for that matter leading and following, its central concern. This approach will be the primary focus of the next chapter. In this chapter we will also pick up on and expand upon the critically oriented approaches to leadership that question many of the fundamental assumptions that leadership researchers have made about the existence of leadership as a distinct phenomenon and have encouraged a more processual orientation to the study of leadership that is concerned with who has power, who does not and why this is. Before we move to process, we want to finish this chapter by examining an approach to leadership that recognizes the contributions of the follower-centric theories discussed above and seeks to integrate these with considerations of the role of the leader in constructing leadership. Indeed, it sees leadership as something that is essentially co-produced by followers and leaders.

Followers as co-producers of leadership

It is unusual for there to be an explicit contract between leaders and followers but there may well be some form of implicit contract.

While equilibrium is achieved between followers and leaders, leadership will be sustained. When it begins to become unbalanced, that is leaders and followers are providing too little and/or taking too much, then the relationship ultimately has to be renegotiated. One of the most celebrated examples of leadership illustrates this principle in a dramatic fashion. The leadership produced by Ernest Shackleton and the 28 crew members of the *Endurance* expedition, when their ship was crushed in the ice floes off the coast of Antarctica, is held up by many as the apotheosis of leadership and its lessons have been widely imparted throughout boardrooms. At various points in the epic and perilous journey back to civilization, the leadership relationship became strained and occasionally challenged, but the numerous accounts of the voyage have shown how both Shackleton and his followers acted to preserve and strengthen the leadership relationship in the knowledge that this was vital to the survival of the group (Shackleton, 1999).

The best effort to date to model the co-production of leadership in a dynamic way is leader–member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX theory is intuitively appealing. This might partially explain why for the past decade in excess of 30 references appear each year in scholarly publications with LMX in the title. It accords with the experiences we have had both as followers and as leaders. It brings into relief the fact that differences exist in the quality of relationships that leaders have with individual followers. There are times when we have really got on with a boss and there are times when we haven't, and yet others seem to get on famously with that same boss. It also issues a cautionary note in warning leaders of the dangers of being selective in whom they choose to favour as this fosters divisive in-groups and out-groups within the larger group. Leaders are therefore encouraged to cultivate high-quality exchanges with all of their followers, recognizing that ultimately it always 'takes two to tango'.

LMX has been taken further recently by comparing and contrasting it with a Chinese construct known as leader–member *guanxi* (LMG) (Chen et al., 2013). This work differentiates between the Western notion of LMX and a different and more indigenous relationship abbreviated as LMG. One major difference is that LMG pertains to non-work-related exchanges whereas LMX is purely a work exchange. Also, LMG is developed through family and school ties, as we might expect from the high-context culture within which it evolved and was researched. Either way, the role of context and social relationship is given the place it has long deserved within the leadership exchange literature.

Echoing the pioneering management thinker Mary Parker Follett (1924), Keith Grint has noted that leaders can learn a lot about how to

lead from their followers. He draws an intriguing parallel between the challenge of learning how to lead for the first time and the challenge of learning how to become a good parent, noting that 'in both cases, and counter-intuitively, it is the junior that teach their super ordinates how to lead' (2005a: 104). In order to do this, open, honest and continual feedback is essential. Looking back on how we learned to become parents, we probably should have devoted more time and effort to trying to learn from our children instead of relying on more traditional sources, such as our parents, our friends or child-rearing books.

The movie *The Queen* provides a striking example of a highly celebrated moment when the roles between leader and followers were reversed. It is a fictional depiction of the behind-the-scenes turmoil within the British Royal Family in the aftermath of Princess Diana's death. The Queen is stoically determined to follow protocol and to mourn the death privately, and not bow to her subjects' desire, fanned by the media, for her to publicly acknowledge the death. In the end she acquiesces, making a public statement via television and by ordering the Royal Ensign to be flown at half-mast above Buckingham Palace. In a dramatically compelling fashion, we witness a liminal moment in which the followers are seen to lead the leader. A sub-plot in the film is, of course, the newly elected Tony Blair's role in influencing the Queen to change her stance in the interests of preserving the monarchy's leadership in the longer term. One, of course, can't help musing at the end of the film whether Tony Blair himself may have lost sight of the principle of follower-led leadership when he made the decision to take the United Kingdom into the war in Iraq.

Perhaps Tony Blair and other besieged leaders might have derived some form of comfort from the lessons that Keith Grint distils in his 2001 book *The Arts of Leadership*. On the surface, this book appears to be yet another conventional celebration of the heroic pursuits of well-known historical figures such as Horatio Nelson and Florence Nightingale, as well as business leaders like Freddie Laker and Richard Branson. From these accounts, Grint provides evidence not of their cumulative successes but of their propensity regularly and routinely to fail and make mistakes. What distinguishes them from leaders whom we have long since forgotten is the preponderance of their followers to consistently support and cover up for them. He poignantly concludes, 'the trick of the leader is to develop followers who privately resolve the problems leaders have caused or cannot resolve, but publicly deny their intervention' (2001: 420).

