

## Chapter 2

# Leadership: What Is It and How Can We Learn from This Knowledge?

*“Come, for I have found the clue I sought so long”*

Walt Whitman *Proud Music of the Storm*

### 2.1 Introduction

The focus in this chapter is to summarise the theoretical underpinnings of leadership and secondly to reflect on the insights arising from these essentially academic debates about what leadership is and how to measure it as well as how context shapes the everyday working lives of leaders. Finally and most importantly, consideration is given to leadership thinking today and its utility for every day leaders and followers.

There have been many compelling theoretical and empirical views on leadership throughout human history. Debates about the changing nature of leadership have led to theorising about it as well as new understandings including its aims, methods and essence. For much of the past century, researchers have endeavoured to discover the enigma of leadership; how much is innate or learned by individuals, how a leader garners support and achieves the greatest impact for followers and its ingredients. Despite many attempts at measuring leadership, there is still no one definition or approach that captures it adequately for the diverse settings in which it is played out. Just about every theorist, writer, leader and follower interprets leadership in a particular way that is both like and unlike everybody else's view so there is unlikely to be one definition that meets the needs of all the varying contexts in which leadership is played out. The leadership context itself has become a significant element in understanding it, as something essentially purposive and issue-focused. One definitive element is that leadership is contingent upon its context: spatial, time and institutional.

## 2.2 The Leadership Conundrum

It is important to understand how leadership is produced in cultural, political and economic ways. A primary aspect is the illumination of the monoculture (see Sect. 2.7.4) provides a yardstick by which the substance of leadership (the types of incumbents to be considered worthy of leadership, the vision) and how this limits exposure to non-conventional views of leading, especially those critical of the institution, its decisions and policies.

A second aspect concerns the values placed in and derived from the leadership and how these are reflected in the principles of the Board and the executive suite. Leadership competence comes to the fore here so that the vision and decisions reflect inclusiveness of the executive suite, itself responsible for self-perpetuating the monoculture. This social process limits the nature and quantity of information provided, thereby sidelining the diversity of viewpoints of those individuals and groups who are not part of the monoculture that shapes the institutions and the institutional networks within every national context. This form of cultural control is not only in scope but also has a hold over subsequent generations that follow through within the same institutions.

The third aspect is the leader and how they inhabit the role which becomes the substance of a particular leadership or at least, in the case where the personal profile does not resonate with followers, it masks it. Leaders serve to promote and reinforce their values which align to those of the institution as the pinnacle governing standards regardless of how inclusive they are of followers' and other stakeholders' interests.

Fourth, leadership often conceals the process that enhances the leader and the institution. Since this process is largely invisible, occurring behind the scenes, it is not acknowledged nor in some cases, managed. Fifth, the constraints on leadership include the industry/professional arenas, regulations and policies as well as the workforce.

Most importantly, no analysis of leadership is complete unless it is seen within a wider, determining context of a global market and geo-political economy. Whatever else leadership may be, it is deeply embedded in its monoculture.

Although leadership emerges in many guises at various times and varies over time, its underlying expectations are impervious. For example, it is anticipated that leadership will find a pathway forward for institutions, shape a trajectory for followers, and that problems will be sorted and benefits gained. If none of this occurs, the leader will be blamed and ousted.

## 2.3 The Vision: A Promise for a Brighter Future

The formation of vision is initiated as a general rule by incoming and current leaders, signaling a way forward for the institution if running smoothly or if not, out of a predicament (Shipman, Byrne, & Mumford, 2010). Sometimes a crisis is engineered by the leader so as to create a sense of urgency or firm up a resolve amongst the

followership. Often leaders view this tactic as a way to strengthen their leadership. However, for a vision to be effective it needs to be compelling and to appeal to both the values and the sentiments of followers so as to achieve this outcome.

There was a time, post the 1980s due to the economic circumstances of the time, where leadership generally was more hardnosed and management boards and CEOs moved away from focusing on vision as they saw it as serving little purpose (Mumford, Antes, Caughron, & Friedrich, 2008; Mumford & Van Doorn, 2001). However in the last decade, leaders have reverted to envisioning and supplemented this process with garnering intelligence and evidence for transformation to ensure a strong pathway to the future for their institutions (van der Pas, de Vries, & van der Brug, 2011).

Leadership is “discursively constructed in historically specific social contexts; [that] are complex and plural; and.....shift over time” (Fraser, 1992, p. 178). The leader shows the way; develops a vision and creates a narrative which at times takes on legendary and even, romantic overtones, like Horace’s poetry referred to in Chap. 1. Vision is about method and manner: how to express an idea in a given situation and shape its expression to suit different temporal contexts, in particular using “text” and “cultural artifacts” meaningfully to align to the institutional goals. Followers unconsciously associate themselves with these stories and either agreement or submission ensues. It is through such stories, articulated through various channels and events that leaders promote their leadership (based on Davie & Harre, 1990).

The formal position taken by a leader reveals to the incumbent numerous facets of potential influence, which they utilise according to the fluidity of the situation and the extent of a transformation required.

A [leader] position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one’s own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 46).

To illustrate this conundrum further, with every new leader, a fresh claim is made about their potential impact whether this is a CEO, a leader of a country, a political party, a church. Sometimes these accounts are followed by a report or an analysis, sometime later, to reveal that the leader has succeeded in meeting expectations of the office. In so doing, often what is represented to an audience are the images of idealised leaders caricatured against their failures. People enjoy failure as much as success, providing they are not its author.

Standards for identifying high-impact leadership and leaders change as institutional history is written and rewritten of what worked and did not and why. In each production of new leadership (shortened by media cycles and catastrophic actions outrunning the real events at times), particular leaders are held up as the ideal (based on Allio, 2009, p. 6). This process is far from straightforward or consistent.

Leadership is about people; human beings who not only have to deal with the complexity and uncertainty in their situations and organisations but also have personal investment in the outcomes. Increasingly leaders face the risk or the fear of not being able to perform to meet wide and diverse expectations nor to cope with the demands placed on them brought about by instant global interconnectivity, not only in terms of stretching their performance often beyond the limits of their capability but also, and more importantly, in terms of attempting to meet successfully the often unrealistic expectations of their boards, the challenges of the marketplace and the segmented communities in which they lead. Fear of failure and potential public demise produces in people a negative field that for some can be paralysing. Leaders are not immune from this. It is here that the executive coach finds a lever, discussed below.

## 2.4 Leadership Origins

Leader, like many words, has evolved in meaning over time. Initially ‘leader’ was linked to the offspring of a mythological god with all the overtones of a super-being or what is referred today as an über-being. To demonstrate this point, a CEO of a very large institution recently made an off the cuff comment to me in an unguarded moment: “I am, after all, only human”.

Many leaders are seen in this way at least initially. US presidents are good examples to draw upon. However in earlier times, a leader was associated with the proponents of various religious philosophies or royalty for example, Jesus Christ was considered a leader as were those who attained distinction in battle, Alexander the great, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Admiral Lord Nelson spring to mind. Today, leaders are more often linked to someone of great merit in politics.

While celebrity leader as a notion emerged in the late twentieth century, luminaries have always been extolled. The main difference today is that with 24/7 communications, the propensity for manufacturing celebrity leaders is greater. Most employees do not consider their CEO as a hero since they are usually aware of their weaknesses or presume them. Yet the stories of famous leaders produce something akin to either hero worship or deference.

Institutions in western culture, as in most others, are quick to foment the dominant image of the leader. Conjuring up images of celebrated leaders – almost entirely men – it is one of someone who assumes almost sole responsibility for particular feats, advancements or innovations within their respective institution. However, leadership often belies the complex social processes involving numerous people working somewhat interrelated to produce these outcomes for the leader. The very invocation of leadership suggests a hierarchy of social organisation that is led by them. This social hierarchy stands for the main referent against which most leaders are evaluated, at least in a western business culture the thinking of which dominates most economies today.

By the twenty-first century, there is a psychological rift between the expectations of the leader and those they serve, especially when leaders exhibit predominantly political interest not only for the institution they lead but also for their own survival. Leaders may have lost the freedom to “rescue” the institution in the way they see fit and frequently become prisoners of their circumstances including their Board or the State. There is often a tension between what the leader is, what they know is expected of them, and what is assigned to them by the Board, the shareholders and the constituents.

Consequently, it is understandable there is at the one and same time, a strong felt-need of a leader and a lament of a lack of leadership. Leaders hold out the promise of bringing something new to the situation whether this is an institution or an event; or to recover the situation from a less than successful past performance. Further, leaders are supposed to ‘enlighten’ followers calling on their own inner and external resources to transform their situation to a new future and provide salvation and hope. The Climate Change debate in most countries today is an example of this.

Despite its emphasis on über qualities or John Bunyan’s (1964) concept of *Everyman*,<sup>1</sup> leadership has yielded to meritocracy and careerism. In most western economies, institutions function on the basis of merit: positions are advertised and filled on this foundation (Son Hing, Bobocel, & Zanna, 2002). Merit is at the core of career progression or at least, it is espoused to be so. However merit-based decision making is a vexed process. The ambiguity and politicisation of leadership means that ways of thinking about its value to the institution, especially a particular leader’s significance is far too influenced by social and political attitudes of followers, supporters and non-supporters. It makes it difficult to think of leadership as important in itself.

Questions of what is leadership and who is a high-impact or moral leader are almost as unpredictable and enigmatic as assessing a great work of art, a musical composition or a good idea, with opinions varying depending on one’s perspective and position. For example, an expert opinion on art will frequently differ from how the general public evaluates art works, as borne out by the introduction of the ‘popular choice’ awards in most fields today whether it be art, literature or sport. Rarely are the award and the popular choice prizes bestowed on the same recipient. The same is true of leadership.

As stated above, the type of leadership society expects and praises is reflected within the social and cultural context and determines what followers and constituents will accept or not. The social and personal profiles of leaders and the political significance of their leadership influence assessment about what constitutes great leadership, and this is at the expense of the unequal representation of women and others from minority backgrounds. Witness the rise and fall of Silvio Berlusconi, dubbed Il Cavaliere (the Knight with all the implications of a quest which culminated in his term being the longest of any post 1940s’ prime minister of Italy). Despite his three terms

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<sup>1</sup> *Pilgrim’s Progress* an allegorical play about the life of Everyman, who represents all mankind, in the fight for good over evil.

as Prime Minister, Berlusconi's impact was undone by private actions as this became the prime focus, eventually invalidating his leadership coupled with his government being slow to implement austerity measures in response to the market downturn. The media is central in influencing the public about how leadership is perceived, including the standards that individual leaders need to uphold in their private lives.

