Teaching Leadership Critically: New Directions for Leadership Pedagogy

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TITLE

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ABSTRACT

Conventional approaches to teaching leadership in business schools have over relied on transformational models that stress the role of charismatic individuals, usually white men, in setting compelling visions to which all organizational actors are expected to subscribe. Such approaches pay insufficient attention to the dynamics of power, the influence of context and the significance of follower dissent and resistance. This article examines the pedagogical potential of Critical Leadership Studies: an emergent, alternative paradigm which questions deep seated assumptions that power and agency should be vested in the hands of a few leaders, and explores the dysfunctional consequences of such power dynamics for individuals, organizations and societies. It also recognises that follower compliance and conformity, as well as resistance and dissent, are important features of leadership dynamics. Informed by our own experience of trying to teach leadership more critically, the essay highlights a number of guiding principles that, we argue, have the potential to reshape and enrich leadership pedagogies in business schools.

KEYWORDS: Critical leadership studies, pedagogy, romanticism, power, hubris, conformity, resistance

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past 50 years or so, leadership has been one of the most widely taught subjects in business schools around the world. In recent times the importance and influence of leadership studies in business school curricula has increased even further. Just as there is no single way to enact or study leadership, so there is considerable diversity in the ways that leadership is taught. Scholars in different business schools emphasise different theories, approaches and themes, often informed by their own research interests and concerns. However, despite this diversity, most leadership courses adhere to a rather narrow set of psychological assumptions and approaches that, in privileging the role of powerful individuals, are highly 'leader-centred' (Jackson and Parry, 2011).

In their primary focus on developing leaders' abilities and skills these mainstream courses typically draw on a familiar list of theories such as: 'great man'/trait, styles/skills, situational/contingency, charisma, transformational/transactional, leader-member exchange, servant and, more recently spiritual and authentic leadership. Many leadership programmes informed by these perspectives promise to turn students into inspirational leaders capable of impacting powerfully and positively on the world (Tourish et al, 2010). Yet, in practice, these high expectations are rarely achieved. Disappointment with this state of affairs is evident in the growing criticism of business schools (e.g. Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Khurana, 2007; Alajoutsijarvi et al, 2014), and which has partly inspired this forum.

While acknowledging that elements of more critical thinking are evident in a number of business school courses,[2] this article firstly highlights the continued predominance of

[2] For example, although contemporary leadership courses may question the way that women, ethnic minorities and other subordinated groups are often excluded from senior positions, they generally remain confined within the mainstream leader-centric paradigm.

mainstream leadership teaching in elite, 'top' ranked schools, and the limits of this perspective. Secondly, it explores the potential value of teaching leadership more critically. This alternative approach draws on the emergent field of Critical Leadership Studies (CLS) to re-think and re-vitalize leadership pedagogy. CLS hold that leadership is fundamentally about the effective or ineffective exercise of power, authority and influence.[3] Arguing that conventional approaches to teaching leadership in business schools pay insufficient attention to situated power relationships,[4] critical pedagogies caution against depictions of leaders as miracle workers who do and should have absolute power, and of followers as people who should unquestioningly commit to the causes espoused by leaders. There are important recurrent tensions and dilemmas in these complex organizational and social dynamics that are central concerns of critical leadership courses.

Proposing a more nuanced approach to leader and follower power, influence, and agency, critical courses re-conceptualise leadership as a co-constructed, asymmetrical and shifting dynamic characterized by complex situated and mutually-reinforcing relations

[3] We do not intend here to rehearse the now ageing debate about the extent to which 'management' and 'leadership' are distinct entities. Our view is that while it makes sense to see management as somewhat more concerned with day to day operational activities than leadership, the difference has been overblown. Many management activities have been relabelled as leadership seemingly in a quest to imbue them with the greater sense of grandiosity associated with transformational leadership theories in particular. Nevertheless, the term leadership has heuristic value in that it captures the approach, perceptions and interactional dynamics of varied organizational actors when they encounter uncertain environments, powerful others and complex strategic dilemmas, and in which the salience of leadership issues is therefore heightened. However, attempts to establish absolutist distinctions between them can be viewed as another example of the 'dichotomizing tendency' in leadership studies – such as leaders/followers; transformational/transactional and leaders/contexts (Collinson, 2014). Discussion of these issues, and the value of conventional distinctions between management and leadership, is also a useful issue in more critically oriented leadership courses.

