

The Evolving Nature of Leadership

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

GRACE LEE BOGGS

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

Love it or hate it, the concepts of leaders and leadership are ubiquitous in contemporary society. This chapter begins with civil rights activist and feminist scholar Grace Lee Boggs’s reframing of a Hopi quote that captures a central theme of these reactions to and feelings about leadership . . . they often reflect an outward gaze. They illustrate the longing we have for someone else to make the social structures we navigate (e.g., work, community, society) function better and our deep disappointment when this does not happen. Sometimes they even capture the ways in which we feel

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

WHY STUDY LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP?

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

More pragmatic rationales for the study of leadership exist as well. Bennis (2007) reminds us, “In the best of times, we tend to forget how urgent the study of leadership is. But leadership always matters” (p. 2). He goes on to share “the four most important threats facing the world today are: (a) a nuclear or biological catastrophe, whether deliberate or accidental; (b) a world-wide epidemic; (c) tribalism and its cruel offspring, assimilation; and finally, (d) the leadership of our human institutions” (p. 5). You could add to Bennis's list issues associated with rapid globalization, persistent domestic and international human rights violations, and growing resource scarcity to create a virtual perfect storm of leadership issues. There is no doubt that these challenges necessitate the study of leadership and how best to operationalize it. The truth, though, is that there are few times in history that are not characterized by

a conflation of social, political, and scientific issues that require leadership. Bennis reminds us that individuals and groups have the power to leverage leadership as a vehicle to address complex problems. The degree to which we are adequately prepared to do so is tied to the degree to which leadership is studied and learned.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

That there is no shortage of *opinions* about leadership contributes at least in part to the vast number of *definitions* that exist. One could question, however, the degree to which these definitions actually add something meaningful to the knowledge base. Do they functionally alter the ways in which we think about or engage in leadership? This book is going to take a bit of a different approach. No singular definition of leadership will be advanced. I most certainly will provide you with multiple definitions of leadership derived from a myriad of leadership theories. I will not, however, be offering you my own definition nor positing a grand, unifying theory of leadership. In a debate with a fellow leadership scholar, Day offered the term “pizzled,” defining it as “simultaneously pissed off and puzzled” (Day & Drath, 2012, p. 227). I realize that for some readers this lack of a singular definition may result in feeling “pizzled” at this very moment. That’s okay, as the learning of leadership *should* invoke alternating feelings of frustration and excitement if it is treated as the complex and deeply personal phenomenon that it is.

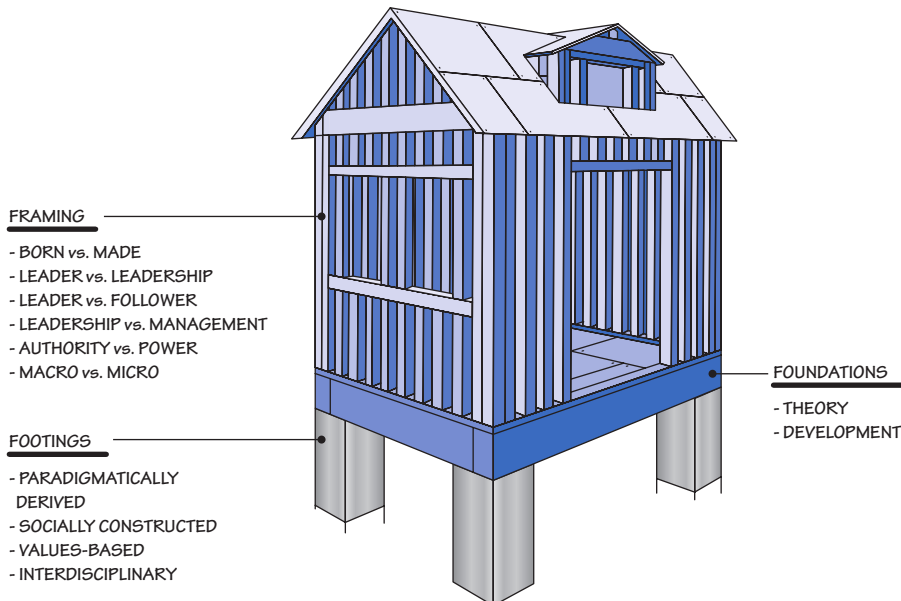
The choice *not* to provide a definition for leadership is a purposeful exercise in restraint to avoid adding yet another set of terms, another semantic differential to the pantheon of preexisting definitions. I will most certainly provide a means of bracketing the core components of leadership as well as encourage you to play with them, arranging and rearranging concepts in ways that are meaningful to your understanding of what leadership is and is not. I also want to be clear that this does not reflect indifference about definitional clarity. Definitional clarity is essential to understanding a particular theory and its underpinnings as well as how we engage in leadership practice. We are simply embarking on a different approach that suggests learning leadership theory is less about the acquisition of terminology and more about becoming a critical learner. It also repositions readers as having the agency to author their own definitions of leadership that arise as an eclectic mix of components from various theories and their own life experiences.