The politicisation of the media is reflected in leadership. Leaders need to deal with complex ideas and thorny issues and so this needs to be translated into language that the media thinks the public will understand. The media shape people's expectations of leaders, especially if they are a politician or in eminent office. The trust placed in the institutions that leaders represent is an awareness of the processes of appointment and accountability of the incumbents, especially when things go wrong. Facts are shaped by the media and journalists and commentators are directed as to what is suppressed or not by their own leaders. More significantly, any hint of wrong doing is likely to be spear-headed. For this reason, the community is quick to celebrate and dishonour leaders depending on their track record, both publicly and privately. When leaders do not conform to the community's or more precisely, the media's expectations of them, they bring their office or institution into disrepute. And so it is with their leadership. Think of the US Presidency and how it became despoiled through Bill Clinton's sexual scandals or Nixon's lies. Or take another example of the Catholic Church and how it became desecrated and even ridiculed over the way the public perceived its poor handling of child abuse and paedophilia. These institutions become sullied along with the incumbents' reputations. In some cases, the leaders' (e.g. captains of industry) actions were criminal and they have been goaled and ostracised until they serve their time and are then free to redeem their celebrity status and even capitalise on it. For example Martha Stewart, an entrepreneur who was incarcerated for lying in the United States has since been able to recover her reputation evidenced by her subsequent business and media success.

Accordingly, the value of the impact of leadership by the 'experts' is different to those who experience specific types of leadership directly. Often a leader is described as effective, distant or ethical for example by those who do not know them and as warm by those that do; sometimes the two views coincide. Just as great hope is held out for leadership; disappointment is likely to follow the experience of a leadership failure. While leaders are still applauded for "their courage to make difficult decisions in challenging times", this approbation will be at the expense of society's admiration for them. In these types of situation, leaders are perceived as an anti-hero both within and outside the institution and shared in a twitter-instant.

## 2.5 The Study of Leadership

Leadership suffers from what Fricker (2007) calls 'epistemic injustice', that is how credibility is bestowed on certain ideas and notions, while simultaneously rejecting, intentionally or otherwise, others — even 'knowable' facts.

This selective denial is often at the forefront of managerialism, where certain principles are reified such that they are no longer viewed as unchallengeable. One way of addressing this is to see leadership as importantly involving an active construction and exchange of meaning between the leader and followers which is dependent upon the prevailing circumstances and moreover, is culturally and situationally mediated by all. For leaders to act and provide meaning to others requires them to use their intellectual and emotional capabilities, to bring their subjective experiences to bear on the present circumstances, and for them to make analogous comparisons.

Nevertheless, the study of leadership has produced a large body of literature emanating from various disciplines of theoretical knowledge and research. One could ask: what is the purpose of all this intellectual energy invested by researchers and writers into leadership theory over the past century. There are several features common to most perspectives on leadership. Before discussing this further, the question of “why is leadership important?” needs to be asked.

Even a brief moment of reflection leads to an observation about the significance of leadership and followership in every aspect of our lives regardless of context. A reliance on leadership has always been from the early ages, whether it be through hunting and gathering, navigating oceans, going into battle, pioneering in the Antarctic or climbing Mount Everest, discovering scientific breakthroughs or steering institutions through the profound changes in the social and economic order and physical structures of the time. The task of leading continues to be testing and equally precarious today as it has been throughout history. And the world continues to change rapidly. Think of social networking, the use of stem cells research, nano science, the rise of China and obesity as mere samples of evidence of this. Any comparison of leadership with previous times is limited given the social and cultural mediation of meaning and the nature of change that sustained specific leaderships. However an historical understanding of the contingencies of a given leadership is important. Today’s challenges are no less difficult than in the past. A quick survey of some of these more recent challenges shows, for example: the transformation of geopolitics, balancing western-centric philosophies against others as well as developing strategies to meet market demands and economies. Throughout these challenges, leaders are seeking to build their corporations, handle increasing debt more efficiently, engage in industry restructuring, all the while meeting the expectations for strong leadership.

However there are several possible answers to the why leadership is an important question, which will be explored throughout this chapter by examining selected experiences of established leaders, who were invited as part of writing this book to reflect on their own leadership journey or at least one aspect of it whether this was as a leader or as a follower. Further they were invited to contribute a personal insight through a letter to either past or present a leader or a follower that could be drawn to demonstrate a lesson in leadership and followership.

As indicated in the introduction, perhaps the most straightforward answer to “why leadership is important” is that leaders matter, either as an exemplar or a ‘hero’ to look to in tough times; and for ensuring governance and authority in their

institutions. Increasingly today leaders and followers slide into and out of these roles as management hierarchies flatten and as organisations need to respond to market demands (based on Stech, 2008 and background reading Howell & Méndez, 2008).

Leaders face challenges, aspire to transformation and through this maze, further problems emerge that they need to overcome. The call for greater accountability and transparency of leadership, if anything, has heightened the need for leadership and demonstrated its importance. Leaders are expected to be increasingly responsive to these changes as well as to those they serve. By making a series of prudent decisions in the eyes of the followers, each leader successively builds from their predecessor. This process can lead to a real and durable change which lays the foundation for the successor to evaluate.

The focus of leadership is primarily institutionally based, that is, businesses and organisations that design and deliver services and products as well as address followers, customers and community needs. The application here includes companies, non-profit organisations, government departments and enterprises. Leadership can be the result of individual or collective actions. Leaders are effective when they address the interests or needs of a followership and persuade or reassure them to ensue.

In the Middle Ages, industry or guilds, as they were called then, were formed around craft skills and these ensured skill development as well as the process of transferring skills from one generation of workers to the next, which is similar to professional and trade associations today. Past leaders of guilds like the captains of industries today play a significant role in influencing the social, political and cultural norms of industry. However, how much time they are able to spend in developing the next generation of representative leaders is open to question. This is an important consideration for the development of future leaders and how leadership will evolve over the next decades ahead.

Investigating leadership gives us a privileged position to discover and reflect on the institutional life in which leadership is played out, who benefits and who does not. Leadership is characterised by influence, drawing for itself from a range of sources both legitimate and personal and learning how to deal with the pressure to meet expectations and achieve outcomes. There is a renewed focus on accountability which emphasises the need for results. Increasingly accountability is becoming central to the leaders' platforms running for public office.

## 2.6 The Theoretical Heredity of Leadership

There are many and varied assumptions about how knowledge of the world around us is acquired, how people relate to it and what is counted as real and false. Leadership varies according to who is defining it and from what perspective. Leadership is not a discipline of knowledge as much as it is defined by the theoretical and pragmatic perspectives, outlined below in Table 2.1.



**Table 2.1** Theoretical and pragmatic perspectives of leadership

Theoretical perspective	Pragmatic perspective
Reason for leadership	Approach of leadership
Leadership disposition	Choices
Leadership motivation	Incentives
Culture and mores of leadership	What is accepted and what won't be
Harmony	Conflict: What will work and what won't
Leadership policy	Business and management practices

The categories and processes of leadership are social constructs and draw from a range of social theory in three main traditions: 2.6.1 Classical Philosophy, 2.6.2 Positivist Thinking, 2.6.3 what is labelled as the Chicago School, and 2.6.4 Transformational Leadership.<sup>2</sup>

**2.6.1 Classical Philosophical Tradition**

Leaders are considered as self-directed and the assumptions sustaining the classical tradition include:

- people have free will to act as they choose;
- in choosing one course of action over another, people weigh up the pros and cons and personal consequences; and
- behaviour is governed by socially accepted laws, rules and standards and if people breach them they should experience the consequences.

These assumptions are typified in historical writings (e.g. Plutarch), in literature (e.g. Shakespeare), art (e.g. Egyptian Revival) as well as through film (e.g. Hollywood) (Riad, 2011).

**2.6.2 Positivist Thinking**

The positivists abandoned the Classical philosophy perspective, basing leadership on genetic or personality structures whereby leaders are predestined by intrinsic individual factors to position themselves if the circumstances are right. Personality traits are a collection of characteristics that shape people’s cognitions and behaviours in certain ways and remain relatively stable over time. Personality can be inferred on leaders based on observed behaviours and behavioural trends exhibited

<sup>2</sup>Readers are encouraged to use the readings to explore this more deeply as what is presented in Sect. 2.6 is a brief survey only.

by the incumbent. According to the Positivists, mind, self and social relations can be operationalised and measured empirically through for example, personality scales and other standardised instruments as well as experiments and confirmed. These inventories are designed to assess personal traits that purportedly predict leadership performance and behaviour.

Taking a step back, leadership has been studied by researchers since the 1950s following on from the trait theorists in the 1940s (e.g. Stogdill, 1948). They focused on the innate characteristics of the leader whereas the behaviourists observed and described the behaviours of specific leaders: for example, Fleishman (1953, 1973) referred to 'consideration' (i.e. relationships with followers) and initiating behaviours (i.e. instructions for getting the work done). The dichotomy between a focus on relationships versus task has been replicated throughout the late twentieth century (see Blake & Mouton, 1981). The outcome of this research is that high-impact leaders exhibit a balance of such behaviours in the workplace depending on contingent factors such as the cohesiveness of the followers, existence of clear goals and policies and the like, which impact followership. However this is a crude one-dimensional approach to leadership and needs to take into account other factors such as whether the context is global, local or both, the nature of the institution. Current research shows that the traits that work well across diverse situations are being genuine and understanding of others; task precision and being good natured (Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007).

The idea that particular leadership styles are appropriate in different situations is the basis of the situational explanation of leadership (Higgs, 2003; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). The Fiedler Model (Fiedler, Chemers, & Mahar, 1994) can be seen as an evolutionary link in leadership theory between trait, style and contingency theories. Fiedler concluded that changing leadership style was not an effective way to lead and that leaders should instead understand the situation and do what they can to modify it. What we can conclude from this is that leaders must be aware of situations and use them as the primary determinant in their decision making. However, the experiences and abilities that leaders possess are often the reason why they have been recruited and selected for a particular role at a particular time for a particular situation. Those that choose leaders for a situation expect them to use capability and experience to transform the situation in some way.

Leaders' performance and behaviour is modified by the context, what works well in one situation may not in the next as it is contingent on what people observe, how they interpret it and choose to respond. Moreover on a macro-level, people's behaviour is modified by the situation and other contextual factors such as type of industry in which they work; the nature of the business; the state of the economy, the political regime and so on. People face the consequences drawn from their experience and this in turn shapes their future behaviour.

