Leadership a critical text

Simon Western
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What is Leadership?

"She was a courageous leader"

"An innovative leadership culture flourished in the company"

"The company board showed great leadership"

"Scandinavia takes a lead on social welfare"

These statements show that leadership is not just the property of an individual figure.

Leadership is much more.

Leadership Discourses:
Assumptions about Leadership

Workplace leadership is too often viewed from a hermetically sealed world, of corporations, consultants and business schools, without enough attention to the social world beyond that impacts on it.

Over the past century, four key discourses have emerged that dominate leadership thinking.   These four discourses form a meta-study of leadership in a social and economic context

- The Leader as a **Controller**
- The Leader as a **Therapist**
- The Leader as a **Messiah**
- The **Eco-Leader**

The Discourses of Leadership

1900   1960   1980   2005

Controller

Scientific
Management

Therapist

Human Relations
movement

Therapist continues via coaching &
emotional intelligence & is still popular
in HR & public sector leadership.

Messiah

Transformational
leadership/culture control

Eco-Leader

Controller still found following the mode of production,
particularly in manufacturing & in China/Asia

Leader as Controller Discourse

The Leader as Controller assumption is that the leadership focuses on maximizing efficiency and control to increase output. Employees are treated in a functional way as replaceable 'cogs in the wheel' of the efficient machine. Modernity led by the idea that 'Science and rationality can save us' were the underpinning assumptions and leaders act these out through striving to be evermore efficient through measuring and controlling resources. Taylorism, Fordism, specialization, and mass production/ consumption emerged. It was hugely successful, admired by Stalin/Hitler but was seen as de-humanising. Recent attempts to 'modernise' the public sector in the UK have seen a reversion to Controller leadership, focusing on targets to achieve greater outputs.

Leader as Therapist Discourse

The basic assumption is that the leadership task is to work on human relations. The idea being that 'happy workers are more productive workers'. Emerging from the post-war culture and 1960s ideas of personal growth and the rise in individualism. Leaders encourage workers to self-actualize through work, so that people 'come to work to work on themselves' (N. Rose). This discourse embraces 'therapeutic culture' and focuses on engaging workers in order to increase motivation and commitment. Personnel departments were established to achieve this. This discourse is very popular in education and the public and voluntary sector and other people focused organizations. Leadership development is dominated by the therapist discourse; often focusing on 'developing the self' e.g. using psychometrics, 360s and coaching to attempt to offer personal insight and modify behavior.

Leader as Messiah Discourse

The messiah discourse arose in the 1980s following an economic slump in the USA. A new covenantal leadership emerged. The aim was to create strong and dynamic cultures under the vision of a transformational leader. Loyalty and commitment within teams, and linking personal success to company success was a key goal. Control is achieved via peer and self surveillance, rather hierarchical power or coercion. This book links the Messiah discourse to the rise of Christian Fundamentalism in the USA, claiming that corporate leadership wanted to mimic the unusual new organizational forms, created by a highly successful transformational church leaders. These prophetic leaders managed to create entrepreneurial and dynamic yet highly conformist cultures. Yet longer-term results can create totalizing and fundamentalist mindsets, with organizational cultures that resist critical reflection and difference.

Leader as Messiah Discourse

Isolated elements swimming in the same direction for the purpose of understanding.

Damien Hirst (1991)

Individually cased, Hirst's fish swim blindly in the same direction without interaction. It's a cold and clinical metaphor for society without conflict. A utopian ideal of a harmony that comes at an unthinkable cost of sameness and emotional confinement.

From the Damien Hirst Collection
Saatchi Gallery London 2003

Eco-leadership Discourse

Connectivity

Ethics

Leadership Spirit

The Eco-leadership discourse focuses on connectivity, inter-dependence, ethics and leadership spirit. The aim is to create distributed leadership at local levels, encouraging leadership from the edge and building networks that are responsive and adaptive to change. Eco-leaders recognize that the workplace as interconnected eco-systems, and central control is obsolete. Sustaining strong networks and building coalitions and collaborative relationships are vital to success. New business models, new organizational forms and new leadership are essential to work within the global, political advanced technical and turbulent yet fragile environment we find ourselves. This new leadership assumption until recently is was a marginalized voice but progressive business and political leaders are finally embracing this discourse. It is not just about the environment but dealing with the internal ecology of an organization as well.

The Eco-Leader: 'working across boundaries'

Organizational eco-system

External environment

- **Internal organizational eco-system**: creating thinking spaces, breaking silo culture, connecting and communicating, working with feedback loops to respond to change, creating an organizational architecture that enables distributed leadership thus creating an adaptive organization.

- **Eco-leaders also focus on the external environment:** political and environmental trends, stakeholders, competitors, realizing the interdependence between their internal organizational ecosystem within a wider eco-system. This is no-longer considered an altruistic act, but vital for sustainable success.