MAPPING THE DEFINITIONAL TERRAIN

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

Exploring the inner mechanics of a theory is essential. This includes unpacking key assumptions about its nature, clarification of terminology, and differentiation of core considerations among theories. Taken together these three elements could be considered the building blocks of understanding leadership. In fact, let's use the process of building a home as a metaphor here with assumptions, terminology, and core considerations representing key elements of a building's (or theory's) architecture (see Figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1 The architecture of leadership theory



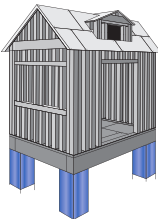
Your goal is to assess the structure of the theory looking at how its architecture informs, constrains, or elevates the utility of the content it presents.

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

Key assumptions provide the footings for *terminology*, or the major concepts associated with understanding the nature of leadership. The terminology employed in a theory is essential as it is akin to the foundation of a home drawing on the strength of the footings to offer further support in bearing the weight of the structure. Foundations are also designed to resist external threat such as moisture and cold by tailoring the design to fit its context. Similarly, terminology bolsters the parameters used to define leadership and adjust to the shifting contexts that influence it.

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

Assumptions About the Nature of Leadership



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

Leadership Is Paradigmatically Derived

The primary footing on which leadership theory rests reflects its paradigmatic assumptions. You might be wondering what the heck it means for something to be paradigmatically derived. A paradigm reflects the basic lens through which a person views the world and consists of concepts, assumptions, values, and practices. Let's use an example to illustrate this. In the United States, if you were to reference football it would immediately call to mind a specific sport with clearly articulated rules. The paradigm through which we understand football is highly specific, so when the term is mentioned people immediately think of things like team affiliations and particular types of equipment. However, if you were to mention the same term in most of the rest of the world it would cue what we refer to in the United States as soccer, which has an entirely different set of rules and practices. Here is how a paradigm operates. If you were in the United States and told U.S. friends to meet you at the football field and to bring equipment, the dominant paradigm for football would likely kick in for them. They would show up at the U.S. football field, not the soccer field. They would likely bring a U.S. football, not a soccer ball.

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

Table 1.1 offers definitions of four key research paradigms (i.e., positivism, constructivism, critical theory, and post-modernism). Every theory is born out of a paradigm that carries with it particular assumptions that shape perceptions about the nature of leadership (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). A critical learner must take these into account when considering how to interpret and use a theory.

Leadership Is Socially Constructed

With the exception of positivism, most research paradigms acknowledge that leadership is socially constructed. To suggest that something is socially constructed means that it does not naturally exist (i.e., it cannot be touched or explicitly seen) but is

TABLE 1.1 Research paradigms and their influences on leadership

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

identified, named, and understood based on social interactions among people. It is cocreated in terms of meaning. Furthermore, because social constructions represent often taken-for-granted beliefs they function as powerful framers of reality for people and can be difficult to change. An excellent example of a social construction is money. In and of itself, money has no real value; in most cultural contexts it is simply printed paper or metal coins. However, individuals are socialized to symbolically

ascribe value to money. In the United States this is why we understand “the value of a dollar,” can differentiate between types of currency and their relative value, and readily recognize that just because paper bills from a board game like Monopoly are also called money does not mean that they carry any inherent value.

The same assumptions of social construction apply to leadership. Leadership does not functionally exist. It represents an abstract set of concepts derived by people to explain and make meaning of observations from the world. The assumption that leadership is socially constructed is critical to understanding theory as it acknowledges the fluidity of the concept. It explains why each of us may have varying reactions to and interpretations of leadership. Furthermore, social constructions are bound by time, context, and culture. Applying this to the example of money, we understand that the relative value of \$100 today is different than in, say, 1850. Similarly, you might find that what you can purchase with \$100 differs based on location (e.g., in a city versus a rural area). Finally, although the concept of money is generally transferable across cultural contexts, how it is named, the form it takes, and its relative value can shift enormously from country to country. Again, when we apply these same assumptions to leadership we begin to recognize that what is deemed leadership is constantly evolving to keep pace with shifting norms in the sociopolitical systems in which we exist. How we understand leadership also becomes culturally contingent. That is, organizational, domestic, and global cultural differences will contribute to norms that in turn shape how leadership is understood, experienced, and enacted.