The mainstay of this tradition is that people's behaviour is determined biologically, psychologically as well as socially. Life cycle and experience, personal chemistry and attributes, both physical and otherwise, influence how people behave, relate and respond to each other. Some of this is learnt and some of it is innate. On the question of whether leadership is innate or learned, it is important to

note again that such theories are largely acontextual and represent generalisations about leaders. As a result, trait theories have become somewhat redundant by transactional theory of the 1970s, despite the resurgence of psychological testing for employment and other purposes.

Another relevant point to note here is that Positivism is rooted in the Scientific Method (Taylor, 1947). Frederick Taylor formulated how people worked into procedures and processes with rules; all of which could be replicated. This developed into a system whereby management was about codifying these procedures and processes, still in evidence today through total quality management (Boje & Winsor, 1993), business process engineering (Conti & Warner, 1994) and the like. Leaders today often rely on this approach as it simplifies the work and they can rely on a command and control approach, hence the charge of being too technical or managerial. Managerialism as it pertains to leadership can be conceived in two forms, that is, a specific capability and techniques required in administration based on standards and measurable outcomes. It, by definition, is “an ideology, accepted to varying degrees by all of us but held most closely by members of the managerial class that places faith in the ability of managers to provide for the needs of society by application of specialised skills and knowledge. The ideology rests on the value of efficiency which provides guidance to managers in the application of their expertise toward the achievement of organisationally defined goals.” (Edwards, 1998, pp. 560–561). The “in search of excellence” movement which swept through corporate life in the 1980s made this plain. Moreover managerialist expectations of leaders are at the highest in times of turbulence e.g. when countries are at war, when markets crash and economies need rapid and effective recovery, or when the community no longer supports its leadership, national or local. Often these events and trends occur in clusters, emerging simultaneously.

Despite managerialist expectations, it is more often than not that the romantic ideal that people aspire to or are motivated by about how they would like their leaders and leadership to meet their needs.

.....what it is that is difficult to say about leadership is ..... that it is almost impossible to articulate because it is predicated upon a desired eroticised relationship between the leader and follower. This relationship, this erotics, is homoerotic [but not exclusively so] and it is this, we suggest, that is the unsaid, or the unsayable, which prevents coherent definitions of leadership (Learmonth, Ford, Lee, & Harding, 2011, p. 929).

However, managerialism comes to the fore when people see through or feel let down by the idealised hopes of their leaders. Often this has more to do with followers than it does with leaders but nevertheless, they focus on their capability and skill set or its lack thereof. Followers “do not obey ...by virtue of tradition or statute, but because they believe in” (Weber, 1948, p. 79) the leader. This can be a contradiction of terms. However, it is further testimony to what is at stake when understanding leadership: the personal and biographical and followers’ expectations.

While elements of this are still relevant in organisations today, with institutions and processes becoming increasing global and, virtual with staff having to respond to issues and problem resolution on-the-spot, a command and control culture, even in the military, is no longer the central tenet of leading. Moreover managerialism

ignores the diverse sub-cultures that people work and live in and the need for accommodating diverse interests and agenda as never before is; a point that will be discussed further below.

### ***2.6.3 Chicago School: Symbolism***

Leadership based on this school of thought, dominated by Merton (1969) who unlike the Positivists, claimed that influence over others is derived from the transactions that occur between leaders and followers and is contingent upon the situation in which these are performed, the size of the group and whether it is mainstream or peripheral. These contingencies help to distinguish the notion of influence based on transactions drawn from positional influence or authority and those that are not. Leadership based on authority essentially relies on followership and for both, this occurs through a person's acceptance of formal processes learnt in school, within the family as well as occupational and professional influences. Through this, the behaviour and performance of both leaders and followers are molded and moderated by order and instability, values and norms. However, there is always a combination of authority and transactional influence present.

Understanding how leadership relies on the behaviour of groups, small and large, mainstream and peripheral, in and out groups, is critical too. Conversely, alienation and marginalisation are important in thinking about leadership and frequently, are the biggest challenges for leaders to deal with so. Germaine to leadership is the notion of control focusing on the processes that bolster or deplete control. Control comes in many forms, for example through attachment as that experienced through family ties and friendship; formal attachments through professional and trade associations or through the formation of moral beliefs such as those experienced through being a member of a religious, professional or ideological-driven entity.

In addition to behaviour, performance, influence and other more formal modes of control are the symbols that leaders draw on both through their interactions with and membership of boards, the media, governments and networks. How we label people, using position titles and the like is as significant in socially constructing the leadership reality as is the followership as one fuels the other.

### ***2.6.4 Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership theory was proposed as a set of characteristics that were most appropriate when an institution was going through, or needed to, change (Bass, 1985). Palmer, Walls, Zena, and Stough (2001), concluded that effective leaders were those who displayed a transformational rather than a transactional, task-focused leadership style. Most leaders want to transform or change their world within their realm of influence. However, this, of course, is largely a political venture and

political issues are by no means irrelevant to how they feel about themselves. This is where coaching also has an important role to play. However most theories on transformational leadership avoid or ignore the political dynamics and respective interests of leaders, sub-leaders, followers and coaches.

Even though positivist and constructivist theorists hold different ontological and epistemological understandings about how we acquire knowledge, how we understand human nature, how reality is constructed or given; how do leaders influence others; all share a common concern with situational and organisational structures and how this impacts or shapes leadership. Whereas trait theories paid attention to personality and relationship typologies and the “transactionalists” on what leaders do and say or zeroed in more narrowly on a single institution and its contingencies to ascertain what constituted leadership, the “transformationists” of the 1990s focused more on what leaders were doing, planning, mobilising and creating. All were conceived as rationalised relationships of exchange (profitable<sup>3</sup> and non-profitable in the broadest meaning) between leaders and followers. Even to the point of defining the leaders’ preferences and systematising them such that options were constrained.

## 2.7 Insights Arising from Leadership Theories

### 2.7.1 *Leadership as an Instrument of Change*

The focus of leadership in theory and practice from the 1990s has largely been about how leaders’ actions guide improvement or constructive change in the organisations or groups that they represent. More importantly, the way leaders communicate the need for change in a manner that people can make sense of and experience its impact and meaningful outcomes so that their engagement heightens and indifference or even worse, their resistance does not set in.

How this is achieved is complex, given that in the leader and follower relationship there is an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, leaders are accountable for outcomes however defined, just as they wish to have the freedom, at times unfettered, to achieve this; so too do their followers. This drive for autonomy fulfils the need that most people have for self-efficacy, a person’s belief that they have the capacity (expertise and wherewithal) not only to meet the demands of their work but also to exceed them. Moreover, people with high self-efficacy are likely to perceive setbacks including critical feedback as being positive rather than negative (Bandura, 2012). What is more, when people feel competent and confident to make decisions and act accordingly (i.e. self-efficacious) they are more likely to be accountable and

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<sup>3</sup>If I use an alternative word for profitable such as beneficial or rewarding, then I cannot use non-rewarding since even in situations where there is no money-making, there is benefit which may not be immediately apparent.

have a heightened sense of autonomy. Therefore, accountability, (that is, feeling responsible, answerable and even liable) together with autonomy are not antithetical rather they are mutually inclusive.

The experience of autonomy for both leaders and followers occurs in various ways. One is through the latitude to make choices at work within one's own professional or work domain – not so much what is to be achieved but how to achieve it. For example, 'having a say about how things are done' and being consulted about prospective changes if not directly participating in the decision making. Another way of realising this relationship between autonomy and accountability is through bestowing increased responsibility or obligations for carrying out projects and duties within the group or institution and ensuring that the governance through the institutional delegations of authority underwrites this. For example, 'the buck stops here' best sums up this type of autonomy signalling that a person is willing to take the ultimate responsibility for their decisions, rather than passing it on.

A further way for achieving this important connection is through people, especially followers, closely identifying with the institutional, workplace or group values and assumptions underlying decisions and actions. "A shared definition of the situation comes to prevail. This includes agreement concerning perceptual relevancies and irrelevancies, and a 'working consensus' involving a degree of mutual consideration, sympathy, and a muting of opinion differences. Often a group atmosphere develops – what Bateson calls *ethos*. At the same time a heightened sense of moral responsibility for one's acts also seems to develop. A 'we-rationale' develops, being a sense of a single thing that we the participants are avowedly doing together at the same time." (Goffman, 1963, pp. 96–98)

This idea dates back to early notions of democracy. For example:-

Here each individual is interested not only in [their] own affairs but in the affairs of the State as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics- this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a [person] who takes no interest in politics is a [person] who minds [their] own business; we say that [they] have no business here at all. (Thucydides, 1954, pp. 118–119)

In regard to this, people have a sense of 'pulling together more or less in the one direction'. What Vaill (1982, p. 27) called 'jelled' that is a normative fit between what people individually and collectively feel comfortable with in the face of the demands of the institution's mission. (Of course, the proviso here is that people have to know what the mission is and what it means. This sounds trite. However in today's complex organisations, many staff are indeed unaware of the mission or it is left to them to interpret it or if known, disagree with it.) An example of this occurs often at the point of hiring a new staff member. Both the employer and the candidate will be trying to find a good 'fit' between themselves and the hiring organisation. They each have expectations about what they are looking for in their prospective institution and what it can offer them to meet this need of "fitting" in. It is as much about how they can identify with the institutional mission and values and reconcile these with their own. Similarly, the members of selection committees are also looking for the 'fit' between the individual's needs and their experience with that of their organisation's or group's.

Given that followers, in any one institution or group, are from an increasingly diverse background, the reliance on any specific set of values or beliefs is less likely. Leaders are often puzzled by what seemed like a perfectly sensible idea to modify direction or introduce a change only to be met with resistance from their followers. It is important to note that this resistance is not emanating from people's psychological makeup, by and large, rather through whether or not they accept the so called "given corporate culture" of the institution. People are essentially conservative and conformist and so it is difficult for them to redirect their efforts if the direction of the institution or group changes especially without notice, reason, or consultation. They need time to ponder and understand the change, have the opportunity to question it, especially if they feel that the current direction and approach has been successful so far. In the latter case, often the followership for various reasons does not appreciate the competitive positioning of the institution, the external forces driving the change nor the information that their current approach is just not working or profitable. When followers are given this information finally they often feel annoyed and disappointed that they were not alerted to this until 'the moment of truth' when the institution is confronting a crisis. And so even if they understand it at this point, they feel let down, distrust sets in and they become resistant.

Whatever the contingencies of the situation, achieving this complex relationship between autonomy and accountability amongst followers requires strong leadership. It requires the capability and flexibility of the leader to foster it both within the followership sufficiently enough to the point where it is reflected in the climate and culture of the wider institution or group.