Since writing the first edition of this book in 2008 we have been surprised and gratified to see how rapidly the importance of followers and followership has been recognized in both the academic and

consultancy literature. The edited collection entitled *The Art of Followership*, with its bold subtitle *How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Great Organizations*, spoke volumes about the profound weather change we have seen in leadership studies regarding the power and influence of followers in creating effective leadership (Riggio et al., 2008).

When should the follower choose to no longer follow a leader? Ira Challeff, who has perhaps done more than anyone to celebrate the crucial role that the follower plays in creating exceptionally good leadership argues in *The Courageous Follower* that:

> A primary challenge we face as leaders is creating an atmosphere in which people have the courage to tell us what they really think. A primary challenge we face as followers is telling the leaders what we really think, whether or not the atmosphere encourages us to do so. Ultimately, a follower doesn't draw power or authority from a leader, but from the organisation's purpose and from the commitment and skills he or he brings to that purpose. An effective follower is supportive, not passive! (2009: 18).

In order to be courageous follower, it is vital, he argues, to develop 'intelligent disobediance' in order to 'do right when what we are told to do is to wrong' (Challeff, 2015). Along these lines, it is worth considering the lonely and often tragic figure of the whistleblower as a prime exemplar of the follower as leader. Perhaps the most notorious whistleblower of recent years is Edward Snowden the former CIA computer operator who copied and leaked large caches of classified material from the National Security Agency. He has been both heralded as a hero and a traitor by some and pilloried as a villain and traitor. This action has done a great deal to publicize the dangers of striving to maintain national security through mass surveillance and violating individual privacy and safety.

Followers can exert greater (and safer) influence over leaders when they work together. The salience of social influence and social power that followers can exert over their leaders has been systematically examined by Oc and Bashshur (2013). Their sage advice to followers is to 'be aware of the needs of your leader. Build your strength accordingly (e.g. be persistent, show integrity and composure and have some positional or informational power) increase your immediacy (reduce social distance) and find safety in numbers (find a confederate, build coalitions)' (2013: 431).

Collinson (2006) has noted that studies of leadership need to develop a broader and deeper understanding of followers' identities and the

complex ways in which these selves may interact with those of leaders. His poststructuralist approach to studying leadership highlights how followers' identities may be more differentiated and contested within the workplace than is generally assumed. Collinson's own (2005) empirical research has shown that leaders are often surprised by the unanticipated way followers have reacted to their plans. Followers are smarter and more cunning than they tend to be given credit for, whether it is in the way they appear to support, conform or resist.

Mary Uhl-Bien and Melissa Carsten (2017) have recently argued that in the same way we have begun to recognize the significance of context to leadership we need to be equally as sensitive in developing a more nuanced contextual understanding of followership. Specifically, they show how followership has significantly evolved as the bulk of work moves from a primarily hierarchical context to a primarily distributed leadership context to primarily a network context. Their contextual analysis reveals three varying views of followership: the classic position role in which the leader is the manager and the subordinate is the follower; the behavioural (process) which views leadership and followership as co-constructed in combined acts of leading and following (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014); and the identity (process) view which says that followership is constructed when, through an interactive process, individuals take on a follower identity (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). In hierarchical contexts, followers tend either to take on a passive role, an anti-authoritarian role or a partnership co-production role. In distributed leadership contexts, a behavioural process view becomes more apparent. Here followership occurs when individuals take on a follower identity and act in accordance with this identity in their engagement with leaders. In network contexts, such as social media and open source software projects, they note that individuals take on a follower identity but behave in ways that are consistent with leadership. They conclude their analysis by noting that 'trends clearly suggest that the nature of work is only going to continue to move forward more distributed and network contexts. As this happens the belief that followership is uninteresting or unimportant is no longer accurate' (Uhl-Bien and Carsten, 2017: 153),

Education will need to play a central role in promoting more nuanced followership development. To this end, Dennis Tourish and his colleagues propose that business schools should abandon their obsessive promises to produce transformational leaders and begin presenting an alternative and more realistic prospectus based on enlightened followership and the promotion of effective upward communication within organizations in order to create healthier and ethical organizations (Tourish et al., 2010). The challenge of creating 'transcendent

followers' who are well in tune with their selves, those whom they work with and the organization in which they work seems a worthy goal for business schools to align themselves to (Cunha et al., 2013). To this end, we are still keenly awaiting the publication of the competing volume to this book entitled 'A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Studying Followership'!

Conclusion

In this chapter we surveyed wide-ranging work done by those who have been curious about that other generally unheralded group of people when it comes to leadership, namely followers. We looked at various theories that have conceptualized followers to varying levels of significance, either as moderators or constructors, substitutes or co-producers of leadership. This work has sought to provide a much-needed counterbalance to the predominant lopsided focus on leaders held not only by academics but also by the general populace. We believe that this work creates a more holistic and complete picture of how leadership works or fails. Given its youthful and partially formed nature, follower-centred perspectives also provide plenty of scope for producing fresh and exciting new research. Finally, and most importantly, it encourages us to reflect and actively think about what we might change in our much rehearsed role as followers to co-create better and higher forms of leadership.