[4] Burns' (1978) influential text illustrates the tendency in mainstream leadership studies to eschew any critical analysis of power. Differentiating between 'leaders' (who successfully engage and satisfy followers' motives) and 'power holders' (who use followers for their own purposes, and utilize 'naked' and 'brute' power to achieve their ends), Burns asserted that 'power-wielders' were not leaders. For example, he argued that Hitler was not a leader but a tyrant, 'an absolute wielder of brutal power' who crushed all opposition: 'A leader and a tyrant are polar opposites' (1978: 3). This approach sanitizes the concept of leadership to such an extent that brutal dictators and autocrats are no longer considered to be leaders at all. Since the publication of Burns's highly influential text, this tendency to 'purify' leadership of questions related to power has become increasingly embedded in mainstream business school teaching and research on leadership (Collinson, 2014).

between leaders and followers. Informed by our own experience of teaching leadership critically, this essay highlights three critical guiding principles that, we argue, have the potential to reshape and enrich leadership pedagogies in business schools: critiquing romanticism; foregrounding power; and rethinking followership. Addressing these key themes, critical leadership courses can, we contend, more adequately prepare students for careers in contemporary workplaces. The article concludes by emphasising the emancipatory potential of critical pedagogies for leadership teaching in business schools.

BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND THE MYTHS OF HEROIC LEADERSHIP

The assumptions, theories, methodologies and findings of mainstream studies have had an enormous influence on the design and delivery of leadership courses in business schools. These predominantly psychological approaches tend to privilege and romanticise individual leaders whilst also underestimating the dynamics of power, the influence of context and the significance of follower dissent and resistance. They tend to assume that the interests of leaders and followers automatically coalesce, that leadership is an uncontested form of top-down influence, follower consent is its relatively unproblematic outcome and resistance is abnormal or irrational. This is particularly evident in the teaching of courses on leading change, where the idea of 'change' is usually held to be a 'good' thing, irrespective of its content (Ford et al, 2008). Opposition is explained in terms of 'misunderstanding' and 'self-interested political behaviour' (e.g. Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979), rather than as a form of useful feedback. The job of leaders is defined in terms of creating and communicating a vision for change in ways that secure employee buy-in (Kotter, 2012). From this perspective, any dissent that occurs can be overcome by the adoption of this or that technique, since the 'vision' comes from the insights of the leader rather than through a process of co-construction between leaders and followers. This message leaves business students unprepared for the challenges that they will face when they encounter active, questioning and dissenting

employees, and/or when they themselves might be faced with a decision about whether to disagree with their boss on an important issue.

For example, the Judge Business School of Cambridge University offers an open executive education course on transformational leadership. Its premise is that the course will help to turn participants into transformational leaders capable of 'breaching resistance to change.' They will be able to motivate 'employees beyond monetary incentives' and provide 'inspirational leadership and result-oriented management.'[5] Employees, it seems, bring little to the table other than a capacity for resistance, and are sufficiently lacking in non-pecuniary motivation that it must be generated for them by others. The downsides of entrusting a select few with such power are side-lined in favour of extravagant promises about what the programme will accomplish. Firmly rooted in functionalist traditions, these approaches neglect the power dynamics through which leadership and followership are enacted in specific conditions, sometimes producing unintended and contradictory consequences.

