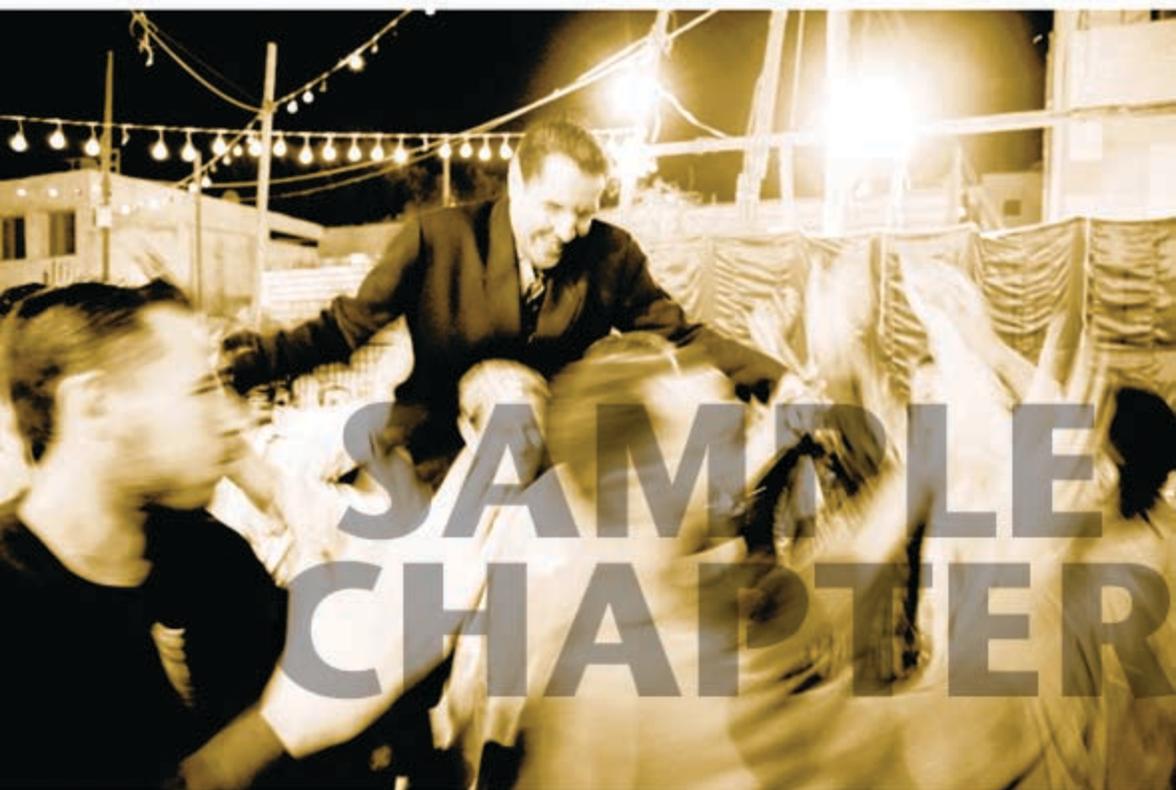


THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP

Identity, Influence and Power



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and Michael J. Platow

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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	ix
<i>List of tables</i>	xi
<i>Foreword</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xxv
1 The old psychology of leadership: Great men and the cult of personality	1
<i>Leadership in history: The “great man” and his charisma</i>	2
<i>The political decline of the “great man” approach: The impact of the “great dictators”</i>	5
<i>The standardization of leadership: Personality models and their failings</i>	7
<i>The biographical approach: Looking for the roots of greatness in personal histories</i>	10
<i>The theoretical deficiency of individualistic models</i>	12
<i>The political deficiency of individualistic models</i>	14
<i>The faulty definition of leadership</i>	16
<i>Conclusion: Five criteria for a useful psychology of leadership</i>	17
2 The current psychology of leadership: Issues of context and contingency, transaction and transformation	21
<i>The importance of context and contingency</i>	22
<i>The importance of followers</i>	28
<i>The importance of that “special something”</i>	38
<i>Conclusion: The need for a new psychology of leadership</i>	42

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
3	Foundations for the new psychology of leadership: Social identity and self-categorization	45
	<i>Social identity and group behavior</i>	46
	<i>Social identity and collective power</i>	60
	<i>Defining social identities</i>	64
	<i>Conclusion: Setting the agenda for a new psychology of leadership</i>	73
4	Being one of us: Leaders as in-group prototypes	77
	<i>The importance of standing for the group</i>	78
	<i>Prototypicality and leadership effectiveness</i>	82
	<i>Prototypicality and leadership stereotypes</i>	94
	<i>Prototypicality and the creativity of leaders</i>	103
	<i>Conclusion: To lead us, leaders must represent “us”</i>	106
5	Doing it for us: Leaders as in-group champions	109
	<i>The importance of fairness</i>	111
	<i>From fairness to group interest</i>	118
	<i>Clarifying the group interest</i>	130
	<i>Conclusion: To engage followers, leaders’ actions and visions must promote group interests</i>	132
6	Crafting a sense of us: Leaders as entrepreneurs of identity	137
	<i>The complex relationship between reality, representativeness, and leadership</i>	138
	<i>Social identities as world-making resources</i>	143
	<i>Who can mobilize us? The importance of defining category prototypes</i>	147
	<i>Who is mobilized? The importance of defining category boundaries</i>	155
	<i>What is the nature of mobilization? The importance defining category content</i>	159
	<i>Conclusion: Leaders are masters not slaves of identity</i>	162
7	Making us matter: Leaders as embedders of identity	165
	<i>Identity as a moderator of the relationship between authority and power</i>	166
	<i>Leaders as artists of identity</i>	171
	<i>Leaders as impresarios of identity</i>	179

<i>Leaders as engineers of identity</i>	188
<i>Conclusion: Leadership and the production of power both center on the hard but rewarding work of identity management</i>	192
8 Identity leadership at large: Prejudice, practice, and politics	197
<i>The prejudice of leadership</i>	198
<i>The practice of leadership</i>	205
<i>The politics of leadership</i>	215
<i>Notes</i>	219
<i>References</i>	223
<i>Glossary</i>	245
<i>Index of leaders and leadership contexts</i>	253
<i>Author index</i>	257
<i>Subject index</i>	263

Preface

The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say “I”. And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say “I”. They don’t *think* “I”. They think “team”. They understand their job to be to make the team function. . . . There is an identification (very often quite unconsciously) with the task and with the group.

(Drucker, 1992, p. 14)

The title of this book, *The New Psychology of Leadership*, raises three questions. What do we mean by *leadership*? What do we mean by the *psychology* of leadership? And what is *new* about our approach to the psychology of leadership? It is best to be clear about these matters before we start on the body of the book.

What is leadership?

Leadership, for us, is not simply about getting people to do things. It is about getting them to *want* to do things. Leadership, then, is about shaping beliefs, desires, and priorities. It is about achieving influence, not securing compliance. Leadership therefore needs to be distinguished from such things as management, decision-making, and authority. These are all important and they are all implicated in the leadership process. But, from our definition, good leadership is not determined by competent management, skilled decision-making, or accepted authority in and of themselves. The key reason for this is that these things do not necessarily involve winning the hearts and minds of others or harnessing their energies and passions. Leadership always does.