Leadership Is Inherently Values Based

If leadership is socially constructed, then *how* it is constructed represents the value norms that a particular group of people endorse at a given point in time whether good, bad, or somewhere along the continuum. However, this particular footing is one that is sometimes contested in fascinating ways. Some argue that leadership is value free or neutral and simply about effectiveness and/or goal achievement. Classic examples of these arguments typically focus on horrific leaders such as Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot, or Joseph Stalin, using their effectiveness in achieving goals as examples of how leadership can be absent of values. Others suggest a danger in this thinking, instead explicitly infusing concepts like ethics and justice into theory as a means to

segment out those who engage in leadership that harms others. This essentially redefines leadership as intrinsically good and positive.

What appears to be lost on both sides of the argument is the reality that leaders and leadership that cause harm hardly reflect the absence or neutrality of values. Quite the opposite is true. They bring to the forefront values that many simply find abhorrent, but they are values nonetheless. Failing to acknowledge this is a dangerous false dichotomy. Perhaps Kellerman (2004) said it best when she asserted that “because leadership makes a difference, sometimes even a big difference, those of us who desire to make the world a better place must . . . come to grips with leadership as two contradictory things: good and bad” (p. 14). But this assumption runs just a bit deeper. Because of social construction, leadership theory isn’t just inherently values based. It also communicates which values are acknowledged and deemed important.

Leadership Is Interdisciplinary

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

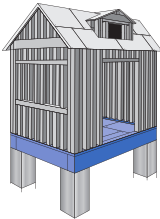
Consider the following as an example of leadership’s interdisciplinary nature. It would be difficult to think about leadership without considering the ways in which groups manage strategic processes (business, management) in complex organizations (organizational/industrial psychology) nested in varying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

tively, then, must involve questioning the degree to which interdisciplinary perspectives are present in content.

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

Making Connections

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

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

Leadership Theory

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

Formal theory represents what is traditionally seen as scientific or academic theory. It is derived over time through hypotheses that are empirically studied to

generate relationships among concepts attempting to describe and explain a greater whole. Key factors essential to formal theory are its ability to explain complex phenomena in comprehensive yet parsimonious ways, its practicality and ability to be operationalized, and its empirical validity or transferability (Patterson, 1980).

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

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

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

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

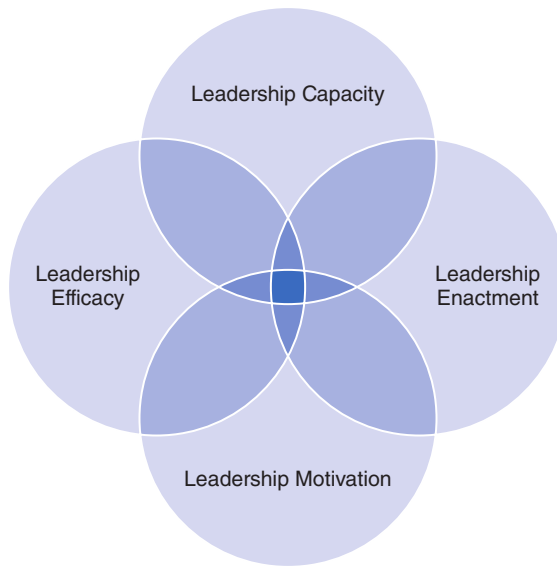
| Classifications | Definition |
|-----------------|---|
| Informal Theory | Untested personal propositions about the nature of a phenomenon; frequently subconscious; delimited to one's worldview |
| Formal Theory | Empirically tested propositions that offer explanatory and descriptive insights into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

which provide useful heuristics or mental shortcuts for categorization, with theories that go beyond categorization to describe and explain processes. Critical learners must avoid taking an author's label of something as a "theory" at face value and examine the ways in which it may or may not have been empirically validated, created for description and/or explanation, or even be transferable to practice. All of these have a direct impact on the utility of a theory.

Leadership Development

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

The reality is that theory and development are inextricably intertwined. How people approach the development of leadership is a function of their formal and informal theoretical understandings of the construct. Ironically, how people understand formal leadership theory is a function of their leadership development. Heifetz (2010) argued that "the theory of leadership one uses has an impact on leadership development. It influences the assumptions and choice of values one makes to develop further for oneself the self-image and ability to practice leadership" (p. 25). This

FIGURE 1.2 Domains of leadership development

necessitates the exploration of leadership development, not solely as a function of theory to be unpacked once theory is understood, but as something that simultaneously informs and shapes theory as well.