While the history of the theoretical development has provided us with wonderful insights into leadership it is incumbent upon leaders to develop their own critical thinking about how to do this. A coach is significant in assisting leaders, who may feel weighed down by the demands of their role, to develop their own leadership logic and stance with an inherent flexibility.

### **2.7.2 Choice Making**

Leadership is often construed as disconnected streams of choice and decision-making leading to outcomes. For example, solutions may be proposed where problems do not exist; choices are made without solving problems; problems may persist without being solved; some problems are solved. Distinguishing an organisation's goals is problematic. There is not an overarching or uncontested understanding of what the institution is and its goals, despite the rhetoric. Choices are made based on the outcome of dissimilar streams of problem points, potential solutions, participants and choice opportunities.

To reflect this in a tangible sense, the institution is a 'garbage can' where these streams emerge (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972) and leaders and followers often have to sort through the 'messy situations' they find themselves in. In so doing, conflict often emerges when this process of decision making is frustrated. This conflict is especially



acute at a time of crisis, when organisational processes become more constrained, that is, when there is a major deviation from normal events, or when a lack of control over a situation is far more obvious.<sup>4</sup> At crisis point such as an earth quake, tsunami, bush fire, flood, stock market crash, war, devaluing of the currency, massive decline in sales, or technological accident, the leader's ability for choice making is at the fore. Often such events whether physical or social, are accompanied by "aftershocks" and delayed reactions (Johnson, 2012; Murphy, 2009; Perrow, 1984). One issue that leaders need to address is the consequences of the choices and decisions that are made or endorsed by them. What is rarely visible are the unintended or detrimental reverberations of these. Revisiting the misconduct examples of Clinton, Nixon and the Church, these situations often lead to consequences that were unknowable at a particular decision point although may have been avoided if foreseen.

What is important here is that leaders and followers need to understand that a choice is being made and in turn what the options are, that preceded the decision. Further if one option is chosen over another, what are the projected consequences, both immediate and long-term? And of course, both leaders and followers each act on different rationalities. This distinction supported by Bucy, Formby, Raspanti and Rooney (2008, cited in Gottschalk, 2012) found that the intentions, calculations and ultimate choices are different for leaders and managers compared to their subordinates. The assumption is that leaders may act on a different rationality, and they need to know this and discover the way their followers think and feel.

Again these situations can be better guided by the organisation's culture or the sense of "jelling" that followers may feel with the leadership. These "risky business" events represent everyday life for all people, working in organisations, who act or behave according to a set of beliefs, values and assumptions based on what they see as opportunities, the choices they make at the time and how they rationalise this post hoc, all of which are associated with their socio-economic status – that is, "theory must learn from life" (Willis, 1978, p. 182).

Choice making gives rise to the notion of ethical leadership (see also Chap. 8) when each option is eventually evaluated against accepted standards and critical judgments are made. The expectation for ethical leadership for incumbents of high office today is so strong that this is often the undoing of those cited above, even at times when the misdemeanour is relatively inconsequential. Trust is at the heart of leadership.

### 2.7.3 *Leadership as Trust*

To achieve this complex relationship between autonomy and accountability with followers requires trust (Fukuyama, 1995; Seligman, 1997). As indicated, leader and follower relations are built on trust.

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<sup>4</sup>Trying as we may to conceive potential crises, we increasingly develop risk mitigation strategies so that we become less shocked and better prepared to either mitigate or handle a crisis. Crises are then moved into the realm of normal.



Without the general trust that people have in each other, society itself would disintegrate, for very few relationships are based entirely upon what is known with certainty about another person, and very few relationships would endure if trust were not as strong as or stronger than rational proof or personal observation. (Simmel, 1978, p. 179)

A trust relationship is based on a ‘way of being’ as well as a ‘way of doing’ which reinforces it. To demonstrate this point, trusting people involves a degree of risk taking because neither the leader nor the follower can ever predict in advance whether trust in one or the other is misplaced or not. People come to trust each other when both parties act in good faith and do not abuse this by violating the other’s expectations.

### ***2.7.4 The Monoculture of Leadership and Its Elitism***

Despite the contemporary ethnic, cultural and language mix of communities, institutions in which leadership is performed remain mono-cultural; still largely white, male and networked. “.... Those who sit in the seats of the high and the mighty are selected and formed by the means of power, the sources of wealth.... which prevail in our society” (Mills, 1956, p. 361). To attain leadership, to get to the ‘top’ of any institution or group is, if not to conquer the monoculture, to be accepted by it. Often one particular business leader will introduce and sponsor their protégés into their institutional networks such that leaders can be traced back through their ‘generational tree’ of the monoculture.

Exclusiveness or elitism is an important concept here as it governs how we think about leadership and ultimately how coaches work with leaders and leadership aspirants to assist them work within the corporate culture that is, the dominant monoculture. The prevailing culture in practice supports and continuously endorses a particular type of leadership from its inception. This process replicates itself through the selection and socialisation of leaders exhibiting similar patterns of behaviour and approaches until its culmination. When leaders replicate the monoculture they experience less opposition to their interests from their peer “cultivars” as they will be accepted onto boards, professional networks and clubs, thereby extending their influence. Although ultimately, these leadership “cultivars” will compete with each other and eventually, become each other’s greatest rivals. For example, witness the “clash of titans” and the subsequent falling out amongst formally close networks on boards, in political parties, when this is played out by the media.

What supports these mono-cultural ‘elites’ is that they control cultures that govern the ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups of society largely governed by money and investment; and the views of these elites on what works best is upheld by board members. How many times does the media report about both men and women leaders lamenting the fact that leadership and board membership is not diverse and leaving the question about ‘why is this so?’ hanging (Rowley, Hossain, & Barry, 2010).

There is an accepted way of doing things reinforcing the specific monoculture. Power disparity in gender relations and social relations is taken-for-granted and relatively fixed; despite having been acknowledged as unequal, if not counterproductive. The monoculture governs a set of relations that infers a natural order and hierarchy of control (like Taylorism, based on Taylor, 1947) which, in turn, implies obedience or loyalty to the leader, and is internalised by leaders and followers alike. Reaching genuine diversity of institutions and boards, not only using quotas to rectify this but also examining and unpicking defending cultural assumptions would mean leading an institution differently once the eventual erosion of the status quo that the monoculture protects, had occurred. New leaders, regardless of background, ‘sign up’ to this mono-culturalism by becoming assimilated or conveniently bi-cultural.

According to agricultural theory (Lampkin, 1997) from where the term monoculture comes, such culture is more susceptible to pathogenic decline. Similarly when a culture is exclusive as often found in institutions, leadership and power become corrosive over time, turning inward with a greater propensity for unethical behaviour and corruption. There are extreme examples of monoculture in specific industry sectors where the networks of connected individuals are evident. The pathogenic decline comes about when a particular leadership dominates: “*power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely*” (Dalberg-Action, 1907, p. 504).

## 2.8 Monoculture, Diversity and Inclusiveness

As institutions become more diverse, there needs to be greater opportunities for inter- and extra- group mixing, interacting and communication. Institutions are important in building a democratic society and they need to be created where members with different responsibilities are included and can participate equally for the purposes of knowledge sharing which can only enrich the endeavours of the institution. These opportunities can be formal (official) and emergent. To experience this, compare an exclusive culture (i.e. one that is “open” by invitation or practice only to selected individuals) to a more diverse one, that is inclusive, which is open to a variety of ideas and influences. Exclusion is the result of a deliberate intention to reduce the number of people who can share in the knowledge of the elite group; and in some instances, this may be inadvertent. An inclusive culture is ultimately more resilient to decline as it can absorb a wider range of issues, strengthening it all the while. A diverse culture therefore does not have to be quarantined from outside influences to protect it. The following are some of the institutional-related questions that can change or limit inclusiveness, and hence greater diversity amongst participants:

- How well is the strategic direction of the institution understood so that members, both inside and outside the institution, can identify with this purpose;
- Does the leadership group take a big picture view in terms of the impact and time horizon of its institution?

- How accessible is relevant Information and data sources for all and is this communicated regularly?
- What is the extent of reciprocal trust, which is critical for building a collaborative culture? High trust and therefore group engagement is often associated with organisational or group size. If the institution is large, work groups are important for personal, face-to-face interaction.
- What is the extent to which the leadership engages with its followers?
- How responsible are all institutional participants for its work and behaviour? If this is high, is it open to self- or peer-review?
- How is it known, whether or not there is a high degree of integrity in the institution? Is there a code of conduct and are most members aware and follow this as well as the ethical principles of the institution? Is there a sense of professionalism throughout the institution? (see Chap. 8 for a further discussion around this); and
- What is the composition of the institution and its workforce profile? How this is balanced? Is the workforce relatively stable or transient?

Inclusive cultures take time to develop and this is not a straightforward process. Many of the variables above need to be addressed as they form the foundation of an inclusive culture. However, they are often seemingly messy and chaotic. The most important thing is to focus on creating space in terms of time and place for a “conversation” so that people can begin to exchange information initially, eventually formulate ideas and through this process overtime they will come to entrust each other. People need and must want to participate as this is a measure of them identifying and wanting to belong to the institution and follow its mission. It demonstrates what they believe in and value for what the ‘institution’ is doing. If trying to broaden a mono-culture then some of the above factors need to be addressed as well as initiating grass root triggers to encourage greater and more diverse participation through identifying champions within in the workplace. This will invigorate some shift and the leadership needs to use this to stimulate it further so it can be spread institutionally through

- developing a shared vision
- conducting intensive internal and external consultation, with professional facilitation
- communicating continuously to all staff using various media channels and feedback loops
- mentoring and coaching of informal leaders
- ensuring democratic process and structures for participation; and
- reinforcing institutional policies and codes to the above.

Culture is a tool for influence and change in institutions. The more sterile the culture, the less observable are the real forces of change and conversely, the forces of resistance. Through generations of leaders, a set of norms and values develop as well as a guiding purpose, that is, the current leader’s strategy and its implementation. For it to survive it needs to be open to opportunity and change. To withstand change requires a diverse range of thinking and responses which is less likely to occur in a mono-cultural context.

Early leadership thinking from 1940s onwards, of which managers of a certain generation experienced and learnt, reinforces assumptions of command and control, now deeply embedded in Western culture. This had led to not only in relative terms but also and less perceptibly, the unequal distribution of power between leaders and followers. Inherent to this is an acceptance that the leader is the one rightly in control and the test of 'good' leadership is a leader's ability to influence and get others to follow. Power is improbable, vague and ultimately fruitless, if it is not expressed as an exchange with each group accountable for their part.