Even more, leadership is not about brute force, raw power, or “incentivization.” Indeed we suggest that such things are indicators and consequences of the *failure* of leadership. True, they can be used to affect the behavior of others. If you threaten dire punishment for disobedience and then instruct others to march off towards a particular destination, they will probably do so. Equally, if you offer them great inducements for obedience, they will

probably do the same. But in either of these cases it is most unlikely that they will be truly influenced in the sense that they come to see the mission as their own. If anything, the opposite will be true. That is, they are likely to reject the imposed mission precisely because they see it as externally imposed. So, take away the stick—or the carrot—and people are liable to stop marching, or even to march off in the opposite direction in order to assert their independence. Not only do you have to expend considerable resources in order to secure compliance, but, over time, you have to devote ever-increasing resources in order to maintain that compliance.

In contrast, if one can inspire people to want to travel in a given direction, then they will continue to act even in the absence of the leader. If one is seen as articulating what people want to do, then each act of persuasion increases the credibility of the leader and makes future persuasion both more likely and easier to achieve. In other words, instead of being self-depleting, true leadership is self-regenerating. And it is this remarkable—almost alchemic—quality that makes the topic of leadership so fascinating and so important.

What is the psychology of leadership?

If leadership centers on the process of influence—if, in the words of Robert Cialdini, it is about “getting things done through others” (2001, p. 72)—then, in order to understand it, we need to focus on the mental states and processes that lead people to listen to leaders, to heed what they have to say, and to take on the vision of the leader as their own. It is important to stress, however, that our emphasis does not reflect a reductionist belief that leadership is an entirely psychological phenomenon that can be explained by psychology alone. On the contrary, our approach is situated within a tradition that argues that the operation of psychological processes always depends upon social context (Israel & Tajfel, 1972). This means, on the one hand, that psychologists must always pay attention to the nature of society. On the other, it means that psychology helps identify which features of society will impact most strongly on what people think or do. Put slightly differently, what good psychology does is to tell us what to look for in our social world. It most definitely does not provide a pretext for ignoring the world and looking only inside the head.

In the case of leadership, there are a range of social and contextual factors that impact upon a leader’s capacity to influence others. Most importantly perhaps, these include (a) the *culture* of the group that is being led, as well as that of the broader society within which that group is located, (b) the nature of the *institutions* within which leadership takes place (e.g., whether, to use Aristotle’s taxonomy, those institutions are democracies, aristocracies, or monarchies), and (c) the *gender* of leaders themselves. All of these factors are important in their own right. At various points in the analysis, we will also demonstrate how they impinge on the influence process. Nevertheless, our primary focus remains on developing a comprehensive account of the

influence process itself. In this way we provide a framework from which it is possible to understand the impact not only of culture, institutions, and gender, but of social and contextual factors in general.

Overall, then, we look at how leadership operates “in the world” because the reality of leadership is that it is very much “of the world.” Indeed, not only is it a critical part of the world as we know it, but it is also a primary means by which our world is *changed*. The key reason for this is that leadership motivates people to put their shoulders to the wheel of progress and work together towards a common goal. As psychologists, our focus is precisely to understand the nature of the “mental glue” that binds leaders and followers together in this effort. What commits them to each other and to their shared task? What drives them to push together in a particular direction? And what encourages them to keep on pushing?

What is new in the “new psychology of leadership”?

To refer to a “new” psychology of leadership is to imply a contrast with an “old” psychology. So let us start with that. In Chapters 1 and 2, we show how, traditionally, leadership research has analyzed relevant phenomena at an individual level. Most obviously, considerable effort has been devoted to the task of discovering the personal traits and qualities that mark out great leaders. And even where research has acknowledged that leadership is not about leaders alone, the emphasis has remained very much on the characteristics of the individual leader and the ways in which these map onto the demands of the situation, the needs of followers, or some other leadership imperative. In short, in all this work, leadership is treated very much as an “I thing.”

We, by contrast, start from a position that speaks to the points raised by Peter Drucker in the quotation at the start of this Preface. For us, the psychology of effective leadership is never about “I.” It is not about identifying or extolling the “special stuff” that sets some apart from others and projects them into positions of power and influence. For us, effective leadership is always about how leaders and followers come to see each other as part of a common team or group – as members of the same *in-group*. It therefore has little to do with the individuality of the leader and everything to do with whether they are seen as part of the team, as a team player, as able and willing to advance team goals. Leadership, in short, is very much a “we thing.”

This point, of course, is not new in itself. After all, we have just cited Drucker making the same point some 20 years ago. Yet it is one thing to make assertions about what constitutes good leadership. It is quite another to provide a sound conceptual and empirical basis to back up these assertions and to help theorists and practitioners choose between them. If leadership really is a “we thing” (and we believe it is) then we need to understand what this means, where it comes from, and how it works.

Our answers to these questions all center on issues of *social identity*. That is, they all focus on the degree to which parties to the leadership process define themselves in terms of a shared group membership and hence engage with each other as representatives of a common in-group. It is precisely because these parties stop thinking in terms of what divides them as individuals and focus instead on what unites them as group members that there is a basis both for leaders to lead and for followers to follow. And it is this that gives their energies a particular sense of direction and purpose.

However, here again it is not entirely novel to use social identity principles as the basis for a psychology of leadership. In the Acknowledgments, we note our substantial debt to John Turner whose work on group influence provides the conceptual basis for a social identity model of leadership. As well as ourselves, a number of other researchers—notably Mike Hogg, Daan van Knippenberg, and Naomi Ellemers—have made these links explicit and provided empirical support for the idea that effective leadership is grounded in shared social identity. However, what we do in this book—what *is* new about our psychology of leadership—is that we provide a detailed, systematic, and elaborated account of the various ways in which the effectiveness of leaders is tied to social identity and we ground this account in a careful consideration of relevant empirical evidence.

As the titles of chapters 4 to 7 suggest, the structure of our argument can be summarized in terms of the following four principles:

First, we argue that leaders must be seen as “one of us.” That is, they have to be perceived by followers as representing the position that best distinguishes our in-group from other out-groups. Stated more formally, we suggest that, in order to be effective, a leader needs to be seen as an *in-group prototype*.

Second, we argue that leaders must be seen to “do it for us.” Their actions must advance the interests of the in-group. It is fatal for leaders to be seen to be feathering their own nests or, even worse, the nests of out-groups. For it is only where leaders are seen to promote the interests of the in-group that potential followers prove willing to throw their energies into the task of turning the leader’s vision into reality.

Third, we argue that leaders must “craft a sense of us.” What this means is that they don’t simply work within the constraints of the pre-existing identities that are handed down to them by others. Rather, they are actively involved in shaping the shared understanding of “who we are.” Much of their success lies in being able to represent themselves in terms that match the members’ understanding of their in-group. It lies in representing their projects and proposals as reflecting the norms, values, and priorities of the group. Good leaders need to be skilled *entrepreneurs of identity*.

