

After leaders: A world of leading and leadership ... with no leaders

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We have for such a long time tied ourselves up in knots with the word *leader*. We argue in this chapter (building on Drath, McCauley, Palus, Van Velsor, O'Connor and McGuir, 2008) that the field of leadership would make its greatest contribution thus far by jettisoning the word *leader* and giving prominence to leading and leadership. The preoccupation with on the one hand seeking the entitative traits, style, authenticity and charisma of *leaders*, and on the other hand endlessly problematizing the existence of such heroic mythical creatures has consumed so much resource for such little gain. This view is not new. Drath et al expressed this well in their pitch for repositioning leadership towards outcomes and process. Yet despite the eloquence and authority of their reasoned argument they could still not let go of *leader*. In a parallel way there is a growing group of researchers seeking to push forward with the notion of leadership-as-practice (for example Carroll, Levy and Richmond, 2008; Kempster and Gregory, 2015; Raelin, 2016).

This chapter seeks to connect the arguments of Drath et al. (2008) and emerging work on leadership-as-practice through the analogous use of an operations management lexicon – the notion of context, inputs, process and outputs: *leadership effect* as the output – are people more or less motivated, inspired, committed, confident, aligned, and directed; *practices of leading* (that generate the leadership effect) as the process – such as sense framing, directing, caring, and visioning; and

three forms of inputs (using Archer's 1995, notion of agents and structures) – *primary agents* as people in a condition prior to being influenced, *corporate agents* in positions of influence, and an array of *structural antecedent influences*. Aspects such as servant leadership, distributed leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership become realigned and viewed very differently through the lens of inputs, process and outputs. Certainly, very differently when the *leader* aspect no longer exists. The sacred and romantic notion of leaders has been long forgotten. Critical leadership scholars work has been done. The world has moved on. The agenda is to perhaps understand the purposes and responsibilities of the leadership effect and a greater alignment of inputs and processes to achieve necessary action to the wicked problems that face humanity.

In this way the orientation of the chapter seeks to offer up an unapologetic vision of a world that has a much more deliberate appreciation of 'leading' and 'leadership'. With these two words much more clearly understood and enacted in everyday activity we suggest the much-overlooked sense of purpose – including societal purposes – will become salient and palpable to such everyday acts of leading and emergent leadership. This is because those leading are most conscious of the purposes for which they are leading, and they are not caught up in entity orientations associated with the *leader*. The distracting and anachronistic ontological fixation to a leader concept as a categorical mistake (Kelly, 2008) has led discourses on leading and leadership into a wasteful cul-de-sac. Wasteful in the sense of expenditure on leadership development, wasteful regarding academic attention, and so wasteful in terms of contributing to society. We position the chapter as a reflexive

dialogue between ourselves examining our hopes for the demise of the *leader* concept and debate the argument for the operations lexicon.

We draw on a research approach Steve has used elsewhere (Kempster and Bainbridge, 2017), described as testimonio (Beverley, J. (2000), where letters are exchanged that allow a particular phenomenon to be examined in a critically reflective manner. In this way we offer up our letters between ourselves as the basis of the chapter. As a consequence the chapter is structured by Ken first examining the futile search for the *leader*. Steve responds to this provocative opening letter by offering up an alternative way of conceiving leadership – he draws on the language of operation management and the notion of inputs, processes and outputs. Ken’s response is to imagine how this would become operationalized (excuse the pun), with emphasis to leading through speeches. Steve concludes the chapter by exploring how leadership without the *leader* might address the enormous challenges our societies face.

Incidentally we shall persist with italicizing *leader* in order to make this word salient and to irritate so people similarly take to hating the word!

Letter #1: Ken on futility and fixation of the leader

Dear Steve,

You asked me a few days ago, can we imagine a world without people using the word *leader*? I have chosen to take up that question, challenge indeed, and pen some thoughts to you. I do this as a researcher and writer of leadership, and it is in this context my letter is situated.