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

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

Leadership Capacity

Enhancing capacity tends to be the goal for leader and leadership development. But what does this entail exactly? Capacity reflects an individual or a group's overarching knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the leader role or the group's leadership process (Day et al., 2009; Dugan, 2011). Note, however, that the form leadership capacity takes is highly contingent on the formal theory being employed. As you will see in later chapters, different formal theories emphasize different sets of knowledge, skills, and abilities that may or may not be transferable among one another. In other words, an individual or group may have high leadership capacity for one formal theory, but little capacity to engage effectively based on the assumptions of another theory.

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

Leadership Enactment

Enactment is when capacity is put into action, or the functional practice of leadership. It is the behaviors of an individual or group as they engage in leader roles or leadership processes. Once again, the form that leadership enactment takes is a function of the formal or informal theories driving it. Additionally, leadership enactment may reflect a particular theory, but that does not necessarily guarantee that it will be successful. The relative effectiveness of leadership enactment is dependent on the level of leadership capacity of the individual or group. Explicitly distinguishing between capacity and enactment is important as many people presume they are syn-

onymous. It is critical to keep in mind that just because someone does not enact leadership does not necessarily mean that the individual lacks leadership capacity. Conversely, those who enact leadership may not actually possess the necessary capacities.

Leadership Motivation

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

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

Leadership Efficacy

Efficacy also helps to explain why there can be significant gaps between capacity and enactment. Stemming from Bandura’s (1997) groundbreaking work on social cognitive theory, efficacy reflects an individual or group’s internal beliefs regarding their likelihood of success with a particular task. Bandura argued that efficacy is domain specific and individuals or groups may have differing levels of efficacy depending on the task at hand. For example, I may have high efficacy for driving a car, but low efficacy for swimming.

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

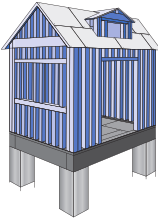
It is also important to note two nuances associated with efficacy. First, scholars distinguish between leader and leadership efficacy (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008). These differences parallel those articulated by Day et al. (2009) related to leader and leadership development. *Leader efficacy*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

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

Making Connections

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



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

Born Versus Made

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

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

The reification of heroic leaders may also reflect psychological responses to issues of power and authority inherently embedded in leadership that reinforce our *need* for infallible leaders. They calm our anxieties in the face of threat

increasing a sense of security while simultaneously displacing responsibility (Heifetz, 2010; Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). In other words, if leaders are born rather than made, we get let off the hook. We get to turn the gaze outward rather than inward, as the quote from the start of the chapter so beautifully challenged us to do. As much as we may not want to admit it, that can be enticing.

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

Leader Versus Leadership

By now you have likely noticed the attention to clearly distinguishing the terms *leader* and *leadership*. *Leader* refers to an individual and is often, but not always, tied to the enactment of a particular role. This role typically flows from some form of formal or informal authority (e.g., a supervisor, teacher, coach). When not tied to a particular role, the term *leader* reflects individual actions within a larger group, the process of individual leader development, or individual enactments attempting to leverage movement on an issue or goal. *Leadership*, on the other hand, reflects a focus on collective processes of people working together toward common goals or collective leadership development efforts. Note that leadership does not presume that individuals lack formal roles or authority. It simply looks beyond those individuals alone and at the overarching process. Formal theories will vacillate in their emphases on leaders, their roles, and their development versus leadership as a process, how it unfolds, and collective development.

Kellerman (2004) argued the differentiation between leader and leadership is a semantic differential that is very difficult to understand, particularly among those without any experience studying it. She is correct in this assertion. If you ask most people what leadership means, they will typically begin by describing characteristics of an individual leader (e.g., “Leadership is a person who . . .”). Other scholars suggest the differentiation between leader and leadership, though difficult to make, is essen-

tial to advancing leadership development (Day et al., 2009; Guthrie, Jones, Osteen, & Hu, 2013; Hannah et al., 2008). As a critical learner, differentiating leader and leadership is essential for connecting concepts to practice.