Fourth, we argue that leaders must “make us matter.” The point of leadership is not simply to express what the group thinks. It is to take the ideas and values and priorities of the group and embed them in reality. What counts as success, then, will depend on how the group believes that reality should be

constituted. But however its goals are defined, an effective leader will help the group realize those goals and thereby help create a world in which the group's values are lived out and in which its potential is fulfilled.

In the book's final chapter, we draw these various principles together to address a number of over-riding issues for the practice and theory of leadership. Most importantly perhaps, we clarify what a leader actually needs to do in order to be successful. Some readers—particularly practitioners and those at the more applied end of the leadership field—might ask why we take so long to get to what might be seen as the heart of the matter. Our response is that we feel that it is critical to provide a secure foundation before we set out to tell people what to do. We want to persuade the reader of the credibility and coherence of an “*identity leadership*” approach before we set out what “*identity leadership*” means in practice.

We believe that this is all the more important given the huge challenges our societies currently face. As a result of a range of global developments—in military technology, in religious extremism, in political conflict, in environmental degradation (to name just four)—the difference between good and bad leadership can reasonably be said to constitute all the difference in the world. We need leaders who not only have the right goals but who can also mobilize humanity to support them. And we cannot advise leaders lightly on a hunch or a whim. We need a case that is built less on opinion and more on well-substantiated scientific argument.

The need for a new psychology of leadership has never been more pressing.

1 The old psychology of leadership

Great men and the cult of personality

Effective leadership involves influencing others so that they are motivated to contribute to the achievement of group goals. This process lies at the heart of human progress. Scarcely any advance that civilization has made would have been possible without it—whether in arenas of politics and religion, science and technology, art and literature, sport and adventure, or industry and business. For good or for ill, leaders are widely recognized as the proper focus for our attempts to understand the tides and shape of history. As a result, from an early age, we are told wonderful stories about the role that great leaders have played in making history and initiating the changes that have created the world as we know it.

This focus fuels widespread fascination with the lives of leaders, and more particularly with their individual psychology. How were they brought up? What key events shaped their intellectual and social development? What are their defining psychological characteristics and traits? What makes them so special?

To answer such questions, a vast industry has grown up in which all manner of people have found voice: not only psychologists, but management theorists, historians, politicians and political scientists, theologians, philosophers, journalists, and a range of social commentators. Their contributions include scientific analyses, scholarly biographies, and popular accounts of leaders' lives. The nature of these contributions is varied and far-reaching, and a great many are both very insightful and highly readable. A common theme in these various treatments, however, is that, almost without exception, they endorse an *individualistic* understanding of leadership that sees this as a process that is grounded in the nature of individual leaders. In this way, leadership is seen to arise from a distinctive psychology that sets the minds and lives of great leaders apart from those of others—as superior, special, different.

This book does not seek to diminish the contribution that great leaders have made to the shaping of society, nor does it seek to downplay the importance of their psychology. What it does do, however, is question and provide an alternative to this individualistic consensus. Indeed, rather than seeing leadership as something that derives from leaders' psychological uniqueness, we argue the very opposite: that effective leadership is grounded in leaders'

2 *The New Psychology of Leadership*

capacity to embody and promote a psychology that they *share* with others. Stated most baldly, we argue for a *new psychology* that sees leadership as the product of an individual's "we-ness" rather than of his or her "I-ness."

As we will see, this perspective forces us to see leadership not as a process that revolves around individuals acting and thinking in isolation, but as a *group process* in which leaders and followers are joined together—and *perceive themselves to be joined together*—in shared endeavor. It also follows from this point that in order to understand leadership properly, our gaze needs to extend beyond leaders alone; in particular, it needs to consider the followers with whom they forge a psychological connection and whose effort is required in order to do the work that drives history forward.

We need this broad gaze because the proof of leadership is not the emergence of a big new idea or the development of a vision for sweeping change. Rather, it is the capacity to convince others to contribute to processes that turn ideas and visions into reality and that help to bring about change. For this reason, leadership is always predicated on *followership*, and the psychology of these two processes is inextricably intertwined. Critically too, we will see that followers can only be moved to respond enthusiastically to a leader's instruction when they see the leader as someone whose psychology is aligned with theirs—when he or she is understood to be "one of us" rather than someone who is "out for themselves" or "one of them."

We readily recognize, however, that persuading readers of the merits of this new appreciation of leadership is no easy task. Not least, this is because the old psychology of leadership is deeply ingrained both in psychological theorizing and in popular consciousness. Its intellectual shackles are both tight and heavy.¹ Accordingly, we need to start our journey by inspecting those shackles and then loosening ourselves from their grasp.

Leadership in history: The "great man" and his charisma

If there is one model of leadership that exemplifies the individualistic consensus that we have identified as lying at the heart of the old psychology of leadership it is that of the "great man." This, indeed, is one of the cornerstones of traditional academic and popular understandings of leadership. It is the model we were first introduced to in childhood books about monumental figures such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Abraham Lincoln. It is the model that is found in those history texts that recount the feats, and extol the virtues, of extraordinary figures who seem a race apart from the rest of us. It is the model that informs the biographies of leading businessmen that line the shelves of airport bookstalls and that invite us to follow in their footsteps to success, influence, and tremendous personal wealth. It makes for wonderful reading, but as a window onto the causes of great leaders' success it is deeply flawed. Not least, this is because by defining its subject matter in a manner that precludes interest in "great women," the approach displays its partiality from the outset.

One of the earliest formal statements of the “great man” model is found in Plato’s *Republic* (380 BC/1993), a text that takes the form of a dialogue between the master, Socrates, and his student, Adeimantus. Socrates starts by asserting that only a rare class of philosopher-ruler is fit to lead the uneducated and brutish majority and that, without such people, democracy itself is in peril:

- Socrates:* Look at it in the context of what we were saying earlier. We agreed that a philosopher has a quickness of learning, a good memory, courage, and a broadness of vision.
- Adeimantus:* Yes.
- Socrates:* From his earliest years, then, he’ll outclass other children at everything, especially if he is as gifted physically as he is mentally, won’t he?
- Adeimantus:* Of course.
- Socrates:* So when he grows up, his friends and fellow citizens will want to make use of him for their own affairs?
- Adeimantus:* Naturally. . . .
- Socrates:* That leaves us with only a tiny number of people, Adeimantus.
(Socrates, 380 BC/1993, pp. 217–218)

Although only embryonic, Plato’s analysis set the scene for the greater body of subsequent leadership research that has gone on to focus attention on the psychology of the individual and to argue that it is the leader’s distinctive and exceptional qualities that mark him (or, less commonly, her) out as qualified not only for responsibility and high office, but also for universal admiration and respect.

In essence too, work of this form provides a straightforward response to the perennial question of whether great leaders are born or made. It answers “born.” It suggests that leaders are individuals who are superior to others by virtue of their possession of innate intellectual and social characteristics. In short, leaders are simply people who are made of “the right stuff” and this stuff is seen to be in short supply. Writing over a century before Plato, the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus expressed this point very bluntly: “The many are worthless, good men are few. One man is ten thousand if he is the best” (500 BC; cited in Harter, 2008, p. 69).