Perhaps if we get rid of the word *leader*, indeed if we get rid of the whole concept of *leader*, then leading and leadership immediately fill the gap. For researchers, if we do not have to write about the *leader*, then we must write about what is causing and doing the leading and the leadership effect that follows. It might be about the person engaged in leadership in some way. But there's more, it is not just the person doing these things – indeed it might not even involve a person, for example Microsoft Word and the red that underscores spelling errors leads changes! We will have to examine the structures that allow for the wielding of power in order to influence other people. We will have to look for the ways in which power is generated and allocated within the organization or society. Then, we look at leadership. Suddenly, it all becomes fun and purposeful for researchers.

I have had a bee in my bonnet for some time about the overuse of the word *leader*. In fact, if I had my way, I would have it removed from our lexicon. If I did not say this in the 2nd edition of our book (Jackson and Parry, 2011), I will be making this point in the third edition. I think that too many people use the word *leader* as a cop-out when they cannot be bothered explaining the position of the person whom they are discussing. I see it all the time in journal submissions. I see it everywhere.

I have a case in point.

I am on the Editorial Board of *The Leadership Quarterly* journal; although that might be in doubt after this book comes out. I have reminded authors and editorial colleagues many, many times that this is a Leadership journal, and not a *Leader* journal. Under the cloak of researching leadership, and with an article title that invariably says "... leadership ..." the discourse falls almost immediately into that of

leader and *leaders*. Usually, the author is researching the leadership of a manager or some other role in an organization. However, without further ado, these managers get called *leaders*. No-one even bothers to explain the difference between *leader* and leadership, nor who is this rogue *leader* who always seems to appear immediately, often in the abstract no less. This blunder comes from 'big' names who at least should be open to question the ontological premise that is assumed. It is slovenly at best and un-professional at worst.

This matter is a bit like the Americans in 2017 who should have known better. They just go with the crowd, because 'everyone else is doing it', and 'I don't want to get a bad name' by making it difficult for everyone else. So, they just go along with the sham. Eventually, as we now know, people don't even realize that there is a problem let alone a solution to the problem. There's a sense of what Alvesson and Spicer describe so beautifully as 'The Stupidity Paradox' (2016: page). People accept the dubious or the absurd, for short term result, and then continue doing it without questioning or challenging why. They conform thoughtlessly. Thoughtless conformity is stupid. People who raise the alarm become demonized, and become the victims of what Giacalone and Promislo (2013) call the stigmatization of goodness. The population becomes socialized into notions that honesty actually means undermining the organization's interests, or that courage is actually disloyalty, or that 'social responsibility' is actually losing interest in the welfare of the institute. I have become demonized by raising the alarm about the indiscriminate use of *leader*. Subtle threats have been made about being removed from the Editorial Board. Perhaps my windows will get smashed. Perhaps I will be put on an agrarian steam train and taken somewhere. I should be so lucky.

But, what do we really mean when we write or talk about *leader*? Invariably people are referring to the CEO, or the person in charge, or the manager, or the senior Parliamentary member of the political party, or whatever. The problem is that I don't know who the devil they are referring to because they just take the easy option and call them *leader*. If one is to refer to the manager and then talk about the leadership challenges that they face (or the management challenges of course), then we would also know what they are on about. As it is at the moment, the situation is more confused rather than less so by calling people *leader*. Instead of clarifying the knowledge and understanding of the reader, authors are making the whole argument more confusing. Sense-making is not being achieved. Ironically, within a body of knowledge that is all about sense-making (Weick, 1995; Pye 2005), those very authors are sense-destroying.

Also, there is a sexiness or populism about the use of the term *leader*. Partly it is a cop-out and partly it is a form of bullying, wherein power is vested with the *leader*. Others have to play the weaker role of follower. This asymmetry of power flies directly in the face of leadership, let alone the popular notion of distributed leadership, that apparently, we all should be trying to achieve. If anyone is going to be in charge and have the power, then that person should be the manager who has control as one of their responsibilities. Generating leadership among the workforce is another of their responsibilities. Many people eschew the notion of having multiple *leaders*. They usually say that we have only one *leader*. Therein lies the problem. Leadership is partly about generating and developing leadership (not *leaders* of course 😊) right through the organization. As a respected colleague said,

management is the toughest gig of them all, and we enfeeble ~~emasculate~~ 'the manager' by frivolously calling them *leader*.