Rather than address such issues, mainstream approaches tend to emphasize the importance of leaders as charismatic visionaries, often with minimal to no evidence that their claimed impact on organizational performance has actually occurred (Meindl et al 1985). For example, Spector (2014) argues that the portrayal of Iaccoca in the 1980s as a transformer of Chrysler was unsubstantiated, but was also foundational to early conceptualisations in the literature of transformational leadership and its subsequent popularisation in the business school curriculum. Thus, leaders are routinely depicted as 'change masters' (e.g. Kanter, 1985), heroes and saviours (see Hatch et al., 2005); and miracle workers (see Slater, 1999).

[5] See the programme's website at http://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/programmes/execed/open-programmes/transformational-leadership/. Last accessed 15th October 2014.

Some leadership scholars adopt more nuanced positions. For example, Zacher et al (2014) suggest that leaders' personal wisdom can sometimes offset the potentially harmful effects of narcissistic transformational leaders since it increases positive forms of individualised consideration.[6] But this is not common. More typical is the position of influential US leadership scholar Warren Bennis, who decried the prevalence of different factions and interests in organizations and politics, and concluded that 'People in authority must develop the vision and authority to call the shots' (Bennis, 1989: 144). There is no explicit consideration of any downsides to entrusting those with formal authority to 'call the shots', presumably with minimal input from the factions and sub-groups over which they preside. Dissent is here equated with subversion and dysfunction, rather than regarded as a possible source of strength to be encouraged.

Leader-centred teaching influenced by such heroic perspectives focuses on identifying those traits, behaviours and competencies that are most correlated with effectiveness. For business students, one of the messages of this approach is that leadership is a relatively stable construct that is amenable to observation with the correct tools, which in turn will provide leaders with the techniques they need reliably to influence others. Yet, there is little evidence that human behaviour can be rendered pliable and predictable in this manner (Grey, 2013). Business school graduates taught to expect otherwise are likely to find the world of work much more frustrating than the simplistic prescriptions of leadership textbooks have led them to expect. In particular, the idea that leadership is socially constructed and interpreted and

[6] Rarely utilised by leadership scholars, research on wisdom challenges overly heroic notions of leaders (McKenna, Rooney and Kenworthy, 2013; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014). It recognises that if excessive agency is invested in leaders there is little need for anyone else to take much responsibility for ensuring organizational success. There is also little need for leaders to pay serious attention to followers' input, if any is offered.

that 'it' could mean very different things to different actors in different situations is largely ignored.[7]

Linking leadership theory to context and practice

Most research into transformational leadership seeks to identify 'gaps' in incidental aspects of the theory, while taking its fundamental postulates for granted. It proposes more and more mediating factors that attempt to explain core relationships, and moderating factors that establish boundary conditions. In principle, this can be an important part of theory building (Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007). Here, however, we suggest that the theory of transformational leadership has grown so complex and diffuse that its theoretical foundations, practical utility and pedagogical value have been undermined.[8] For example, Van Knippenberg and Sitkin's (2013) exhaustive review identified 58 moderating variables in the literature that purportedly have relationships with 37 dependent variables. They also found 52 mediators predicting 38 different outcomes. This ensures that negative results can be hypothesised as due to the presence of still-to-be identified moderating and/or mediating variables. Finding them requires 'more research.' This Sisyphean task conveniently banishes the prospect of falsification. Despite a proliferation of theories, one major review of theory development in leadership studies concluded that new waves of theorisation had not displaced their predecessors (Glynn and Raffaelli, 2010). This allows both 'strong' and 'weak' forms of theory to thrive – at least as measured by the amount of research and number of publications they attract. The cost is that it becomes progressively more difficult to

[7] The notion that while subjective experiences of phenomena overlap between actors, there are also variations from person to person is commonplace to philosophers and cognitive scientists who study consciousness. The word 'qualia' is used to denote the way that the quality of subjective experiences differs from the 'objective' properties of outside stimuli, and how the same stimuli and external environment is often interpreted differently by each person (Dennett, 1993).