Moving forward over 2,000 years, similar views were articulated in an influential series of lectures on “Heroes and Hero Worship” delivered by Thomas Carlyle in May 1840. In the first of these lectures, “The Hero as Divinity,” Carlyle declared that “Universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here.” He went on “We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to be near. The light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world” (Carlyle, 1840, p. 3). Again,

4 *The New Psychology of Leadership*

then, we are encouraged to regard the stuff of leadership not as the stuff of ordinary mortals but as the stuff of gods.

Exactly what this stuff is has been a topic of intense debate for most of the 2,500 years that separate the world of Heraclitus from ours today. Commonly, though, it is conceptualized in terms of distinctive traits that are believed to make those who possess them inherently more adept at directing, managing, and inspiring the remainder of the population who require their direction, management, and inspiration.

Different analyses place an emphasis on the importance of different traits. For Socrates the defining characteristics of a great leader were quickness of learning, good memory, courage, and broadness of vision, as well as physical presence and prowess. Distilled into contemporary psychological thinking, these ideas are typically related to mental qualities such as decisiveness, insight, imagination, intelligence, and charisma. Of these, it is the last—*charisma*—that has received the most intense scrutiny. In many ways, this is because the idea of charisma captures particularly well the sense of “something special” surrounding great leaders and our relationship with them.

Reviewing the development of thinking about charisma, Charles Lindholm (1990) charts a lineage that progresses from John Stewart Mill’s (1859–1869/1975) notion of the genius whose pleasures are of a higher order than the animalistic gratifications of the majority, through Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1885/1961) *Übermensch* (or “superman”) who is impervious to both pleasure and pain, to Gustave Le Bon’s (1895/1947) notion of the hypnotic crowd leader. However, it was in the seminal writings of Max Weber (1921/1946, 1922/1947) that the concept of charisma was first introduced explicitly and explored in depth.

As Antonio Marturano and Paul Arsenault (2008) point out, in the original Greek the word *charisma* (χάρισμα) has multiple meanings—including the power to perform miracles, the ability to make prophecies, and the capacity to influence others. Generally, though, the term is taken to refer to the idea of a leader’s “special gift.” Yet rather than seeing this simply as a gift that leaders *possess*, Weber’s use of the term also referred to charisma as something that is *conferred* on leaders by those in the community that they lead. As he put it:

The term “charisma” will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual is treated as a leader. . . . It is very often thought of as resting on magical powers. How the quality in question would ultimately be judged from any ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is entirely indifferent for purposes of definition. What is alone important

is how the individual is regarded by those subjected to charismatic authority, by his “followers” or “disciples”.

(Weber, 1922/1947, p. 359)

Unfortunately, the nuanced meaning that Weber gave the term has tended to get lost in more recent academic writing as well as in lay usage. In part this is because Weber’s writings on charisma were themselves inconsistent: sometimes treating it as an attribution to leaders and sometimes as an attribute of leaders (Iordachi, 2004; Loewenstein, 1966). In line with the latter reading, contemporary references to charisma tend to regard it as characteristic of the person rather than something that is endowed by others. That is, leaders are seen to be effective because they *have* the charisma (or the charismatic personality) that allows them to articulate a vision for a given group of followers and to generate enthusiasm for that vision.

Lending some credibility to the underlying construct here, studies find reasonable agreement between raters in assigning leaders to charismatic and non-charismatic categories. For example, Richard Donley and David Winter (1970) found high levels of agreement among historians when they asked them to judge the “greatness” of US presidents. Nevertheless, the fact that a person’s charismatic status can dramatically increase (or decrease) after their death is highly problematic for arguments that its source lies within the individual alone. Part of the problem here is that the precise nature of charisma also proves incredibly difficult to pin down. In many ways this is unsurprising, as Weber himself saw charisma as something that was distinguished precisely by being impossible to define—lying “specifically outside the realm of everyday routine” and being “foreign to all rules” (1922/1947, p. 361).

Notwithstanding its undoubted utility as a theoretical construct, these definitional and empirical difficulties pose serious problems for empirical scientists—particularly those who want to treat the construct as a property rather than as a perception. For without knowing exactly what it is they are looking for, it is hard to develop a meaningful platform for prediction and explanation.

The political decline of the “great man” approach: The impact of the “great dictators”

The issue of definition aside, Weber’s analysis led to his emergence as a seminal figure in the modern study of leadership. In this regard, he was very much a rationalist, believing that the future of leadership (and society) lay in the inexorable advance of instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) and institutional routine. This, however, was a future that Weber viewed with some concern, writing that “The routinized economic cosmos . . . has been a structure to which the absence of love is attached from the very root. . . . Not summer’s bloom lies ahead of us . . . but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness” (cited in Lindholm, 1990, p. 27).

6 *The New Psychology of Leadership*

As Weber saw it, only charismatic prophets could save society from this form of soul-destroying bureaucratic leadership. In the 1920s and 1930s this was a view that resonated with many ordinary Germans who hoped for the appearance of a charismatic Bismarck-like saviour who might take them from economic gloom and social breakdown into sunnier terrain (see Frankel, 2005). Such views are illustrated by the following comments of a Nazi high-school teacher as he reflected on the failure of the Weimar Republic:

I reached the conclusion that no party, but a single man could save Germany. This opinion was shared by others, for when the cornerstone of a monument was laid in my home town, the following lines were inscribed on it: "Descendants who read these words, know ye that we eagerly await the coming of the man whose strong hand may restore order".

(Abel, 1938/1986, p. 151)

Of course, events surrounding World War II proved Weber right about the polar night, but they also showed him to be spectacularly wrong about the role that charismatic leaders would play in historical progress. Far from saving the masses from darkness, charismatic dictators were responsible only for deepening the gloom. Far from saving nations and peoples, they destroyed them.

A core problem with Weber's analysis was that it *counterposed* the will of the leader to that of the rest of the population. According to his view, leaders need agency because masses lack it and hence heroic leadership was required in order to save the masses from themselves (for extended discussions see Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2003). It is clear too that the dictators themselves saw the masses as a material to be used (and abused) in the service of the leader rather than vice versa. Both Hitler and Mussolini articulated this through a strikingly similar conception of the leader as an artist. An insight into this emerges from an interview that the German journalist Emil Ludwig conducted with Mussolini in 1932. In this, Mussolini described how:

When I feel the masses in my hands, since they believe in me, or when I mingle with them, and they almost crush me, then I feel like one with the masses. However, there is at the same time a little aversion, much as the poet feels towards the materials he works with. Doesn't the sculptor sometimes break the marble out of rage, because it does not precisely mold in his hands according to his vision? . . . Everything depends upon that, to dominate the masses as an artist.

(cited in Falasca-Zamponi, 2000, p. 21)

In a similar vein, Hitler described himself as an artist who created history through his domination and subjugation of the masses. And in this respect,

his most accomplished artistic work was the myth that he and Goebbels created around his own leadership (Kershaw, 2001, p. 4). As the historian Andrew Roberts observes: “Hitler acquired charisma through his own unceasing efforts to create a cult of his own personality. [He] deliberately nurtured this status as infallible superman until millions proved willing to accept him at his own outrageously inflated estimation” (2003, p. 51). In Susan Sontag’s words, “never before was the relation of masters and slaves so consciously aestheticized” (cited in Spotts, 2002, p. 54).