While earlier thinking demonstrated how followers are influenced through an unwitting acceptance of the monoculture and the underpinning psychological and social structures as given (e.g. systems of authority, institutional hierarchy) as defined by the leader-follower relationship. Evidence of such thinking is reflected in relationships between god and disciple, king and subject, pope and flock, master and servant, manager and employee. Through this dimension, leadership theory itself reinforces social cohesion due to its capacity for engulfing leaders and followers into a ritual acceptance of this and in so doing, reinforcing the hierarchical structures demarcating the power of appointed leaders and the relative status of those outside these revered circles (see Durkheim, 1984). This belief is reinforced by positivist<sup>5</sup> theory. Cultural competence<sup>6</sup> goes some way in addressing this monoculturalism and will be discussed in Chap. 6.

It is understandable that resistance to the status quo is profound. Resistance involves an attempt to neutralise the legitimacy of the monoculture to destabilise its power and influence bases. However way the opponents justify it, resistance ensues when allegiance to one leader or a principle conflicts with that of another, especially where there is a difference in standing. In most cases, resisting a leader or the monoculture is passive until a crisis point is reached.

Throughout the twentieth century, theories of leadership assumed a prevailing monoculture. However in disciplines where an emphasis on the scientific method of research is less revered for example, in political economy, such assumptions are challenged. Political economists hold that there is a plurality of coexisting ideas and standpoints although mostly they contend that leaders employ coercion, incentives, and persuasion in varying degrees. The structural, legal and political context in which an institution works is significant to this. Each context has its own challenges, opportunities and constraints that are inimitable, including the opportunities and constraints of its incumbents. No one alone can identify conclusively what an institution "requires" by way of leadership, or in what order or quantity for its optimum development. Some leadership theorists conclude that leadership is about harmonising different viewpoints and seeking common ground whereas other political economists do not. For example, there are many accounts

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<sup>5</sup>Positivism theory holds that "causation lies in the external conditions, rather than in the minds of organisational members, and that situational imperatives determine the organisation, rather than that individuals exercise a free choice", in Tsoukas and Knudsen (2003).

<sup>6</sup>Multicultural competence first coined by Paul Pedersen in Pedersen (1988).

of how leaders have cast themselves or been viewed by others as “architects of political change” (Schofield, 2006).

The identity and status of the leader does make an impact. For example, Wood (2007) assessed the comparative impact of the U.S. presidents’ economic rhetoric. His analysis demonstrated that presidential speeches shaped a range of everyday issues such as the health of the economy, consumer confidence and choices to purchase or not, business investment, as well as interest rates. This finding was foreshadowed in earlier research by Jones and Olken (2005) who showed that changes in growth rates are associated with changes in the identity of the national leader. Further higher-status individuals were followed or better role models for others more regularly than lower status individuals (Eckel & Wilson, 2007). The political economist view of leadership focuses on how leaders are chosen, selected, removed and held accountable by and to those empowered to make important decisions (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, & Morrow, 2003). To what extent leaders have choice over how to assure agreement or acquiescence from their followers is something most test day in and out throughout their tenure as well as the measures they use to gain this either through coercion, “quasi-voluntary compliance” (Levi, 2006) or role modelling. The leadership literature gives little insight into this.

## 2.9 Leadership and Cultural Integration

Cultural integration is by definition, “an orientation to understand the cultural differences of each person in a multicultural or cross-cultural context - but strive to create something that is a combination of many cultural perspectives” (Caligiuri, Lepak, & Bonache, 2010, p. 94). The latter day studies of leadership have been more likely to emphasise cultural integration as opposed to cultural competence and how this assists individuals’ and groups’ capacity to make decisions and mobilise others, despite the constraints they face. In contrast to the earlier works, these theorists assume that structures provide leaders with access to resources which enable them to create strategies for action. The milieu in which this is played out employs culture as a symbolic resource using communication typically, email, social media, YouTube broadcasts and public performances. Such practices are normalised in people’s everyday lives. Studies of social and political movements such as climate change, political parties, labour movements, philanthropy, sport and social activities as well as managerial practice illustrate how people are willing to act (i.e. human agency). These studies have tilted people’s attention towards the potential for challenging official leader appointments and relationships in all spheres of life; take for example, women challenging the Church hierarchy.

Leadership is often seen in terms of normalising and governing followers’ action through its integration with the status quo (monoculture). As mentioned previously what is less in focus are the socio-political issues, with the aim of negating or contesting traditional hierarchies. While it could be assumed that transformative leadership embraces social equity, it may occur more as a matter of

compliance if the monoculture remains untouched. Thus leadership reinforces the institutional system and codes of power of the monoculture and upholds the current divisions between the ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups, thereby continuing to exclude particular groups from active participation in power.

To influence the leadership context, a sense of proportionality is required in balancing privilege, diversity and opportunity. This is a very postmodern view whereby the late twentieth century philosophers believed that there is no absolute fact or fixed meaning about leadership. Leadership is probably best understood for the purposes here as “trans-disciplinary” coupled with “a new principle of relativity, trans-cultural, transnational and encompasses ethics, spirituality and creativity” (Klein, 2004, p. 516).

## 2.10 Reflections on Leadership Thinking Today

As discussed previously, leadership as an expression developed as many words do by modifying its meaning over time through shifts in both its usage and its deployment in various contexts. This shift in meaning and usage mirrors the transmutation of leadership itself, such that it is a continuously moving goal. Consequently, its evolution as a concept and a process and practice in action is just as complex, nuanced and ambiguous as people’s understanding of the human condition. In earlier times, it was assumed that people relied on their leaders and were loyal to them, especially publically. Today, people are appointed and it is often more expedient to say leader than use an alternative word.

Viewing leadership through the prism of language, action and identity is important to see it in all its facets. Leadership as a form of rhetoric provides important insights into how a leader crafts a vision, develops goals and messages to communicate meaning to their followers. Communication through the various media channels at our disposal today: twitter, email, YouTube etc. creates leaders overnight or at least, celebrity-leaders.

### 2.10.1 *Leader as the New Celebrity*

As mentioned in Chap. 1, throughout the centuries outstanding leaders were idealised when their influence made sense for the populace. How genuinely loyal this following is, has always been problematical for a leadership. Leaders respond to the expectations of many stakeholders and followership. Complicating this relationship and the need to fulfil often unrealistic expectations is the fact that leaders often take up their positions of influence without being fully prepared or in some cases willing to do so, which can be difficult especially if they are ill-prepared.

### ***2.10.2 The Social Construction of Leadership***

Even for those most experienced leaders have not usually performed to the level of leadership required for their new role and so often they are confronted with a high degree of uncertainty and even instability about this, emanating from within the institution itself. Adding to the uncertainty are the broader contextual factors such as the market economy that feeds into this volatility. In taking up their position, new leaders need to respond quickly so as not only to stabilise matters but also to demonstrate that they are in control of their new found situation. On top of this, what new leaders would like to do or what they believe they can do may be risky for those employing them as well as for their followers and for them.

As a result, leaders may feel incapable or vulnerable in confronting the enormity of the leadership task so they develop a persona, a protective layer or a contrived image. The less prepared leaders are for the role, the more they seek self-protection and the gap widens between their public and private personae. The difference between the two personae is not a sham, although the leader or indeed, their followers, may feel this is the case especially if the false persona is too dissimilar to the core person that it shields. A protective shield, of course, is what many leaders used in ancient times for physical battles. Although life is different today, the battles that is, the crusades, the conflicts, the confrontations and even fracas, remain. A convoluted pattern of leadership emerges so much so that the incumbent leaders become 'lost' at times in its intricacies. What they often do not realise is that their confusion is noticeable to others. In an attempt to maintain a functional leadership, they engage in further self-mythologising and some embody the contrived persona and even integrate it within their core self. To some extent, most people represent themselves in this way, moving to and fro between public and private selves. Where there is a strong alignment between the two selves, this is not easily noticed by others and most people function easily between public and private spheres, understanding the different requirements for public presentation. Some people master the process to the point where there is only a rare glimpse of the private person by others in an unguarded or even well staged unveiling of the "real" self. However when there is a greater distinction between the public and private persona, the incumbent will experience a degree of dysfunction and even distress in trying to reconcile the public and private selves. One way that this is done is by reducing any experience of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and so it leads to an enduring self- and public-mythology. This myth can spawn a degree of idolisation usually at first and if the wider the gap between the two selves, the public version subsumes the private one including personal values and principles. Chapter 7 on ethical leadership discusses this phenomenon further.

Some leaders at least in the beginning have a stronger sense of the construction and promotion of their public persona and depending on how public their profile is or needs to be, they will even employ public relations experts to help them prepare and manage this development. The preparation of candidates for political leadership is an example of this process. However increasingly today many institutions engage



in this practice, for example, leaders of political parties, religious leaders, corporate leaders and more and more, high profile universities, schools and local government do so too.

Consequently, the push for institutions to be competitive or first in the stakes means that more and more leaders will need to groom themselves for public leadership and exposure through the various communication channels. In this, they will assume a role which needs to be aligned to the institution's vision or redirect it based on their own reputation or personal identification, brand if you like. For some leaders, this will be a familiar experience and part and parcel of their expectations for their role. For others, it will be a new, surprising and even, startling experience. Along with the capability set, (technical and interpersonal) usually required for leadership, leaders will need to enact a public face not only for their institution but also for themselves and the two will need to be aligned, adding another layer of complexity to the leadership equation.

This can be a deeply discomfoting feeling for some leaders who undergo a sense of acting out, something that they either are not or that they are submitting to. It becomes dysfunctional when they become overly dependent on a persona that is too distinct from their own core self, resulting in a sense of being out of control. What exacerbates this sense of false self for the leaders is that they cannot derive from the situation a strong sense of authentic selfhood, something that all individuals require for a healthy well being. More particularly, they may begin to feel that they cannot rely on those who assist them in constructing and promoting their leadership. Leaders may fear their dependence on this and on others for supporting it (Winnicott, 1965). Dysfunctional feelings about leadership can occur from the outset or develop over time. Regardless of when it occurs, this dependency can become the defining characteristic of leadership and can draw a leader towards conforming to the requirements that they believe others, their boards, followers and other stakeholders deem to be desirable if for no other reason that their leadership depends on it. Satisfying and pleasing the Board, their constituency or follower brings a feeling of security that they need to maintain if their leadership is to be sustained. Overly satisfying this can exacerbate the sense of discomfort. However believable it is in the beginning, eventually almost no-one is deluded by this collusion and the leader knows this. The need for leadership coaching is apparent.