[8] Transformational leadership theories are not alone in suffering from this problem. For example, Spears (1995) suggested that servant leadership had ten major characteristics. But a more recent review indicates that this has grown to forty four (van Dierendonck, 2011). These include courage, vision, the ability to exercise transforming influence (while empowering others), and humility. This clearly poses implementation challenges. Attending to forty four characteristics in one's daily leadership practice would require levels of sagacity rarely found outside Mount Olympus.

integrate such a multitude of variables into a coherent and internally consistent theoretical model with which students can critically engage.

Leaders and would-be leaders can only pay attention to so many issues. Theories that essentially require them to take account of everything are unlikely to be fully implemented. Nor could educators accommodate such complexity in their time-limited classroom delivery. Students are inclined to prefer simple prescriptions for leadership (Mumford and Fried, 2014). These considerations widen the gulf between what theorists understand by transformational leadership and what students take it to be. The practice of leadership in real organizations, torn between theory and expediency, become more fissiparous and so even harder to study. But, as we now argue, such tensions and paradoxes are often unacknowledged in business school curricula.

BUSINESS SCHOOL PEDAGOGY AND THE PERILS OF HUBRIS

Despite these difficulties, business schools around the world remain keen to embrace the idea of 'leadership'. A survey of 48 MBA program directors in US universities found that all but one confirmed 'their business school was committed to developing leadership in their curriculum' (Klimiski and Amos, 2011: 694). Kellerman (2012) reports that *all* professional schools (that is, those concerned with teaching such occupational groups as managers, dentists, lawyers and doctors) at Harvard now stress the development of leaders as crucial to their overall mission. Business schools also increasingly suggest to potential students that by studying leadership they will become exceptional leaders, able to exercise extraordinary influence over others.

Illustrating this, De Rue et al (2011: 369) took a sample of mission statements from leading business schools. Typical of many, Harvard promises to 'educate leaders who make a difference in the world'; Stanford seeks to 'develop innovative, principled, and insightful leaders who change the world'; and, not to be outdone, Duke University's Business School

wants to 'develop smart and real leaders of consequence, who are looking to make their mark and effect positive change in the world.'[9] This flattering prospectus has more marketing appeal than, for example, suggestions that they will be primarily taught to 'first, do no harm', even if this is more in line with what business schools can actually deliver. The impact of promoting such seductive images of leadership and over-optimistic predictions of future capability is likely to be considerable (Sinclair, 2009; Gagnon and Collinson 2014).

Hype and hubris

Underlying such dynamics are the twin perils of hype and hubris. We argue that these temptations should be resisted rather than embraced. Business schools have tended to over promise on what they can offer in terms of developing the leadership potential of their students. Podolny (2009), a former Stanford and Harvard professor and more latterly a Dean at Apple University, identifies the pressure to climb up institutional rankings as a driver of such behaviour, since it incentivizes schools to compete ferociously for the 'best' students. This in turn encourages a tendency to stress the image of a 'heroic' leader changing the world, since its lure to potential students is obvious – a key reason why mainstream leadership pedagogies have acquired such traction. Moreover, practices by 'elite' schools are then likely to be copied by others, who assume that imitation will improve their own prospects of moving up rankings that are increasingly valued (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007). But such heroic approaches rarely suggest that leaders should listen to and learn from others,

[9] The US universities of Harvard, Stanford and Duke are named after wealthy benefactors who provided substantial donations. This naming process is very common in North American Business Schools. The benefactors' association with the study of business tends to reinforce the 'great man' theory of leadership. A number of US business schools are also named after 'leadership gurus.' For example, in 2006, Sacred Heart University, a Catholic university in Connecticut, announced that it had renamed its college of business the John F. Welch College of Business. It would be 'committed to educating students in the leadership tradition and legacy of Jack Welch' who is described on the university's website as 'legendary', adding '…he made the corporation [GE] into a global powerhouse, and his leadership style has been analyzed and imitated the world over'. His early incarnation as 'Neutron Jack', famous for laying-off thousands of employees, is not mentioned. Outside North America, it is much less common for business and management schools to be named after a 'generous benefactor' or 'a leadership guru' or indeed to receive such donations (Cambridge and Oxford are the exceptions that prove this general rule). Typically, non-North American business and management schools tend to be named after their University and geographical location

including their followers. Recognition of the potential benefits of humility, dissent or follower input is also conspicuously absent. Rather, the preponderant assumption is that those who emerge from a business school education will uni-directionally influence the behaviours of others. These are messages that seem tailor-made to encourage hubris – arguably one of the chief perils confronting leaders in large corporations (Claxton et al, 2015).