As a result of having witnessed its destructive potential first-hand, in the period after World War II, attraction to strong leaders was viewed with profound skepticism, if not horror. Here the charismatic leadership that Weber had considered a solution for social problems came to be seen as an extreme and dangerous form of dysfunctionality. Charisma was a curse not a cure. To prove this point, a plethora of studies now diagnosed leaders who had cultivated mass followings as suffering from a wide variety of clinical disorders—including psychoticism (Bion, 1961), paranoid delusion (Halperin, 1983), narcissistic personality (Kershaw, 2000; Kohut, 1985), and borderline personality disorder (Lindholm, 1990; Waite, 1977). The same shift also created pressures to democratize the study of leadership. This involved moving beyond a fascination with a very few exceptional supermen and taking leadership into the realm of everyday psychology.

The standardization of leadership: Personality models and their failings

As the scientific stature of psychology advanced over the course of the last century, one of its main developments was the science of personality testing. Indeed, for many, this activity became both a sign of psychology’s scientific maturity and a tool by which means its scientific aspirations could be advanced (e.g., Eysenck, 1967, 1980). Moreover, in contrast to the elitism that had been characteristic of the preoccupation with great men, the rise of personality psychology is an example of the democratization of the discipline. It was of and for the majority, not simply the chosen few. Indeed, not only could personality tests be administered to large numbers of people, but mass testing was also *demande*d to ensure the reliability and validity of the wide variety of tests, measures, batteries, and psychometric instruments that the industry of personality testing spawned. Accordingly, whereas previous attempts to divine the character of individuals had required detailed biographical researching, now it could be ascertained through the administration of standardized tests. And where previously analysts had focused on the select few, now they could survey the broad multitude.

One field in which this form of testing really caught hold was that of organizational psychology, and here one domain in which researchers were particularly interested was leadership. The logic of this enterprise was undeniable; if it were possible to use such testing to identify from a large

sample of people those few who might be suited and destined for high office, then this would be an invaluable aid to organizations (and one for which they would pay handsomely). Not only could it inform processes of recruitment and selection, but so too it might guide decisions about training and promotion—allowing employers to ensure that the large amounts of time and money invested in these areas fell on fertile rather than stony ground.

For this reason, in the two decades following World War II, work on leadership was dominated by a hunt to identify those treasured measures of personality that might help organizations identify leaders of the future. Some indication of the scale of this enterprise emerges from an influential review conducted by Ralph Stogdill (1948) that appeared in the *Journal of Psychology*. This considered some 124 studies that together examined the predictive value of some 27 attributes—from intelligence and fluency of speech to social skills and “bio-social activity” (e.g., playing sport). On the basis of this analysis, Stogdill concluded that five factors appeared to have some role to play in the emergence of leadership: (1) capacity (e.g., intelligence, alertness); (2) achievement (e.g., scholarship, knowledge); (3) responsibility (e.g., dependability, initiative); (4) participation (e.g., activity, sociability); and (5) status (e.g., socio-economic status, popularity).

However, while some minimal level of these various dimensions appeared to be helpful, their capacity to predict leadership varied dramatically across different studies. This point was reinforced a decade later in another extensive review conducted by Richard Mann (1959). Surveying all the studies conducted between 1900 and 1957, Mann’s analysis looked at the relationship between leadership and over 500 different personality measures “as divergent as oral sadism, the *F*-scale [a measure of authoritarianism], adventurous cyclothymia [bipolar disorder], hypochondriasis, and total number of *vista* responses [responses to Rorschach tests believed to signify depression]” (1959, p. 244).

To provide some structure to his analysis, Mann organized these studies into seven meaningful clusters of measures. These corresponded to the main dimensions on which personality research had focused. As with Stogdill’s earlier survey, Mann’s primary observation was that the relationship between leadership and these different personality variables was highly variable but generally low. Indeed, from the findings summarized in Table 1.1 we can see that the average strength of the statistical associations between leadership and each of the seven main personality dimensions was only ever weak at best. Thus in the case of even the very best predictor (intelligence), this typically predicted only 5% of the variance in leadership—leaving a massive 95% unaccounted for.

As well as being generally poor predictors of leadership, it was apparent to both Stogdill and Mann that the *meaning* of many of the qualities in which they were interested varied as a function of the context in which they were displayed. What *counts* as a leadership quality depends on the context in

Table 1.1 Correlations between personality variables and leadership (data from Mann, 1959)

Personality dimension	No. of tests	Direction of association ^a	Median absolute correlation ^b (r)	Variance explained ^c (r ²)	Strength of association ^d
Intelligence	196	positive	.25	5%	weak
Adjustment	164	positive	.15	2.3%	weak
Extroversion	119	positive	.15	2.3%	weak
Sensitivity	101	positive	(<.10)	(<1%)	weak
Masculinity	70	positive	(<.10)	(<1%)	weak
Conservatism ^e	62	negative	?	?	?
Dominance	39	positive	.20	4%	weak

Notes

- a A positive association indicates that a higher score on the dimension in question is associated with greater leadership.
- b Absolute correlations can vary between a minimum of 0.00 and a maximum of 1.00.
- c Mann does not provide median correlations for sensitivity or masculinity but describes these associations as “low” and “weak” respectively.
- d According to Cohen’s (1977) criteria, correlations above .50 are strong, those between .50 and .30 are moderate, and those below .30 are weak.
- e Mann does not present data for conservatism, but notes that only one measure, the *F*-scale, reveals any consistent relationship with leadership.

which leadership is required. This means, for example, that a politician’s intelligence, adjustment, and sensitivity will appear different to the intelligence, adjustment, and sensitivity of a soldier. Different contexts thus call for different forms of the same quality.

A related problem was that with most personality variables it was not the case that the more a person had of a given attribute, the better he or she was as a leader. A person can have too much of a seemingly good thing. In the case of intelligence, Stogdill therefore observed that “the leader is likely to be more intelligent, but *not too much more* intelligent than the group to be led” (1948, p. 44; original emphasis). This led him to conclude that the five personality factors he identified (or any of the individual attributes that comprised them) were likely to be of little use without some knowledge of a sixth factor: *the social situation* in which the leader is found. This was because:

A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits, but the pattern of personal characteristics must bear some relevant relationship to the characteristics, activities and goals of the followers. Thus leadership must be conceived in terms of the interaction of variables which are in constant change and flux.

(Stogdill, 1948, p. 64)

Stogdill did not specify what he meant by “some relevant relationship,” but clearly this conclusion was very much at odds with the premises of the

psychological treasure hunt in which most researchers had been engaged up to this point. It was time to call the hunt off.

The biographical approach: Looking for the roots of greatness in personal histories

Given the difficulties inherent in trying to use standardized assessments of a person's charisma or personality as a basis for predicting and understanding his or her future success as a leader, one obvious alternative is to look *backwards* into the biographies of effective leaders in an endeavor to discern what it was about them that made them so great. This approach is probably the oldest in the field of leadership. Indeed, from the time that Socrates encouraged Adeimantus to reflect on the lessons that could be learned from the lives of the great philosopher-rulers, popular and academic biographies of great leaders have devoted considerable energy to the task of trawling through individuals' pasts in order to lay bare the key to their ultimate success.