### ***2.10.3 Mirroring the Leader***

A mirroring process by others in the leadership equation is aligned to this process through role modeling. Role modeling occurs when people identify with others that they admire, often leaders with a high public profile, even over-exposed, due to their prolific visibility through multiple and 24 h access to mass media channels including broadcast, (e.g. chat and business channels); Internet and print (e.g. biographies).



Leadership relies on a followership based on an aspirational frame of reference which followers seek; perhaps for them it is a pathway to a different and maybe a more successful future. Aspiration is often based on what Herzberg (1987) termed *extrinsic motivations* or incentives such as money, fame, and image. If followers are dependent on these they will model themselves on the extrinsic attributes of leadership in the hope that they will attain them too. The intrinsic form of aspiration occurs when followers identify with the vision, values and the direction that the leader outlines and integrate it with their own or indeed find a strong connection with it from the outset – a form of “fitting” in. Followers will feel more connected to the leader in this case and be more readily mentored and coached and open to thinking about ideas and methods different to their own.

Similarly, role modelling is a process if formalised, whereby followers are encouraged to believe in and identify with leaders who are similar in thinking to themselves and/or to the type of person or leader that they would like to become. The aspirations of seemingly independent and even geographically dispersed followers come together so closely that it appears as if there is a collective narcissism taking hold to create something outside and beyond their normal life, so that they have something or “an image” to believe in and admire that is, the celebrity leader, which is in turn they see as a reflection of themselves. This movement is not something that is necessarily devised or manufactured, it just happens and takes hold.

Increasingly the notion of leader, especially of those heading up public institutions, is likely to be carefully devised, scripted, orchestrated and promoted. However while the belief in the leader may not be one that is initially or customarily accepted by all; it is quite rapidly absorbed into mainstream thinking due to the interconnected world in which people live today. This process occurs, in no small measure, due to instant media communications now at everyone’s disposal such as Twitter. Once it has passed through to the public’s consciousness, it transmutes to an article of devotion and ultimately, a publically held conviction, not only by the leaders but also by their constituent followers.

The more frequent exposure of individual celebrity leaders, the greater their cumulative effect on the population or constituent segment of it. Paralleling this growth of ‘experts’ is a growing groundswell of familiarisation of these leaders which ultimately launches them as cultural icons, for example, Steve Jobs, Warren Buffett, which remain long after their time has passed. Margaret Thatcher is a rare female example of this longevity with a film about her released in 2012. Apart from a strong sense of self, a vision and a directness of thinking, little seems to connect these leaders with each other, as each invests something different in their iconic leadership.

#### **2.10.4 “Celebrity-isation” of Leaders**

Our society has moved from iconic leaders, leaders who created unforgettable character, which embodied some attribute that was admired, to celebrities. “Celebrity-isation” integrates belief, aspirations and identification into leadership by followers. A celebrity

leader takes various forms: firstly, the emergent person with some outstanding feature and then goes on to enhance their standing due to achievements which go beyond meeting the expectations about their performance by all, including themselves. Whenever a celebrity leader emerges, it is a surprise, innovative and a break from the past. Mostly however, it is not. This is a point that is developed further in Chap. 6.

Secondly, there is the ‘overrated’ leader often supported by a team on the side line but is seen as someone on whom everyone depends including the Board, the followers and the shareholders. Despite this, leaders come and go and the institution survives and even prospers. A lot of gratuitous attention is given to the leader when perhaps there should be a greater focus on their followers.

Thirdly there is the leader, celebrity or not, who is narcissistic and through this process is persuaded by others to believe in their invulnerability; often an image that is invalid and cannot possibly succeed. Narcissistic leaders are often deluded and have an unreal or false perception of their standing, achievements or influence, which others recognise and do not disabuse them of. A case of “the emperor’s new clothes syndrome” (Andersen, 1989), through which the leader is continuously upheld as the principal person, because everyone is afraid to articulate what is tacit knowledge; or to come to terms with what others know or because they fear the consequences if they do not comply with what is expected of them. Followers can become deceived too and inadvertently collude in this type of leadership. For example, many celebrity leaders become deluded about their prospective performance due to the media hype and the public’s belief in their success. Often these statements are carefully crafted in response to the need to live up to the expectations of sponsors, supporters and followers. Fauconnier and Turner (2002, p. 217) called such half-fantasised blends “counter-factuals” and report that leaders resort to counterfactual thinking every time they “pretend, imitate, lie, fantasise, deceive, delude, consider alternatives, simulate, make models, and propose hypotheses”. Similarly, Goffman (1959, p. 81) argues that self-delusion results in self-deception which becomes inevitable when two different perspectives are held and intertwined in the leader’s *modus operandi*. The two roles the individual plays compel them to employ double talk, that is, two fundamentally dissimilar responses: deceit and feigning.

Using this classification system of celebrity leader, the coach will encounter all four types and many variant forms in between. However the first two ideal types: the emergent celebrity and the over-valued celebrity leader are easier to identify and perhaps consequently easier to engage with at least initially. However working with them for the benefit of growth for the coachee will be challenging as it will be in the case of the latter two forms of leader: the narcissistic and the deluded. The narcissistic and deluded leaders, given the range of their thinking that is likely to fall outside the realm of what is mostly expected from the actions and thinking of everyday (as opposed to celebrity), leaders will require support and assistance beyond the skills of most executive coaches unless they are also qualified clinical psychologists or similar. In my experience, narcissistic and deluded leaders are not open to the usual logical reflection and reasoning frames used by executive coaches due to their solid conviction that “they are right and everyone else is wrong” or they “just don’t see or hear what everyone else is telling them”. This blocking of external feedback

by narcissistic and deluded leaders is usually accompanied by the extraordinary content of their convictions and these also do not sit well with most of the followers who may not be able to speak with them or out about this.

Some followers may hold similarly held convictions at least for a while. An obvious example concerns leaders of religious or political sects, pop stars and the like. Depending on how far removed the sect is from the mainstream culture, such leaders are more likely to be delusional. On the other hand, strong convictions of followers about their leaders are not restricted to marginal figures and for a time can be applied to mainstream celebrity leadership due to the public's lack of knowledge about what is going on behind the scenes compared to what the public can see. This is where the ethical stance to leadership and coaching is so critical and is discussed in Chap. 7.

Leaders themselves are not necessarily responsible for this situation as they may be simply living out and up to the reflected expectations of their minders, those close to them, their followers and the public at large. Moreover in certain walks of life, business, government, politics, academia, opposing beliefs are commonplace. For example take political opponents running for national leadership. Each will hold with great confidence, strong beliefs about certain things that they believe are vital for the public and, in so doing are drawing from their unique subjective experiences. Both demonstrate an extreme and unambiguous imperviousness to the other's experiences as well as to each other's persuasive, counter-arguments. For each, the opinions of the other bear no truth and their proposed policies are unworkable. Obviously in the case of both, neither is deluded. Both are expounding views which are highly valued at times, overvalued at other times, or overrated with different segments of the public. However on the face of it some segments of the public taking sides with one or other of those leaders, would argue that one of them is deluded and even perhaps narcissistic. So in everyday life it is difficult for most of us to sort out which celebrity leaders have substance and which do not until their track record and performance is experienced or can be traced back over time. On many occasions, it is expressed that in reference to a specific leader's performance or reputation that history will record their achievements as significant. The only time it is distinguishable is when the celebrity leader is spruiking a new idea or innovation, which lies outside most other's comfort zones. If their public pronouncements are intense this can further arouse suspicion and rejection especially in academic or political arenas.

"Celebrity-isation" is manufactured by both leaders and followers through a number of ideas generated internally and externally, which could be considered delusion-like in the extreme or to a lesser extent, overrated. How the celebrity leader is perceived and is managed depends on the personal presentation and the past experiences of both the leaders in question and their followers. Regardless of people's philosophical perspective, leaders influence society's thinking about issues and events, and their ideas and values are inevitably reproduced in some way. To accept their influence or impact, passively is core to followership. There are few corners of people's lives where they follow others on impulse; parents and teachers are examples and celebrities can be the other. What is the process that underlies their influence or adulation?

One way of looking at this is through the use of symbols employed by leaders. Communicating experiences requires putting them into a suitable language and the telling of the story itself as well as the interpretations of the events by the speaker and listeners. Language brings together the reality of the objective outer world as well as the subjective inner world (Bourdieu, 1991). The audience perceive these leaders as both metaphoric and in some way, relevant to their personal pathway and the professional and personal changes they wish to make along the way. Leaders use discourse and words as symbolisation. For example, the catch-cries by which they become known, the clichés and other verbal devices work by focusing on specific symbolic-discursive elements and in so doing, reinforcing specific norms and stereotypical images of self or others. Leaders appeal to followers and their words become firmly solidified in their role and all that they represent.

The greater the integration of the figure head aspects of leader with their inner self, the more likely it is that the audience will become favourably inclined towards them. Leadership with the common touch or what some have described as the “Queen of Hearts” is a current phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the followership has an opportunity to integrate their own thoughts and feelings which can then be articulated and communicated and just like media ‘opinion polls’ can propel the leadership into prominence or cause it to flounder. What the followership think, act and say publically will have a huge impact on the quality of the leadership.

Consequently, leaders use the media to their advantage on the one hand, to boost their popularity and conversely this ploy for publicity often backfires on their image and their private self. This promotional process occurs in leadership contexts, whether these are governments, corporations, universities, boards and so on. Rituals of performance and all its channels (e.g. YouTube) constitute wide influence today especially within diverse or dissenting sub-cultures. To that end, leadership is now scripted, rehearsed, performed and analysed. Symbolically condensed units of meaning to represent key elements of the leader’s experience have socially structuring effects to create a sense of community building; the seeding of solidarity, the solidifying of group values and beliefs as well as addressing emotional or moral plights. The individual perception of audience members reinforces socioeconomic relations of power between themselves and those of their leader.

For example many political leaders as well as organisational leaders find their influence ebbing away as other members make their mark. When this occurs, the sub leader can rise to become, for all intents and purposes, the ‘real’ leader, even if not in name, whose philosophy becomes the guiding force for the current leadership and who sets the agenda. The sub-leader can emerge especially if former rivals fall away or do not exist.

On surveying it all, how leadership plays out in the media often strips it of real meaning and converts it into a rigid, indeed evangelical view. In the process, the awareness that imaginary symbols act as a surrogate in that they stand for something else, often with a gap between aspiration and reality; this is not visible and often overlooked. People are confronted with such an array of opportunities

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<sup>7</sup>Popularised by Princess Diana in the UK in the 1990s.

on which to found subjectivity and identity and are overwhelmed to the extent that there is a constant need to reaffirm for themselves, the beliefs and values to which they subscribe or wish to ascribe to and to build a framework for the meaning of their own professional lives.