- Corporate social responsibility, sustainability and ethics, continuity and change, and leadership spirit are key attributes of eco-leadership

Leadership Formation

Leadership Formation focuses on leadership rather than leaders.   Training individuals in leadership skills ignores the systemic question of how to create spaces that enables leadership to flourish in organizations. Training individuals is a small part of creating a dynamic cultures that is adaptive to needs. This requires true distributed leadership at all levels enabling teams to work across complex boundaries and to engage multiple stakeholders.   Drawing on orthodoxy to find a radical solution (G.K.Chesterton), we turn to to monastic life which has survived for thousands of years.

A monk is not trained in 'monk skills' but undergoes a 'spiritual formation'.
Monks are formed by their context, the liturgy, the prayer cycle, silent reflection, a spiritual Director and the 'life' of the community. Likewise leaders also go through a process of formation, formed by their context, by mentors and role models and their experiences.
We might say leaders are formed also by the liturgies of work.

Leadership Formation

Leadership Formation is to create an organizational architecture that places leadership at its centre. Organizational spaces are created to enable formation to occur. Leadership Formation means developing people through learning from the rituals and daily performance of work. Leadership Formation takes place within individuals, teams and the whole organization. It is both a local and global approach to leadership, each person-team-organization develops a formation process tailored to their specific needs. The organization sets out overarching principles, values and an architecture that enables learning and formation to take place. Teams and individuals then identify specific and particular needs pending on their work context, history, place and purpose. Mentoring and coaching should mirror the role of 'spiritual directors' in the monastic setting. This is both formal and informal all leaders act as elders and guides, pointing the way being leadership role models, and conveying the company culture and values in the way they take up their roles.

For Leadership Formation to be successful two conditions need to be met:
• Leadership Formation must be holistic and embedded in organizational culture
• Leadership Formation requires both an informal and a formal process.

Leadership Formation:
Beyond Leadership Development

In the final reflections the book looks forward to how to develop a leadership fit for the 21st century. Contemporary leadership development sits largely within the leader as Therapist Discourse, i.e. HR departments identify hi-potential individuals, and a process of psychometrics and leadership development programmes are used to increase an individuals leadership skills. Yet leadership is not a technique to be learnt. Leaders are formed through multiple experiences, and it is an organizations task to create this formation process; specific to its organizational needs.

Leadership
A Critical Text

Simon Western
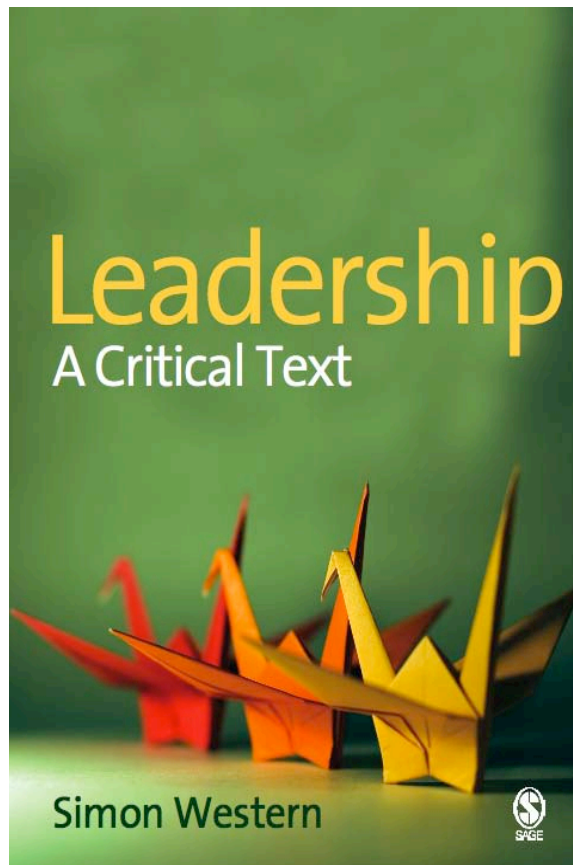
`It is refreshing when you come across a clear, well-written book about leadership that is not peddling the latest gimmick, buzzword or quick fix. What makes this work really refreshing is the emphasis on the critical dimension in the title and the breadth of the author's own experience of work' -   *Times Higher Education*

"In a highly original way, taking "Critical Theory" as a point of departure, Dr. Western helps us to obtain greater insight into the enigma of leadership."

Manfred Kets de Vries
Director INSEAD Global Leadership Center

''Leadership A Critical Text' is an outstanding addition to the Leadership literature. This is an excellent text which takes the field to new heights in the first decade of the 21st Century".

Professor Cary L. Cooper, CBE, Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University

"The book provides a unique and much needed 'voice' to the field of leadership studies, and will have a significant impact worldwide."

Professor Jonathan Gosling, Director of the Leadership Centre Exeter University