Calling someone *leader* seems so permanent. Along with its associated quasi-bullying acquisition of power it suggests that no-one can become leader, and that leadership is restricted to one person. Now, that person usually has the better job title, higher salary, expense account and budget. But yet, still, more is expected and given - the title of 'leader' and a sense of exclusivity and hegemony around such a title.

For years Steve, you and I have asked people of all ages, "What does a *leader* do?"

The answer always is, "Leadership".

I looked up quite a few dictionary definitions of *leader* and they all say 'person who leads'.

... Hello ...

Bing!!

Yes, it is all about leading and leadership! After we all get that worked out with the notion of *leader*, THEN we need to look at the people who do the leading and leadership. There probably will be many of them, and not one *leader*.

For a long time, I wondered why so many of my American colleagues have gravitated toward the term *leader* so readily. Now it is becoming clearer to me. First, the term fits well with the culture of the USA. The people like the whole notion of being a *leader*. That notion proliferated in their discourse; in the media, movies, business discourse, academic discourse. The hegemony and domination of American discourse, based on the size of the market there, has ensured that this notion has

infiltrated discourse in other English-speaking countries. There is a marketing law called *Say's Law*. It says that supply creates its own demand. The expansion in the use of *leader* is a great example. Now, because of the massive supply of overuse of the term *leader* from the USA, we all use the term in our academic literature, as well as business and media discourse. We have taken the easy way out, and just gone along with the majority. We even have our own non-American journals on leadership, all of which are now writhing in the quagmire of the *leader*-leadership dilemma. I remember a time, not that long ago, when Britain did not have Professors of Leadership or schools or degrees in leadership. Now they are many in number, and the use of the word *leader*, with its associated confusion, will be endemic within all of this.

I will elaborate on the point I made earlier. *Leader* is essentially an English-speaking term; and only recently has it infiltrated the whole English-speaking world. The French language does not have a word for *leader*. The closest they have is chef (closest to chief in English). The German word for *leader* is very out of favour, but also means 'guide'. The Spanish word is lider, so they seem to have adopted the English word. Possibly, there is no Spanish word. The Chinese language has no word for *leader*, but has words meaning controlling and winning. They have the word 'lingdao', which is approximately that of 'boss' in English. I suggest that we in the English-speaking world have created and propagated this word *leader*, and now we have stuffed it up. It is time to go back to our roots, or at least to something that we know – leadership. It is also time to breathe some more life back into 'management' and 'manager'.

As I was writing this letter, I received an email advising that the Australian Institute of Management (AIM) would now be called the Institute of Managers and Leaders (iML). I am a Fellow of AIM, I know a fair bit about management. But now I am confused and concerned. I am not much of a manager and quite probably a lousy leader. Hell, I don't even know if I am a *leader* or not. I know that I demonstrate good leadership from time to time. People have kindly told me. But am I a *leader*? It seems such a 'go/no go' gauge. You are either in or you are out. If you are out, you get chipped up and recycled. Perhaps I am just a 50% *leader*, probably much less. Perhaps I am 'narrow pass' *leader*. I have read a lot about this over the years. The only answer to 'am I a *leader*?' that I can come up with is 'maybe, maybe not; sometimes'. If I self-rated on Bass and Avolio's excellent and rigorous leadership frequency scale, I would probably be a 'Once in a while' *leader*, which rates 1 on a scale of 0-4. Hell, I don't even want to be a *leader*. I don't want all that weight on my shoulders. I might soon be without a professional body. One thing is for sure. The proliferation of the use of the term *leader* is not helping anyone.

So, what do we do?

The change must come from the academic, scholarly community. The people of the wider population don't really care about the word or concept of leader, but do care about the effects and consequences ~~matter~~. However, As such they need to take the lead with ~~of~~ the academic community to also get rid of the mythical notion of *leader*. If the wider community stops hearing about *leader* from the academic community in lecturers, seminars, executive education, the media and popular press writing, then

Commented [BC1]: Not entirely sure this is fair? They may not care about the word or concept.....but may care about the effects or consequences?

the use of the term will atrophy and wither. But, the change must come from the academic community. I wonder if we are up to it?