What this means for everyday leaders is that people are capable of deluding themselves in terms of their past success, their current influence as well as their contributions. Leaders often overrate their impact and take credit for achievements that their followers made. From a followers' perspective, leaders often have a heightened sense of their position and are seen as overlooking poor results.

Delusions become a problem for leaders when they need to adapt their actions and approach to changing circumstances. This problem is more visible with high profile leaders e.g. chief executive officers of renowned institutions, chairs of boards and political figures. Such leaders find it difficult to modify their strategies partly due to the confidence built up with their past success and partly when they begin to receive feedback that suggests change, they either think others are confused or do not understand what they are trying to do. As a consequence, leaders reject the advice and feedback or shift the blame to someone else and soldier on along their current course of action. Leaders, like all of us, can become resistant to change, when all the signs suggest that they need to do so. Their optimism buoys them for a time against the pending failure. These false beliefs in one's own standing and capability can also affect a leader's ethical stance discussed in Chap. 7.

## 2.11 Misplaced Loyalty

Loyalty is a devotional response, and like celebrity worship or religious fervour, can dissolve almost as quickly as it develops. In leadership terms, loyalty is an interesting question – is it about commitment, fulfilling your duty, supporting relationships, abiding by values or an ideology? Are people bound by the loyalties they forge? Fletcher (1993, p. 171) saw loyalty as “a life in which interaction with others becomes the primary means for solving problems”. Others view it as an interpersonal relationship that can lead people to act unfairly in favour of some, while overlooking the rights of others (Ewin, 1993).

Hirschman (1970) claimed that loyalty requires a spoken and unspoken obligation of followers (he referred to employees) to submit to their leaders' interests. Whatever the intent of loyalty, it is focused on the relationship between the leader and the followers and their purpose and motivations which may or may not be aligned with that of the institutions. Loyalty is sustained by gaining privileges, earned or not. It relies on the “boys' networks” and the “girls” being “good girls” often leading to resentment by those in the workplace who do not comply and therefore are labeled ‘disloyal’. The disloyal group is viewed as potentially unsafe and every attempt is made to marginalise them. Distrust sets in not to mention the possibility of corruption.

The leadership conditions that support the loyalty phenomenon include a convenient equation between an ambitious leader who relies on personal influence and power and views this as or more important than serving the wider interests of the institution. Adding to this equation are the followership, who also shrewdly perceive the benefits of serving the leader's interests and needs rather than those of the institution. A leader's compelling vision or inspiration is a powerful way of engendering loyalty, which like love is a complex emotional response. For example, followers attribute an inspiring leader with some special quality or power providing them with a deeply felt relationship emotionally, spiritually, intellectually or in some combination of these,<sup>8</sup> even though leaders and followers may never meet face to face. Others who are not equally persuaded see the loyalty of followers as unfounded and become critical and unsympathetic to them. A leadership based on personal loyalty can flounder when the ties to the leader fade and followers become resistant in defense of their previous devotion.

Leaders use followers and the workplace as a context to give voice to their 'intensity' and even realise their fantasies. A large part of this requires followers to uphold and legitimise their values, actions and decisions. Again the divide-and-conquer approach coupled with the consequences for the loyal and disloyal operates here and is used to include and exclude people, opinions and experiences that do not align with their credo. Organisational accoutrements such as branding, the use of logos, uniforms, office accoutrements, self-portraits, media interviews and other forms of leader promotion are used to reflect them and are iconic of their pursuits. It also provides ways in which enduring involvement, providing others display a willingness to go to considerable lengths to follow them and secure their goals.

Little has been done to explore obsessive or fanatical leadership in terms of the motives and actions of that kind of leader. Fanatical leaders make choices that appear, to most, to be illogical, mystifying or incorrect although may act logically in other aspects of their professional and personal life. Fanatical leaders are not identical and vary on commonalities such as obsessiveness, addictions and fervour of beliefs. Most people display intensity, to a greater or lesser extent, in their lives. What contributes to such intensity varies and most people cannot sustain it for long periods, if the failure of "resolutions" is anything to go by. However the conditions for creating fanatical leadership exist where predisposition, objectives and goal-directed actions are brought together, with extreme intensity being a likely outcome (Haynal, Molnar, & de Puymege, 1987).

Fanatical leaders see the cause of all problems as a force of opposition and the only way is for them to counteract with an equal force of 'good' (Daly, 2002). "The fanatic believes himself to be in possession of the truth which confers upon him omniscience, omnipotence, and invulnerability" (Haynal, Molnar, & de Puymège, 1983, p. 36). Many leaders in turn derive narcissistic pleasure from personal loyalty and often their celebrity status or at the very least, high profile, which only serves to reinforce the intensity of their actions.

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<sup>8</sup> Similar to the ancient Greek notions of love: *agape* (unconditional), *éros* (romantic/sexual), *philia* (friendship), and *storgē* (affection) as described in CS. Lewis's *Til We Have Faces*, loyalty is multi-faceted.

Institutional loyalty, in contrast to leader loyalty, is a form of commitment to a co-operative pursuit rather than an individual one. For example, it can be an association or a network which goes beyond an individual leader such as the medical fraternity, the Catholic Church, the Masons, a criminal gang and so on. It usually involves a leadership circle within and outside the institution, reciprocally sustaining each other. Institutional loyalty pertains to a cause, a philosophy, a code of conduct or principle or a professional code of practice. While it sits beyond both personal and organisational interests, it may contain these if all three components are aligned with the philosophy. Another way of describing institutional loyalty is through professional accountability as its mainstay is founded on a followership being held responsible with their actions being evaluated against approved codes of practice, ascribed to by leaders, followers and clients or customers of the services and products delivered by them.

Influence and decision making is conducted within a sphere of professional accountability and is endorsed legally and morally. Followership is governed by the dignity of the professional and institutional codes that all have endorsed. The leader and follower are as much servants to the espoused cause as each other and in this they form a professional partnership, each with their role to enact.

The implications of loyalty for shaping a cultural context are significant in terms of values and relationships. Cultures rely on a deeply internalised DNA system, which is transmitted from one generation to the next. If professional accountability is embedded both the leaders and followers comply and in so doing, reinforce not only the values of the institution in serving the public interest but also the interpersonal and social context in which they work.

Self-perceptions and actions are a reflection in part first of how people think about themselves as leaders and followers. Second, the context in which leadership and followership occurs is multi-segmented. How leaders think about their leadership is linked to the opinions of others and the assumed expectations of their constituency (team, institution, community or electorate). The same is true for followers. Analysing the feedback (in whatever form) and addressing expectations is rarely straightforward.

Most feedback is not delivered in a situation where the recipient has been prepared to receive it. Consequently most dread and rarely welcome it. The reason for this is that feedback is often delivered insensitively to the recipient's needs and instead of reflecting on it; it is usually rejected out-of-hand and if not, falsely or poorly interpreted. However if people see feedback as a 'normal' part of the interactions and relationships they will be expecting it and more open to listening to it and interpreting it in an appropriate way.

## **2.12 So the Next Question Is What Makes Up Leadership as We Have Discovered Thus Far?**

It is important to state that leadership is a complex interaction between leaders and their followers, direct and indirect. Followers are co-creators of leadership and their continuous investment in it extends beyond the immediate relationship with



leadership incumbents. Followers become part of a social process that is explicit especially when different interests are at stake. Similarly, the leader becomes a cultural or political inscriber whose sway depends on their negotiation with followers. They become encoders, re-encoders or decoders of the logic that underpins their leadership, which becomes self-propagating ensuring that the monoculture thrives.

Dynamic leadership is about recognising the opportunities and limits of leadership including what can be achieved now and what must be executed at the right time. Undoubtedly, leaders play complex roles that shape what and how people feel, see and respond to it. Followers see the leader as someone who attempts to develop a high level of cultural and social understanding of institutional life which either meets their expectations or does not. Others see the leader as someone who attempts to improve what they do. Another version of the leader is someone who conquers frontiers, while a third view is someone who symbolises a higher ideal. These three views are not distinct. The particular frame in which the leader or leadership is envisioned, whether it is of their own or someone else's, dominates how people lead, how people follow and how people coach. It plays a critical role in the reproduction of the social and political status quo.

Many leaders promote social transformation; few achieve it and fewer still engage in institutional reconstruction that changes the status quo and leads to “rocking the boat” often complemented with deep resentment and resistance. A leader is envisioned with a critical and broad view of social structures, capable of discerning how to re-encode or decode boundaries and relationships. Stephen Jobs is an example of this type of leader. Jobs literally crossed both the symbolic and concrete boundaries that divide and order innovation, consumerism as well as the relationship with the consumers not only in relation to Apple products but also in how relationships with consumers have been fundamentally altered through new technological opportunities. Jobs since his death is often described as a genius, an innovator and the focus is on the individual leader rather than the enterprise. Jobs and Apple are synonymous, although he was not always viewed as the leader of choice.

### ***2.12.1 Leading Through Vision***

As stated previously vision remains central to an understanding of leadership. Most people think of vision and leadership as synonymous, and both have fascinated and fixated commentators, journalists and academics alike. The rise of the celebrity leader has reinvigorated the importance of vision for leadership in 2012 following its popularity in the 1980s and then its decline in the decade or so that followed. Part of the reason for its reinvigoration is that leaders need to invest more effort into thinking through the future direction of their institutions due to globalisation, a more intense market economy and rapid technological change so as to remain competitive (Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

A leader's vision is simply “a statement about future goals and the requisite actions needed to attain those goals” (Kohles, Bligh, & Carsten, 2012, p. 2) or



“the strategic plan that will help accomplish organisational goals” (Hall, 2011, p. 73). Vision serves the three purposes for both the leaders themselves but more importantly, for followers. It sheds light on future direction for strategy, especially in the light of change, identifying priorities, and sorting out choices for key decisions (based on Fry, Hannah, Noel & Walumbwa, 2011, p. 261). This is vital for strong followership and how others will view the institution and the particular brand of leadership and whether they will “buy” into it (Criswell & Cartwright, 2010, p. 6).

Leaders need to articulate what is important for their leadership. It is not frivolous in intent or statement. A vision is an expression of the circumstances that the leader sees and must demonstrate to followers an authenticity of reflection and insight. A vision needs to be clarified, understood, promoted and sponsored continuously if followers are to embrace it and indeed cohabitate within the leadership equation. At the same time, leaders realise much of what they advocate represents a particular position and line of reasoning which is open for debate. Consultation with followers is the mainstay for this process to occur. Flexibility of thinking will result in leaders and coaches appreciating that the vision and decisions made around strategy are imperfect as the workplace is changeable.