Leader Versus Follower

The conflation of leader and leadership makes it easier to create an additional false dichotomy around the terms *leader* and *follower*. Most often, *leader* is interpreted as a person with some form of positional authority and followers as those subject to that authority. Heifetz (2010) expressed frustration that “the term follower is an archaic throwback rooted in our yearning for charismatic authorities who will ‘know the way,’ particularly in times of crisis and distress” (p. 20). He also expressed concern that rigid leader/follower distinctions can contribute to perceptions of dependency among “followers” who may begin to see the two roles as mutually exclusive. You either are the leader or the follower.

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

Leadership Versus Management

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

It would be fair to say that management is a necessary but insufficient tool for addressing the complex social, political, and scientific issues that require leadership in society. However, in sharing this, it becomes important not to dismiss the significance of management to leadership. Yukl (2013) reminds us, “The empirical research does not support the assumption that people can be sorted neatly into these two extreme stereotypes” (p. 6), and Rost (1991) expressed grave concern over the denigration of management as if it were the antithesis of leadership. Some leaders are good managers and some managers are also fine leaders. A critical learner will see the shifting sands of how scholars treat leadership/management in formal theories, moving from almost an entirely management emphasis to contemporary perspectives that seem to forget the need for good management.

Authority Versus Power

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

So, what are power and authority and why are they alternately positioned as synonymous or opposing concepts? *Authority* is framed as the *right* to direct others in the pursuit of a specified, and typically shared, outcome and is often tied to management or a positional role (Vecchio, 2007). *Power* represents a broader concept

TABLE 1.3 Types of power

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

Adapted from: French & Raven (1968)

that can but does not have to be associated with authority, reflecting the *ability* to shape others' behaviors. The concept of influence merits attention here as well given its frequent usage in many formal leadership theories. *Influence* is traditionally viewed as a softer version of power that is "weaker and less reliable" (Vecchio, 2007, p. 69).

French and Raven (1968) offered a classification system examining five types of power described in Table 1.3. Referent and expert power are commonly referred to as informal and less likely to be tied directly to authority, whereas legitimate, coercive, and reward power are more formal and associated with authority roles. A person "can possess each of the five sources of power to varying degrees, and their use of one power base can affect the strength of the other" (Vecchio, 2007, p. 73). Informal power has the potential to be more potent, but also more fragile than formal power. Think of it this way . . . If managers lose credibility, they still have the authority to compel employees to complete tasks as defined in their job descriptions. Alternatively, when opinion leaders (e.g., those in social movements or politics) do something that jeopardizes referent or expert power there is less to fall back on in attempting to shape others' behaviors.

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

Macro Versus Micro

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

The study of *context* in shaping leaders and leadership is expansive and important given the footings and foundations already discussed in this chapter. We know that organizational, domestic, and global cultural contexts can radically shape the ways in which individuals and groups understand, experience, and enact leader roles and leadership processes. The degree to which this is represented in theory, however, varies enormously. Many theories seem to leave context out entirely, presuming that the social behaviors associated with leadership occur in a vacuum. This leaves it up to the reader to make assumptions about how and why context might matter. Other theories explore context very narrowly looking at specific influences in isolation such as one-on-one relationships. Still other theories take a macro approach, looking only at context broadly such as influences associated with cultural considerations. This makes it difficult to attribute specific elements of the context to particular influences on leadership.

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

The absence of a stated sphere of influence in a theory can cause significant confusion about the target of leader and leadership efforts. When learning a theory you might say, "Well, I can see how this would work in my project team, but how would this ever work in a complex organization or in attempts to create broad social change?" Similar effects can occur with theories adopting micro-level approaches in their intended sphere of influence potentially conflating leadership with management or reducing leadership to a series of minor task achievements. Conversely, many contemporary theories target systemic levels as the sphere of intended influence, such as the transformation of political systems or the ending of major social injustices. Although these are important aspirational goals, these theories can have unintended negative consequences if they oversimplify complex issues. Additionally, those

involved in leadership may be more likely to dismiss incremental gains or lose hope in long-term processes. No formal theory will ever be able to take into account the full range of micro and macro influences associated with contextual factors or intended spheres of influence. However, the degree to which they adequately address these issues is important to note as a critical learner.