Your 1 out of 4 *leader* friend

Ken

Letter #2: Steve on the new lexicon of leadership

Dear Ken

A provocative view as ever my friend. I found myself stirred by your 1 out of 4 leadership. Not as *leader* of course; but by your sense-giving that seeks to shape my sense-making. I'm picking over my choice of words carefully here so I don't reap your wrath! You lay out the need for scholarly attention to the words we use so as not to sow further obfuscation on the subject of leadership, leading and the *leader*. The salience you bring to the hegemony of the *leader* concept and how this distorts relationships and limits opportunities for broader more inclusive and democratic forms of leading is a persuasive argument.

'Lets start at the very beginning (that's a very good place to start' (Sound of Music, Rogers, 1965) and consider a possible, and for me plausible, construct of leadership. Reflecting on a recent conversation with Mary Uhl-Bien (Uhl-Bien et al, in Press), we sought to create a construct that was leadership in order to define followership. The conversation started with my misgivings around followership. We settled on the notion that the leadership construct is at its heart quite simple. It was the skill of leading. It drew on the etymology of the suffix 'ship' – Germanic origin meaning

quality, knowledge, skill, or craft – and the apocryphal story of a Viking standing at the front of a longboat guiding direction through the openings of the ice leads – the skill of leading! So in this way leadership is centrally about leading – this is the core, which I shall develop a different lexicon around.

My disquiet with followership is similar to that of leader. I am minded of the research I have undertaken with Doris and Gareth (Schedlitzki, Kempster and Edwards, 2016) in search of followers. Using a Lacanian lens we have explored the *leader* image as one of fantasy; a desire to become a *leader* that is a continual process of disillusion. Primarily this is centred on the hegemonic leadership discourse within organizations. People desiring to be *leaders* assume the existence of followers. We argue that a form of ‘phantasmic attachment’ (Jones and Spicer, 2005: 235) is present in pursuance of ‘imagined leader images [where] the subject can only become the leader when he/she is tied into an imagined relationship centred on the recognition of him/herself as the leader by a follower.’ (Schedlitzki et al 2016: [page]). Returning to the notion of hegemonic organizational leadership discourse this reinforces the desire of a *leader* image to control the attached follower (Mueller (2012: 280). But this phantasmic attachment is rooted in ‘the hegemony of the *leader*-follower relation and its promise to deliver what we seek, that the subject continues to desire becoming a *leader* and having control over the fantasised follower.’ Schedlitzki, Edwards and Kempster, 2016: [page]). In essence we postulated that notions of a *leader* identity, and associated hegemonic discourse with such an identity, is a fantasy of continual desire for followers to enable its construction – yet continually failing to become manifest. The phantasmic attachment connects with what Simon Kelly describes as the negative ontology of

leader (Kelly, 2014). *Leader* does not exist as a fixed entity, but is rather an ideal concept that conjures up fantasies of possibilities. Simon draws on Barthes' (1993) work on mythology and the notion of second order form of language to suggest this ideal mythical concept is a floating signifier – relying on proxies to inform the fantasy. So, by negative ontology Simon persuasively asserts *leader*[ship] is ideological rather than ontological (2014: 907). There is an issue here for us Ken. If we buy Simon's argument to move away from ontology to ideology then this has major implications for us as researchers. Do we become 'an ideologue, politician, activist, cultist or soothsayer[?]' (2014: 912). With any argument we develop here, let's be cautious on this. Guthey (2013) has persuasively offered a reframing of the leadership research and development industry as one of fashions.

Incidentally the second stage of the 'search for followers' research has focused on the lived experiences of managers as 'followers'. We asked managers to create a timeline and then examine the leadership relationships. Next, we asked them to define for themselves the difference between following and being a follower. Finally, we asked them to identify leadership relationships in which they were followers and those in which they were following. What have we found so far ... very few follower relationships were identified. The explanations offered included questionable attribution to those who led in terms of viewing them as a *leader*. The empirical data shows that very few people see themselves as followers and reject the attribution, and seek to resist the hegemonic asymmetric relational expectation. Yet ironically many managers lamented the unfortunate experiences of the lack of experiencing good *leaders* in their timelines. I can imagine Simon (Kelly) with a broad smile over his face and a wise look of contentment!