### ***2.12.2 Building Relationships***

Few leaders are influential without an extensive followership, often measured today by the number of followers on a Twitter account! Leadership is more than the sum total of successful or failed leaders and more than the sum of any one person’s characteristics. Few leaders make it on talent alone as leadership requires the patronage of others, not only supporters and followers but also a sponsor, a mentor or their network, a political party or indeed, a faction if in politics, the Board and so on. The existence of power brokers (or “leader makers”), underlies the history of successful leadership feats and coups in almost every field. These are largely unseen or overlooked in the emergence of leadership. This is not the case in Australia in 2012, where the overthrowing of the former Prime Minister by his then deputy, a woman, remains a firm topic of discussion worldwide, to this day.

Leadership provokes questions about power, success, failure, morality and malevolence as evidenced by the focus of the media on the rise and fall of leaders and the reasons behind both. When a successful or failed leadership is publicised, it is often considered against the leader’s aptitudes and flaws. Overemphasis on one or other, narrows insight into leadership; not only does it attribute success or failure to an individual but it also neglects the complexity of human interrelationships and the stakeholders’ complicity with it. Deterministic influences outside a leader’s control need to be acknowledged, for example, the global economy and unpredictable markets, government regulations that contribute to a leader’s incapacity to be omnipotent. Chance and accident (normal or otherwise) need to be understood in this context too and are discussed below.

However as suggested, the idea of a flawed attribute or decision is often blamed when leadership failure ensues whether it is a media report, a court ruling or a Board decision to scapegoat the leader). Scapegoating does not necessarily eliminate predictable or unpalatable blemishes and this is where the coach steps in to salvage the leader's reputation. Scapegoating is defeating; it renders people with a sense of pointlessness and despondency, in this case about the state of national and public institutions and their leadership. Both successful and failed leadership emphasise the private person in a public world and places a focus on human failures rather than the moral, ethical and emotional dimensions on leading as well as the externalities, and the political aspects. It is inevitably alienating.

Most commentators, in academe and the media, concede that the greatest insight into leadership occurs following catastrophic events such as the GFC, accidents and conflict. Despite fresh insights leaders are still characterised as courageous, resilient, assertive, prophetic and physically appealing. They cannot be weak or beset with flaws such as depression, anxiety, uncertainty even though many throughout history have been often successfully and sometimes to their detriment. There are few people who live without flaws becoming self-evident. A few leaders fess up to such when there is nothing to be lost but rarely expose this either beforehand or at the peak of their career as they would not be accepted, promoted or celebrated. In summary, leadership is shaped by the:-

- external environment, institutional framework including regulations, policies and situations of a given enterprise within this;
- diverse personal characteristics, capability and motivations of the leaders, followers, and other stakeholders in the situation;
- diverse interpretations of the leaders, followers, and other stakeholders especially about the 'way' and purposes of the enterprise and how action them;
- working and networking relationships amongst the leaders, followers, and other stakeholders; and
- history of the achievements, crises and collapses of the enterprise (Based on Kilburg & Donohue, [2011](#))

### ***2.12.3 Leading Through Surprises***

The global reach of business today demonstrates how interdependent the social and economic world is. In spite knowing this, recent history shows that institutions often fail to think both locally and globally. Leadership is recognised within a defined domain based on actions and outcomes. What kind of imagination is required to conceptualise problems of unseen complexity and to lead valiantly and responsibly in the face of the challenges this portends?

Catastrophic events and accidents, such as the GFC, earthquake, and tsunamis are unlikely but do occur with significant aftershocks. While all three occurred in the twenty-first century so far and with recurrence, most leaders have to manage the

shocks and the unexpected during their term. Business and organisational failures result in leader anxiety often because they seem to violate people's need for cause and effect. In hindsight what seemed stable and dependable, a business, a community or a financial market, suddenly is not and the source for a chaotic turn of events is not always apparent. What is clear though is that certainty itself compels people to seek reassurance: they need to understand why and how to avoid or minimise it in the future so as to alleviate the anxiety about the unknown. In so doing people seek to reduce their anxiety (Nietzsche, 1998).

The GFC for example, climate change for another, tries leaders' capacity to imagine the distant and often unobservable strands of inter-connectivity that intertwine all parts of the global economy together and that make social, economic and political concerns indivisible. This means that leaders need a deep awareness stimulated often by direct experience that acknowledges realities beyond people's immediate sphere. Moreover, business and economic change requires our capacity to live morally in the context of uncertainty that a newly expanded sense of community has created.

What is needed, then, is to foster an approach suitable to adjust to the problems created over long periods of time, like a mutation as well as a restored sense of what it means for leadership.

#### **2.12.4 *Leading Collectively***

More than at any other point in human history, the diversity and connectedness of our world, largely due to the Internet, although not exclusively, is being realised. It is a complex web of interdependency that often seems invisible, intangible, or at least difficult to fathom quantitatively. More than that, the Internet is equalising the relationship between leaders and followers, between suppliers and consumers and turning these notions on their heads. With the Internet, knowledge and information is accessible to all. Leaders will have to learn what people want, study the nature of thought and human desire, and be expert listeners.

Building a culture of cooperation is essential for organisational vitality. The influence of formal leaders like the CEO can have a remarkable influence on others. If leaders want to guide change, it is essential that they engage followers who in turn have their own authority to do so (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2008, p. 145). Each institution has a given culture which constrains leadership in terms of its own stated and unstated expectations. Over time, leaders and followers alike develop a set of unquestioned assumptions that operate silently in the background to sustain the *modus operandi* about the workings of the institution. These assumptions affect communication patterns, role expectations, exchange and reciprocity, and alliances and relationships. All of these are internalised which means often that they endure the most insistent or novel attempts at change.

Leadership requires, perhaps more than ever before, due to global interconnectivity, that people work collectively, morally and ethically together. Despite a

leader's aspiration for success, they are dependent on others at times without fully acknowledging this. The extent of their interdependence with followers is apparent when they encounter resistance to their leadership in some way, for example, a refusal to accept a change program. Part of the issue is the failure to recognise their interdependency with followers and consequently also the failure to consult with them and if they do, their failure to accept their feedback or assessment.

Working with followers goes beyond requesting feedback or participation as this borders on reactive at best and passive at worst. It requires active dialogue between the leader and followers with both parties actively engaged in the debate especially about new directions, proposed changes or dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Critical engagement requires self-management, commitment, competence (master skills) and focus, and courage (credibility and honesty). Follower development is a leader's utmost responsibility. Willingness to move beyond comfort zones is fully expected of tomorrow's leader. Emerging security threats demand that we do so (Kelley, 1996).

Understanding what followers expect from leaders is critical. If you think about your local politician, your general medical practitioner or your boss, you want each of them to demonstrate competence and be experienced; you want them to act authentically and be committed to their role; you want them to be able to communicate and effect change as required; and you want them to work well with their colleagues and instill teamwork and be approachable.

### ***2.12.5 Leadership and Learning***

When leaders find the institution that they have been leading is not travelling well, a realisation gradually occurs. The danger of ad hoc learning in the absence of rigorous action-reflection leads to decidedly idiosyncratic outcomes. Intentional development, periodic self-assessment, and regular reflection with peers on challenging situations strengthen and focus what one learns on the job. Learning without any translation into new modes of thought, action, and interaction is not sufficient.

Strategies for apprehending the sphere of influence require leaders to consider the wider domain in which they work, to call on suggestions to overcome obstacles and to weigh up all the potential options and outcomes. This is fundamental management learning, although so few leaders attend to it and fall victim to their own leadership.

Taking the lead is a challenging task in itself as it entails is not only self-survival but also ensuring the endurance of the institution being led as well as its enhancement. It is all the more acute today as regardless of industry type, size of enterprise, most leaders are in unique positions due to the potential publicity surrounding their position, their institution and their decision outcomes including how they manage risk and control risk appetite. It may be interesting to compare leaders who are selected or appointed as oppose to those who volunteer. The leaders drive for identity in an increasingly wider realm is often combined with cunning marketing that feeds off itself to create a public profile for the incumbent.

If a leader achieves high profile leadership whether this attracts wide publicity or simply recognition within their own sphere of influence, this means a leadership advantage for them, that is, an ‘optimal experience’ for most leaders (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Following on from this, many leaders refer to the *intense* feelings of enjoyment and pleasure they get out of the leadership experience, regardless of whether they are a figurehead, a pivotal decision maker or a trailblazer. Some of this pleasure is due to the response and in some cases, adulation from followers. Their primary access to reality is through their leadership and this reflected admiration – hence the ‘celebrity-isation’ of leadership. Other parts of it are associated with confronting or introducing new ‘ideas’ mental and physical endurance in working with challenging people, influencing others, having to make pivotal decisions, and the distress of working long hours including travel and being available to others as needed – usually 24/7 in today’s world. The opportunity to introduce new ideas today is limited and this is discussed further in Sect. 6.10 and Chap. 8: *Letters from Leaders*.

Through many revisions from the early twentieth Century to now, from Kafka to Sartre, through the various intellectual revolts against positivism, the idealism around leadership and leaders has lessened.

## 2.13 Conclusion

Considering the bulk of leadership theory with all its complexities, ambiguities and irreducible differences, it needs to be evaluated it in intellectual, philosophical and cultural terms and not accepted at face value. In thinking through leadership, it has to be done within the context of an institutional framework in which it resides. Leadership needs to be seen holistically as well as its component parts. Leadership continuity and discontinuity, as well as its multi-dimensional continuum operating on many different levels of context, content, form and meaning are part of this.

Despite all the decades of searching for a scientific rigour to prove a definitive leadership theory, in many ways leadership research and writing today, with its focus on transformational has inevitably to its early biographical roots of the 1950s, when much of academic literature focused on individual traits, the personality or character of the leader incumbent, his (and it usually was) personal influence as much as the power of the position or what Weber termed ‘charisma’ (Weber, 1993). Today we have become addicted to plot-driven leadership if the mass media stories are anything to go by as if the media is the nearest thing we have to knowledge today.<sup>9</sup>

Their significance lies not only in what they tell us about leadership but also about human nature and often their actions are larger-than-life as a consequence of being played out in the media and from here we deduce the moral compass of leadership. Only when it suits people, do they dismiss the narrators of these media tales

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<sup>9</sup>This thought is based on George Eliot’s claim that “... ‘art’ is the nearest thing to life”.

as unreliable. Instead based on what people read or observe, they attribute leaders with minimal psychological and moral distinctions as if they belong to a particular breed; certainly not their own.

It will be apparent from this discussion how vital the coach is within the leadership equation.

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