This industry is so vast that it is very difficult either to summarize or to quantify. Nevertheless, to get a sense of its scale and scope, it is instructive to type the phrase "the leadership secrets of" into a web-based search engine and examine the results. The first thing one observes is that this search generates around 80,000 results. Even discounting the large number of these that are irrelevant, this number is still very impressive. Search highlights are summarized in Table 1.2 and, in the first instance, these give an indication of the range of individuals whose leadership secrets various commentators have attempted to lay bare.

Looking at these texts (for an extended analysis see Peters & Haslam, 2008), it would appear that people who are dead and male are much more likely than women or living people to be seen as having important leadership secrets. It would also appear that those in the former categories have more secrets than those in the latter: men have around three times more secrets than women, and dead leaders around twice as many secrets as those who are still alive.

Behind this broad consensus about who has more to teach us (a consensus that perhaps says more about the prejudices of the authors and their intended readership than about the realities of their subject matter) there is considerable dissensus in this literature. To start with, there is great variation in the number of secrets that leaders purportedly reveal. Some leaders are said to have had more than 100 secrets, whereas others only 4. Moreover, how many secrets a leader is believed to have had depends on who is writing about them and for what purpose. Thus John Man's (2009) book suggests there were 21 secrets to Genghis Khan's leadership, but Isaac Cheifetz's newspaper article identifies only 5. Likewise, when it comes to Jesus Christ, Mike Murdock's (1997) book suggests he had 58 secrets, but Gene Wilkes (1998) identifies only 7.

Table 1.2 A representative sample of the sources of “leadership secrets” and their number^a (from Peters & Haslam, 2008)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year of publication</i>	<i>No. of secrets</i>
<i>Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun</i>	Book	Roberts, W.	1989	100+
<i>The Leadership Secrets of Jesus</i>	Book	Murdock, M.	1997	58
<i>Jack Welch and the GE Way: Management Insight and Leadership Secrets of the Legendary CEO</i>	Book	Slater, R.	1999	24
<i>Leadership Secrets of Genghis Khan</i>	Book	Man, J.	2009	21
<i>Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell</i>	Book	Harari, O	2002	18
<i>Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham</i>	Book	Myra, H. A. & Shelley, M.	2005	10
<i>Leadership Secrets of the Rogue Warrior: A Commando's Guide to Success</i>	Book	Marcinko, R.	1998	10
<i>The Leadership Secrets of Santa Claus</i>	Book	Harvey, E., Cottrell, D., Lucia, A., & Hourigan, M.	2003	8
<i>Jesus on Leadership: Discovering the Secrets of Servant Leadership from the Life of Christ</i>	Book	Wilkes, C. G.	1998	7
<i>Management Secrets of Genghis Khan</i>	Newspaper article	Cheifetz, I.	2005	5
<i>Leadership Secrets of Mother Theresa</i>	Blog (about a book)	Dugan, R.	2007	5
<i>Why He's Still There: The Leadership Secrets of Saddam Hussein</i>	Newspaper article	Hickman, J.	2002	4
<i>Leadership Secrets of Osama bin Laden: The Terrorist as CEO</i>	Magazine article	Hoffman, B.	2003	(no list)

Note

a Top results relating to individual leaders from Google search conducted on October 1, 2008.

The disagreements are even more apparent when it comes to the actual content of these leadership secrets. It is probably unsurprising to find that the secrets of Mother Theresa (“help people love Jesus,” “submit to others as a spiritual discipline”; Dugan, 2007) are very different from those of a US Commando (“thou shalt kill thine enemy by any means available before he killeth you,” “thou shalt win at any cost”; Marcinko, 1998). However, it is

more surprising to find disagreement in the secrets of the same person, as when Wilkes suggests that one of Jesus's secrets was that he "humbled his own heart," while for Murdock what was important was that he "knew his own worth" and "went where he was celebrated." What is more, where some draw clear general lessons from a specific leader (Slater (1999), for instance, advises Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) to "cultivate managers who share your own vision"), others make precisely the opposite recommendation (the CEO should "listen to all different kinds of people and ideas" says Yaverbaum (2004)).

It would be easy to respond to these inconsistencies with cynicism and, along with Herbert Spencer (a renowned critic of Carlyle's "great man" theories) observe that: "[If you wish to understand social change] you should not do it though you read yourself blind over the biographies of all the great rulers on record" (Spencer, 1896, p. 37; cited in Segal, 2000). However, we would not go that far. Indeed, in the chapters that follow we will draw liberally on biographical data to advance our analysis. Our concern with the practice of divining secrets from particular leaders' lives results more from the problems inherent in attempting to draw general lessons from particular leaders without paying attention to the context of their leadership activities. Indeed, once one takes context into account, an intriguing pattern begins to emerge from the apparent confusion. That is, the different "secrets" start to make sense once one sees them as adages that hold for the particular groups that a particular leader seeks to direct, and that reflect the norms and standards of those groups. That is why it might make sense for a commando to follow the principle "I will treat you all alike—just like shit" (Marcinko, 1998, p. 13), for CEOs to avoid mention of sharing material or financial reward (e.g., see Slater, 1999; Thornton, 2006), but for Jesus to specifically avoid discrimination among his specific flock (Murdock, 1997). So, while it might be wrong to abstract general principles from looking at any one of these biographical texts alone, it may nevertheless be possible to derive a general meta-principle by looking at all of them together. This would take a form something like the following: "leaders should treat followers in ways that are compatible with group norms." However, this is to get way ahead of ourselves. For these are matters that we will examine much more closely from Chapter 3 onwards, and that we will ultimately seek to synthesize in our concluding chapter—in the process of clarifying principles that, we believe, need to inform the practice of leadership.

The theoretical deficiency of individualistic models

The points that emerge from previous sections have pointed to the range of empirical problems that derive from attempts to explain leadership with reference to the character and personality of individual leaders. These empirical problems are substantial. Moreover, they derive from a core conceptual

problem concerning the nature of human personhood. That is, the reason why “great man” approaches are too static and cannot explain variations in leadership across time and place is because at their very heart lies a model of the person as a static, isolated, immutable entity. Personality models, in particular, treat people in general and leaders in particular as possessing—and behaving on the basis of—a fixed and specific amount of a given attribute (e.g., intelligence, extroversion, sensitivity). This, however, is an analytical fiction that does violence to the context-specificity of behavior—including that of leaders.

As a concrete example of this point, consider first the verbal intelligence of George W. Bush. As we will observe more closely in Chapter 6, Bush is well known for verbal malapropisms (or “Bushisms”; Weisberg, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007) in which his command of the English language seems somewhat tenuous. Nevertheless, as the chief curator of these verbal gaffes, Jacob Weisberg, has observed, Bush’s verbal skills and intelligence vary dramatically with social context. Thus when talking to others on matters in which there is shared enthusiasm (e.g., baseball, business interests) Bush is strikingly lucid; it is only when discussing issues in which he has little interest (e.g., welfare provision, foreign policy) that his lack of fluency emerges. As Weisberg comments:

Bush’s assorted malapropisms, solecisms, gaffes, spoonerisms, and truisms tend to imply that his lack of fluency in English is tantamount to an absence of intelligence. But as we all know, the inarticulate can be shrewd, the fluent fatuous. In Bush’s case, the symptoms point to a specific malady . . . that does not indicate a lack of mental capacity per se. . . . He has a powerful memory for names, details, and figures that truly matter to him, such as batting averages from the 1950s. As the president says, we underestimate him. He was not born stupid. He chooses stupidity.