So where does this take us?

The search for followers research above, suggests a reframing. We should seek to work on concepts that are not empty or floating signifiers – work with ‘first order sign system of a manager (signifier), managing (signified) = doing things right (sign)’ (Kelly, 2014: 917). To guide this reframing it’s a helpful starting point to draw on Drath et al. (2008). Drath et al. speak of processes that create the outcomes as leadership practices shaped by *leaders* (2008: 643). It is disappointing that despite the great promise they offer in terms of a new ontology of leadership focused on leading and leadership outcomes they are still caught up with the ideological myth of the *leader* as the input. In part it could be the cultural issue you highlighted of our American colleagues where leadership must have *leaders* (and followers).

In our brave new world the reframing replaces the fantasy signifier of *leaders* with a an alternative lexicon of leadership. A lexicon draws from discourses in operations management and systems thinking. As you know I’m most taken with soft systems thinking (Checkland, 1999) and its emphasis on systems of purposeful human activity. If leadership is seen as purposeful human activity then the reframing of leadership as a transformation might reflect the following: demotivated to becoming motivated; lacking curiosity to becoming curious; unclear direction to having a clear direction; low commitment to having high commitment; low self-efficacy to having high self-efficacy. So the language of inputs, process and outputs (as first order language) become the central features of a new lexicon of leadership. With my endless desire for frameworks I offer up this suggestion:

Insert figure 1 about here

Let me explain what I'm exploring here. Leadership effect is the outcome that emerges within a specific context. I shall come back to the context shortly. The outcome labelled as leadership effect is the outcome of leading impacting on people within a context. In essence the leadership effect places emphasis to the people being influenced – those impacted by the leading. Drath et al. (2008) assumed such an outcome, and following a review of extant literature, suggested the leadership outcome to be direction, alignment and commitment. I think this is helpful but perhaps rather restrictive. There are many aspects that could be considered part of the leadership outcome (or leadership effect), and I have illustrated some of these. Let me be clear though, leadership effect could be a consequence of more than people – such as materiality (the earlier Microsoft Word example). I am just giving emphasis to people – noting that soft systems thinking focuses on purposeful human activity.

What do you think?

Leading as a process, and as a verb, is centrally about an activity. For example, I have put your notion of sense-making here. Actually I have offered this as sense-giving to give emphasis to framing how people may understand what is occurring and why, and how action could be enacted. The leading is enabled (or disabled) by corporate agents (Archer, 1995) who have or desire to have some influence. In figure 1 I offer some dimensions that might reflect such people, such as experience, power,

networks, ethics or roles. For example, if someone seeking to lead is perceived as lacking integrity it might seem plausible that this person would be less able to undertake the process of leading effectively – that is enabling transformation of inputs (e.g. demotivated people) to outputs (motivated people). But such influences need to be considered as a bundle of elements (or practices) – perhaps most notably power drawn from positional authority, or expertise. Ken, you have often spoken about the prominence of organizational psychopaths and how often they seek out roles to influence sense-making (e.g. Babiak, 1995). Their ability to cloak the unethical conduct is clearly a skill as they yield their institutional power. However corporate agents could be people with no positional authority. Such people might be experts, well connected, passionate and determined. These corporate agents may reach out through technology and creating greater power and influence through social movements. In essence lets not fall back into assuming the managers are those that lead.

The leadership context could be a team, department, an organization, even a nation. All contexts have of course antecedent influences that inform and frame leadership outcomes. For example, the effect of being inspired, or having a clearer sense of direction are relative to past experiences in the relationship. Additionally, alternative experiences of how others have undertaken the leading will shape expectations through a sense of learned organizational practices. I have described the context in slightly indigestible language of antecedent structural context. This is intended to capture the structural influence that impacts on the corporate agents, as well as the primary agents, as well as the process of leading.