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

Making Connections

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

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This first chapter makes a case for the importance of leaders and leadership to advancing social, political, and scientific goals. It also begins the process of mapping how leadership comes to be defined in particular theories. Let's revisit the home building metaphor one last time. Footings, foundations, and framing provide the basic architecture of leadership, bringing to life the specific content of a formal theory. However, theories are meant to be adapted. It would be odd to buy a home and move in expecting all of the previous owner's possessions, decorating choices, and placement

of furniture to stay the same. The approach to using theory in this book reflects this. *You* have the authority to adapt and integrate elements of formal theories into your informal theories of leadership, drawing on personal experiences and the contexts you are navigating. Doing this, though, requires you integrate the skills associated with being a critical learner to closely examine the footings, foundations, and framing that shape formal leadership theories. Understanding theory is essential as it “provides the overarching sense-making frame for experience. Without a theoretical framework to connect and integrate experiences there is no sense-making, and thus there can be no learning” (Day et al., 2009, p. 7).

I’ve asked you to first take a step back and consider the architecture of leadership theory with the hope that this will build our collective capacities for critical learning. To aid in the process, each chapter in the book will end with a personal narrative. Scholars assert the power of storytelling in shaping how we come to understand leadership (Denning, 2011; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Narratives weave together the often abstract nature of theory with reality, bringing to life the very human process of engaging in leadership. They also provide a lens that challenges theory drawing into question the degree to which it may be operating from taken-for-granted assumptions.

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

I was born into a working-middle-class family of socially active, Cuban educators. At the onset of the Cuban revolution, there was an anti-clerical element to it—many Catholics were repressed, harassed, imprisoned, and expelled for their beliefs. Because our family was Catholic, they were subjected to a great deal of harassment and repression. Although my grandmother wasn’t politically involved, she became a casualty of the violence of the revolution and

paid with her life in a suspicious car accident. My grandmother's death ultimately drove my family to send my father to the United States through a program called "Operation Pedro Pan." The program sponsored orphaned children, as well as those from families that didn't want their children to become indoctrinated, placing them in foster homes and orphanages across the United States until their parents were able to flee Cuba.

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

In college my understanding of power shifted again. I had a bit of an identity crisis and didn't know if I was "Cuban," "Cuban-American," or what either of those really even meant. I decided to take a class on Cuba where an advisor told me that if I thought I was going to get to know Cuba through a book then I was strongly mistaken. She explained that from afar Cuba looked very black and white, but once you got close to her, she turned into 10,000 shades of gray. The only way to know her was by going there. This inspired my personal pilgrimage to discover my roots, which my parents were totally against. I realize that my family experienced real trauma there—like scars carved into their backs that couldn't be removed. The trauma I inherited from them, though, came in the form of a "backpack" of sorts. I could choose whether to keep it on or take it off. So much of my understanding of the world and how it operated was a function of that "backpack." I knew that if I ever wanted to effectuate change, I had to learn how to take it off—to see and feel and understand for myself.

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

(continued)

and dialogue called “Raíces de Esperanza” (Roots of Hope). We wanted to promote greater people-to-people exchanges on both sides, both in Cuba and the United States, and we wanted to do it in a sustainable way.

Our work with Roots of Hope came to a tipping point in 2009 when a 20-time Grammy Award winner by the name of Juanes came across us. He was a Colombian singer, kind of like a Latin Bono, and he wanted to do a peace concert in Cuba. Everyone in the exile community thought he was crazy, but we thought he was on to something! When we met with him, it was clear that he had no idea what he was getting himself into and no real understanding of the Cuban context, so we offered our support. Navigating those waters was difficult and dangerous. We had to start working both within the system in Cuba as well as keep the pressure on outside of it. We had to find ways to garner trust and political support, and do so quickly enough to be able to logistically pull off the concert. As we moved forward, many of us received threats to our families on and off the island. Despite the severity of the situation and reality that we were operating within an authoritarian, totalitarian regime, my family encouraged me to stay the course. We ended up bringing together about 1 million young people in the largest congregation point on the island, singing songs of freedom and peace and reconciliation. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed that it could have happened.

These evolving understandings of how power operates deeply shape how I approach leadership. They seem contradictory, but being exposed to power in all its shapes and forms led me to better understand its complexity as well as how to navigate it. This exposure to what it means to work both within and outside systems has influenced my career as well. While working in government I was asked to staff a presidential commission on Cuba. I shared my feelings on U.S. policy and how I was against the embargo, yet one of my supervisors said it was fine. He essentially gave me permission to work on the parts with which I agreed so I didn't divorce myself from the opportunity to make a difference because I wasn't 100% in agreement. I know that if I hadn't developed an ability to deal with that perceived “moral ambiguity” there probably wouldn't have been a voice of dissent at the table at all. Having an understanding of how government works from the inside later gave me the ability to influence it effectively from the outside.

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

to hold people accountable to deeper moral obligations. I've learned how to navigate my role from both these vantage points.



Reflection Questions

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