(2004, paras. 3, 21)

On the basis of such evidence, how might a single assessment quantify and characterize Bush’s intelligence? And if we felt confident enough to make it (e.g., on the basis of a test of verbal IQ), on what basis would we expect this measure to predict his capacity to lead?

As a second example, consider the personality and charisma of Barack Obama. At the time of his election in 2008, for millions of Americans, Obama was a profoundly charismatic figure: someone who powerfully embodied most, if not all, of the characteristics that the research discussed above would identify as predictive of leadership (e.g., Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948). Yet many people only came to see Obama as charismatic over the course of the election campaign, and many also remained stubbornly resistant to this assessment throughout. For example, in announcing his endorsement of the Democratic candidate, the Republican and former Secretary of State Colin

Powell indicated that this decision was based on observations of how Obama had *grown* over the previous 2 years in a way that had enabled him to “[capture] the feelings of the young people of America and [reach] out in a more diverse, inclusive way across our society.”² At the same time, ultra-conservatives like Jerome Corsi dismissed Obama’s appeal as a product of deceit and as evidence of a dangerous “cult of personality.” Corsi thus maintained that “for all of Mr Obama’s reputation for straight talking and the compelling narrative of his recollections, they are largely myth” (2008, p. 20).

So which assessment is right? To obtain a definitive answer to this question, one might be inclined to ask an independent psychologist to administer supposedly objective and non-reactive personality tests to Obama. But in deciding where these were to be administered, use of these “objective” measures would necessarily reflect (and instantiate) some stance on the question of where exactly the truth about his (or anyone else’s) personality is to be found. So if there are multiple stances on this (as there almost always are), which one should be authorized? Or should we simply average across them? Clearly there are problems with either strategy. Moreover, if charisma and character grow over time, at which point should we administer such tests in order to obtain a valid assessment?

The critical point here is that a single decontextualized assessment of a person’s character can never have universal validity for the simple reason that this character is always tied to context. Indeed, personality is as much a *product* of a person’s social world as it is a determinant of it (Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, & Veenstra, 2006). The same is true of leadership.

The political deficiency of individualistic models

As well as having significant theoretical weaknesses, a range of observers have argued that the preoccupation of researchers and commentators with individual leaders is also *politically* problematic. In particular, they consider this preoccupation to be pernicious because it perpetuates two disempowering falsehoods. First, it suggests that members of the general population are denied leadership positions for the simple reason that they lack relevant leadership qualities (despite the potentially democratizing consequences of mass psychological testing). If they were great enough they too would have assumed high office—but they aren’t and so haven’t. Second, it implies that it is only individuals who possess special qualities who are capable of imagining and bringing about social progress. Leadership is for the elite, not the *hoi polloi*. In this vein, Gary Gemmill and Judith Oakley (1992) have argued that the very notion of leadership is “an alienating social myth” that encourages the acquiescence and passivity of followers who, if they accept the view that social change is brought about only by the actions of distinguished individuals, become resigned to their lowly role and are deterred from seeking to bring about change themselves. Indeed, the desire to discourage others from challenging the legitimacy of their authority may explain why those who

occupy leadership positions often enthusiastically endorse highly individualistic models of leadership (e.g., after Rand, 1944; see also Bennis, 2000, pp. 113–114; McGill & Slocum, 1998). Along related lines, James Meindl and his colleagues have argued that leadership and charisma are simply romantic *attributions* that people make in order to explain group success (e.g., Meindl, 1993). However, like most romantic notions, Meindl argues that these do not have a strong grounding in reality (a point he supports with experimental research that we will consider in depth in Chapter 5).

Support for this type of argument is provided by historical evidence that the cult of the individual leader was promoted particularly vigorously in 19th-century Europe (e.g., through portraits, statues, and biographies) in order to nullify the threat to the ruling elites of various nations that was posed by the prospect of popular revolution (e.g., see Pears, 1992). At the opening of the 20th century, the same ideas were also invoked as a basis for resisting the emancipation of women and non-Whites, and for explaining these groups' lowly status (e.g., see McDougall, 1921, p. 139). Along related lines, as we have seen, great dictators of the last century were keen to foster cults of personality around their own leadership. On the one hand, this served to project an image of god-like superiority that essentialized their fitness to lead. On the other, it placed them above criticism and was used to justify the ruthless treatment meted out to those they perceived to be rivals or opponents.

Today, it is possible to see hagiographic profiles of powerful CEOs as a manifestation of similar status quo-preserving motivations. By encouraging the perception that such people really are supermen (and, very occasionally, superwomen), their exorbitant status, salaries, and bonuses can be seen as well deserved. Readers are also encouraged to believe that the way forward is to follow in those leaders' personal footsteps rather than to acknowledge, harness, and reward the contribution of followers to leaders' success or to mount a concerted political challenge to any injustices that such leadership embodies. In this way, Blake Ashforth and Vikas Anand (2003) note that cults of personality often pave the way for the emergence and justification of corruption in organizational contexts. Indeed, Jeffrey Nielsen considers this to be an almost inevitable consequence of standard hierarchical models of how leadership works:

Whenever we think in terms of “leadership”, we create a dichotomy: (1) leaders, a select and privileged few, and (2) followers the vast majority. There follows the implicit judgment that leaders are somehow superior to followers. So you get secrecy, distrust, over-indulgence, and the inevitable sacrifice of those below for the benefit of those above.

(2004, p. 6)

At worst, then, the glorified portraits of leaders that are handed down in popular texts present a picture from which the truths about leadership have

been deceitfully airbrushed out; at best, they paint only a part of the leadership landscape rather than the whole.

The faulty definition of leadership

The above discussion reveals a number of serious deficiencies in the way that leadership has come to be understood. Many of these deficiencies are perpetuated by writers of non-academic tracts—noting that in the fields of history and management the market for popular books on leadership is larger than for any other topic. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that these beliefs are only cultivated by those who are ignorant about the science of leadership. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, although almost all researchers reject unadulterated personality models of leadership, the majority still advocate hybrid models in which a leader's fixed decontextualized personality is a key ingredient.

Given the theoretical weaknesses of this approach, it is interesting to reflect on the reasons for its persistence. Principal among these is the fact that many people's orientation to these issues is informed by a *faulty definition* of leadership. This can be termed the *heroic definition*. It contends that our subject matter is – and needs to be – focused exclusively on that special breed of leaders: who they are, what they are like, what they do, when they succeed.