The leadership effect in the outcomes has impact on all three inputs in terms of shaping emergence and becoming. I have sort to capture this in the next figure as temporal dynamic:

Insert figure 2 about here

The notion of inputs, process and outputs embedded in the leadership context generates a leadership system. A system that is characterized by the potential for a fluidity of participants, rather than the singularity of the *leader* and associated hegemony. In this way the opportunities for shared leadership or distributed leadership to become manifest seem most abundant. If someone with expertise (person of influence at that moment) steps into the process of influencing sense-making and as such enhances people's motivations, feelings of success and commitment then leadership has become manifest. If we have no *leaders* then there is a very real possibility of liberating and democratizing a greater distribution of power and influence. Joe Raelin (2016) has recently advocated this sort of dynamic. For sure he has removed emphasis on the *leader* from his lexicon, and gives voice to agency and how this can become leadership as fluid collaboration. What he does not do is provide clarity of lexicon to explain leading and leadership connected with such agency.

I am suggesting a lexicon that draws from first order signifiers – a language that has is less floating and ideological; more grounded in a clearer sense of ontology.

Through orientating the lexicon of inputs, people of influence, process as leading and

leadership outputs, embedded in leadership contexts, we can view leading as a process. I'm shamefully selling this to you Ken, aligned to your overt ontological commitment to leadership as a process (Parry, 1998). Less keen is your resonance for leadership-as-practice (LAP) Denis, Langley and Rouleau, 2005; Carroll, Levy and Richmond, 2008; Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2010; Raelin, 2011; Endrissat and Von Arx, 2013). But I do think LAP resonates so strongly with this lexicon as it reflects the same ontological movement away from the *leader*, and places emphasis to relational and situated practices of leadership relationships. A sense of individual agency, that may stimulate a fluid inter-agency dynamic to enable collective action and leadership outcomes as practices of communities engaging in technical and relational aspects of work (Raelin, 2015). Did I send you the paper I did with Sarah (Kempster and Gregory, 2016)? We broadly (or is it loosely) used the approach outlined here examining practices of an organization with particular attention to how a middle manager (not a *leader* of course) addressed an acute crisis. I mention this (not to increase citations – perish the thought) but to open up possibilities of where this lexicon of leadership might lead. In the same vein I wonder how leadership development might fit to this approach?

I await your thoughts.

Best

Steve

Letter #3: Ken on rethinking leadership debates through this lexicon

Dear Steve,

I really do like your language of inputs, processes and outputs. It is not a new concept generally, but it does now add a sense of salience to all of us who are scholars of leadership. More importantly, it gives coherence to the arguments that you and I are making with this exchange. Instead of a *leader*, we have a people and many other elements. ~~Well, actually, we have people with all the skills and traits that must go with those potential positions of influence.~~ This is excellent. After all, leadership is mostly about people influencing other people. In my days in manufacturing, it was not *leaders* who roll-formed steel coil. There were people (of course), but also there were raw materials, power, finance, packaging, work-shop orders ... and so on ... and of course a whole team of engineers to keep things running. There were those leading and those following all over the place. I was just one of them, and like just about everyone else, taking both roles at the same time. Therefore, it sounds to me like you have replaced the floating or 'fantasy' signifier of *leader* with something else. You have replaced it with the much firmer foundation of the clear signifier of people who are leading in order to generate leadership. I think that our colleagues around the world will like to see that. You have now opened up all five elements – inputs, agency, processes, outputs, and that of context. We now have the opportunity as leadership scholars to work with all five. In particular, you have opened up the problematic element by freeing us of the constraints of the floating signifier of *leader*.

I have helped thousands of people over the years to draft leadership speeches. As the input for their speech, they are never a *leader*. No, they are a manager, teacher, parent, Presidential candidate, committee Chair, or whatever. They must be able to

explain their audience, the context of the speech, the role that they are playing, and the general outcome that they want to achieve. The speech-maker must know this, just as the audience must also know this. THEN, they engage in the process of putting the words together. This communication process must influence the audience and help with the sense-making of the audience. Finally, this all results in the output of an inspired audience who have a sense of purpose about where they are heading and why they should follow the person making the speech. To identify them as *leader* right from the start would be a mistake. It is a romantic, mythological concept (a floating signifier) that is just plain wrong. The mistake is that they seem to assume they have already achieved the leadership by being the person giving the speech. BUT, they have not achieved their leadership until after they have actually undertaken the leading. They are just one person in a moment among a multiple of people in multiple moments who may connect to achieve something. As a person they cannot claim leadership at all.