In his 2004 book *Managers not MBAs*, Henry Mintzberg contends that this definition has held toxic sway over leadership thinking and practice for the better part of the last century. In particular, it resonates with the influential writings of Frederick Taylor (1911) on scientific management and also with Douglas McGregor's (1960) observation that management theory is largely informed by a belief in the inherent superiority of managers' motivations and abilities (a so-called "Theory X" approach). In recent times, Mintzberg argues that such views have become entrenched in MBA programs that have cultivated "a new aristocracy" of business leaders, "a professional managerial caste that considers itself trained—and therefore destined—to take command of this nation's corporate life" (Mintzberg, 2004, p. 144). Paraphrasing his analysis, Mintzberg identifies seven beliefs that go along with this worldview (2004, p. 275). These assume that:

- 1 Leaders are important people set apart from those engaged in core business.
- 2 The more senior a leader is, the greater his or her importance.
- 3 Leaders pass strategy down to those with responsibility for implementing it.
- 4 Followers are inclined to resist leaders' ideas and authority.
- 5 Leaders have responsibility for establishing facts and allocating resources on that basis.
- 6 Leaders alone deserve reward for success (which they alone are qualified to assess).
- 7 Leadership is about the subjugation of others to one's will.

There are two particular problems with the definition that leads to this view. The first is that it tends to regard leadership as a noun rather than a verb, *something* that leaders possess rather than a *process* in which they are participants. The second is that its leader-centricity tends to obscure, if not completely overlook, the role that *followers* play in this process. In fact, though, if we return to the definition with which we started this chapter, we see that followers must be central to any act of leadership (e.g., see Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1978; Haslam, 2001; Hollander, 1985; Rost, 2008; Smith, 1995). This is for the simple reason that it is their labor that provides the *proof* of leadership. Without this labor there could simply be no leadership.

This point is captured well in Bertolt Brecht's (1935/1976) poem "Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters" ("Questions from a worker who reads"; Bennis, 2000, p. 116). In this the worker asks:

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will read the names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock? . . .

The young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?

Caesar defeated the Gauls.
Did he not even have a cook with him? . . .
(cited in Bennis, 2000, p. 252)

These rhetorical questions invite us, like the worker, to loosen the shackles of traditional approaches that define leadership as an activity that is exclusive rather than inclusive, personal rather than social, and individualized rather than collective. The simple fact of the matter is that any analysis of leadership that looks only at leaders is bound to fail.

Conclusion: Five criteria for a useful psychology of leadership

Having argued that there is a pressing need for a new psychology of leadership, a key question that needs to be asked before proceeding is how the superiority of such an analysis might be substantiated. What does a new psychology have to explain in order to be demonstrably superior to the old? On the basis of the foregoing observations, there are at least five criteria that our analysis needs to satisfy.

First, for reasons we have discussed at length, a new psychology needs to be *non-individualistic*. That is, our understanding of leadership needs to move beyond contemplation of isolated heroes and consider instead leaders' relationships with those who translate their ideas into action. This does not mean that we will lose sight of the individual, but it suggests that in order to understand how individual leaders and followers contribute to the leadership process we need to understand and explain how their psychologies are *shaped and transformed* by their engagement in shared group activity (Turner &

Oakes, 1986). This point harks back to Herbert Spencer's famous dictum that "before [the great man] can re-make his society, his society must remake him" (1896, p. 35). A key issue here is that we need to see leadership and society as mutually constitutive—each made by, and each transformed by, the other (Reicher et al., 2005).

Second, our analysis needs to be *context-sensitive*. As Stogdill (1948) first urged, rather than seeing leaders as "men for all seasons," we need to understand how the capacity of any leader (male or female) to exert influence over others is determined by the context in which their collective relationship is defined. Why did Churchill succeed in the war but lose in the peace (Baxter, 1983)? As we will see in the next chapter, our answers need to do more than merely suggest that different types of people are best suited to leading in particular situations, and consider instead how the influence process at the heart of leadership is itself structured by social context. This analysis also needs to explain why and how leaders are required to display sensitivity to that context in order to achieve the outcomes in which they and other group members are interested.

Third, we need to develop a psychology of leadership that is *perspective-sensitive*. One near-universal feature of prevailing approaches is that they assume that if one has identified the right person for a particular leadership position (e.g., on the basis of his or her personality), then this suitability will be recognized by all. In reality, though, as we noted in the case of Barack Obama, a person's capacity to influence others always depends on who those others are. However well-suited a leader may be to lead a particular group, this suitability is never acknowledged uniformly and rarely acknowledged universally. Thus while Obama's election was met with rapture by most Democrats, it was greeted with revulsion by many Republicans. As a further illustration of this point, consider what happened in December 2007 when the West Virginia University football coach, Richard Rodriguez, left Morgantown for the greener pastures of Michigan. Previously, Rodriguez had been a beloved son of the WVU fans, lauded for his footballing wisdom, his loyalty, and his sterling stewardship of the team. Unsurprisingly, though, once his departure was announced, fans were far less adulatory. Reaction was typified by a photo in *USA Today* of a WVU supporter holding up a banner that proclaimed in large text:

RODRIGUEZ. 3 things you don't have AND CAN'T BUY!

1. INTEGRITY 2. RESPECT 3. CLASS³

Although immediately understandable, the simple point that this unexceptional anecdote communicates is one that the received approaches to leadership have considerable difficulty explaining: namely that followers' perceptions of a leader's attributes and their responses to his or her leadership are both contingent on their relationship with the leader. If that relationship changes, so too will the leader's capacity to lead.

Fourth, there is a need for a psychology of leadership that, in the process of dissecting the workings of relevant processes, does not belittle or diminish them, but rather both acknowledges and explains their genuinely *inspirational and transformative* character. As we noted when discussing Weber's writings on charisma, one reason why this term has proved to have such enduring value is that it speaks to the idea that at the heart of effective leadership there is a set of very special human experiences. These have an emotional and intellectual force that allows people to feel that they are not only witnessing history but making it. This was what William Wordsworth felt at the start of the French Revolution when he reflected "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive/ But to be young was very heaven!" (1850, p. 299); it was what Barack Obama's supporters felt in Grant Park, Chicago on the evening of November 4, 2008 (see McClelland, 2008). Nevertheless, the key problem with traditional approaches to leadership is that while recognizing the importance of this subjective experience, they signally fail to account for it. Indeed, by attempting to capture its essence in prescriptive formulae that marry conventional psychologies of person and place, they kill the very thing they seek to comprehend.

A fifth and final requirement of a new psychology of leadership is that its analysis proves to have stronger *empirical validity* than those it attempts to supplant. As we have seen, despite its continued appeal, it is the inability of standard personality approaches to explain much of the variation in the efficacy of different leaders that constitutes their ultimate weakness—leading even their most enthusiastic supporters to be "disappointed" by their explanatory power (e.g., Cattell & Stice, 1954, p. 493). In the chapters that follow, a large part of our focus is therefore on building up an empirical case for the unfolding theoretical analysis we present. Given the complex nature of the phenomena we are addressing—on the one hand leadership can be a creative, even poetic, process, while on the other hand we suggest that there are general psychological processes at play in producing effective leadership—this will involve marshalling a variety of types of evidence. Sometimes we will use historical and everyday examples; sometimes we will analyze leadership language; sometimes we will use data gleaned from experimental studies. None of these evidential sources has priority over the others. All are essential. Each buttresses and complements the other in explaining the multi-faceted nature of leadership. Indeed, it is the convergence of different types of evidence that gives us confidence in our analysis and that will be the measure of success for the new psychology of leadership.