Thank you for opening up the door of insight to me.

Ken.

Letter #4: Steve on using this new lexicon to address the societal challenges – putting leadership as purpose to work

Gooday Ken

Great point on the speeches. It captures the essence so clearly, thanks. The question set for us in channeling our letters is 'after leadership?' We of course have reframed the question to 'after *leader*?' When we speak of getting our acts together it is towards advancing understanding of leading and developing the practice of leading that should become prominent. The work of Scott et al (2017) is most relevant to this argument. Scott et al explore the notion of deliberate practice and compare unfavorably leadership with other fields in terms of developing excellence of practice. There is little agreement in the leadership field with regard to terms of what excellence of leading might look like, no acceptance of experts for which others can compare themselves or expert coaches, similarly no sense of a practice regime that creates excellence of leading and no practice fields for improvement. Perhaps this is more to do with the lack of attention to the practices of leading. But also a lack of attention to the orientation of leading. That is, less about the person's attributes and more about the foci of the leading and how to frame sense-making with regard to gaining leadership outputs of for example direction, alignment and commitment to the purpose of work. In this regard the work you have done Ken on speeches is most central.

You point to the need for leadership research to be built on firm foundations. Leadership studies has endeavored to build castles out from foundations based on 'running sand'. (In my surveying days I recall there was nothing worse than running sand – it would turn hardened builders into quivering wrecks!) The expectations of those spending billions on leadership studies and leadership development per annum (Myatt, 2012) have sought a dividend – a dividend to enrich our institutions, our communities and societies, and by necessity the planet. Leadership scholars

have fallen short time after time in delivering this dividend – perhaps inevitably so when building on bad foundations. However it is not acceptable that we collectively persist in such wasteful endeavor with such immense talent that exists in the leadership industry.

Arguably leadership is society's most significant mechanism for catalyzing social action to draw on the power and thus influence that is connected to those who are in positions of authority, as well as the power and influence of collectives drawn together to address particular social issues. The time is prescient for leadership studies to get its act together; the challenges humanity face demand this of us. We need to put leading and leadership to work. We need to move from endlessly examining / critiquing the mythical *leader* – traits, styles, authenticity, transformational, charismatic – and address the question 'leadership for what?' – a purpose and responsibility orientation (Kempster and Carroll, 2016). I would offer that the lexicon of leading and leadership connected to notions of inputs, agency, process and outputs orientates leadership toward the leadership for what question. Ken let me give an example. With Brad and Merv (Kempster, Jackson and Conroy, 2011) we argued that leadership had lost its purpose. Your point in the first letter gives voice to the issue – too much attention to those leading and too little attention to what they are seeking to lead and why? Using the lexicon of inputs, agency, process and outputs – a focus on leadership of purpose would offer: inputs as people searching for purpose, people with influence seeking to shape sense-making towards purposeful outcomes; process as leading sense-making around purposes – understanding what these are and why; outcome as a clear sense of purpose aligned

to personal interest – captured in Aristotle’s notion of ‘telos’. That is easy to say, but so much harder to enact. Our research showed there was little appetite by managers to engage in this space for three prominent reasons: first, because there was limited expectations and experiences of those ‘following’ for managers to frame everyday work as meaningful in terms of societal purpose; second, the research identified the difficulty for the managers to anchor everyday work to societal purposes; and third, there was limited skill to engage in effective framing of sense making related to societal purpose.

Purpose connects with motivation, curiosity, energy, commitment and passion to engage in work that has meaning and purpose beyond instrumental gain. Using MacIntyrean language, realizing internal goods generated out from practice virtues aligned with an individual’s sense of telos (MacIntyre, 1985). Surely the endless investment into leadership and leadership development (Myatt, 2014) is seeking to realize these contributions – this after all must be the outcome that is anticipated.

But here’s the thing.

The internal goods, the gifts for society, can be aligned within organizations to address the grand challenges that face society. Some emerging and disturbing data: Expectations of just a 2C temperature rise are now most conservative – we should prepare for 4C (Berners-lee and Clark, 2013). Ocean acidification is as bad as it has been for 300 million years. Three of the Earth’s boundary conditions for life have been breached and we are close to breaching many of the remaining 6 (Steffen et al., 2015). The current planetary human migration that presently stands at 66 million (the population of the UK) will seem like a ‘tame’ problem in 80 years’ time when

estimates point to 1 billion with the populations of US, most of Africa, Middle East, India and China on the move. These of course are but a few of the challenges. The United Nations has made a good fist of interpreting these into the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) (United Nations, 2014). The enormous challenge for leadership is how to translate these challenges or SDG's into action, action that is part of everyday activity.

So the case for the leadership outcome connect with these grand challenges seems most relevant and timely. The difficulties lie in connecting societal purpose with everyday organizational activity, as well as connecting organizations – businesses, public and third sector – to work together with governments and NGO's. This is an enormous challenge for leadership studies. It's the equivalence of our 'Cern' challenge. (The Cern project, in search of the fundamental elements that constitute life, incorporates approximately three quarters of the planet's particle physicists). Can the leadership studies industry come together and achieve real breakthroughs? If we can let go of the *leader* fixation we stand a much better chance. Let's hope there are no more conferences and papers that waste our time critiquing the *leader* in leadership, or generating the next theory of *leader* in leadership. Humanity needs effective leading otherwise we need not worry about after *leader* or after leadership

...

Steve

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore 'after *leader*'. In this respect we have sought to provoke attention to the distraction of the word '*leader*' in leadership. There is of course a paradox here. We are seeking we are seeking to lose the word *leader* to open up leadership as a process all are called to in different ways and different moments. For both of us exploring this paradox with students, managers and colleagues has been a difficult task. 'How can leadership lose *leader*?' 'Why are we listening to you guys?' The mythical, romantic and sacred nature of *leader* is rooted within peoples lived experiences. Yet for leadership to be effective we do need to embrace this paradox. And we need leadership more than ever. The hopeful movement away from the romanticized assumptions associated with *leaders* may liberate the opportunity for both those in positions of influence and the many more in positions to act to collaborate together. The grand challenges which are the task of leadership to address are of course wicked problems. As Grint (2005) has astutely asserted these can only be addressed through collaborative effort. Giving attention to advancing collaborative leading focused on purposes and responsibilities will create a very different research agenda for leadership studies, and similarly different agenda for leadership development. A world after '*leader*' needs to be different by necessity. Leadership scholars simply must make a real impact, and not through increased citations between ourselves.

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Figure 1: Systems Example of the Operations Lexicon – Inputs, Process and Outputs

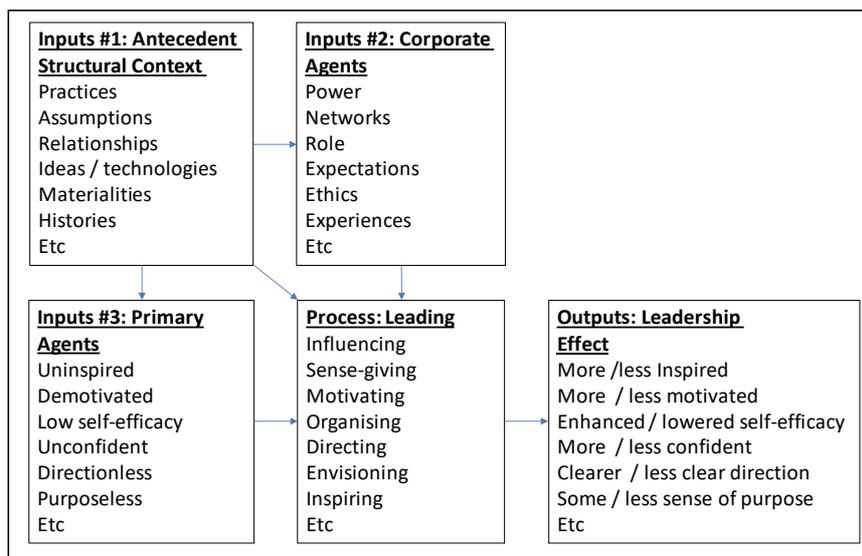


Figure 2: Systemic and emergent change through time