Developing this critique, we suggest that theories which privilege the agency of those who hold formal, hierarchically-based leadership positions above that of other organizational actors will likely have an intuitive appeal for many business students. In turn, the theory and the practice of leadership can become mutually constitutive. The theory finds traction because it legitimises dominant power relations and status hierarchies, which is appealing to those who either hold power or covet it, and those relations in turn further legitimise and promote a theory which appears simply to describe 'what is,' and that therefore (surely?) must lie beyond interrogation. A form of discursive closure develops, in which alternatives are not only ignored, but in an Orwellian sense become unthinkable. The dominant focus on leadership in business schools can render unimaginable the notion of communities of people jointly participating in decision making. This further sustains mainstream approaches to leadership teaching, since it reproduces a world view that is often congenial to its target audiences. In turn, students can develop an exaggerated impression of their ability to determine organizational and societal outcomes. The assumption is one in which the views of a powerful leader hold sway over those of others, and in which there is little need for leaders to take into account critical or dissenting perspectives when making decisions.

Business school curricula

It is therefore unsurprising that the fascination with powerful, transformational, 'top-down' leaders has gone beyond the marketing materials of business schools and entered into

their curricula (Doh, 2003). The predominant approach seems to be based on the cardinal assumptions that all members of organisations have an overwhelming common interest (even if growing differentials of power, status and remuneration suggest the contrary) and that senior managers are best equipped to articulate a compelling vision to capture this interest. In addition to their unitarist assumptions, mainstream pedagogies assume that the practice of leadership is an extraordinary phenomenon, which can only be mastered by a 'new breed of change agents' (Morrison, 2003: 4). Typically, there is little mention of misjudgement, greed, narcissism, shame, duplicity, stupidity, hubris, soaring CEO salaries, power, and lack of democracy/employee involvement: that is, there is no mention of many of the emotional and political issues that frequently preoccupy real people in real organisations. Rather, where power is considered, it is depicted as a neutral resource to be deployed for relatively unproblematic ends.

The job of theorists and business school instructors is thereby defined in terms of identifying those tools (such as emphasizing one's similarity to powerful others) that may help them to secure more power for themselves (Pfeffer, 2013). This perspective transforms leadership courses into finishing schools in ingratiation and flattery in the pursuit of short-term career advancement. The exercise of power is also naturalized, with no consideration of context or its potentially harmful effects on those in subordinated positions (Willmott, 2013a). Accordingly, leadership courses are often designed to improve the ability of students to direct the efforts of others, rather than reflexively to consider power's potential for productive use, while simultaneously registering the perils of hubris (Nirenberg, 1998). The job of educators is then to instil the 'skills' and 'competencies', such as 'charisma' that will enable them to influence others - a technocratic bias that divorces leadership from purpose, and means from ends.

By contrast, critical pedagogies draw attention to the socially constructed, and hence contested nature of knowledge, since action is rooted in power-saturated organizational contexts characterized by conflicts of interest. This is not to say that actors have no interests in common. But placing excessive emphasis on where they converge leaves students unprepared for the world of work. It is argued here that in the interests of both business students and the organizations that they may eventually lead, more critical and reflective perspectives enhances the teaching of leadership. The following section explores some of the key assumptions that, we suggest, can helpfully inform the teaching of more critical approaches to studying leadership.

RETHINKING LEADERSHIP TEACHING

Like mainstream courses, critical leadership teaching takes a variety of forms. Drawing on philosophical perspectives, Cunliffe (2009) encouraged US MBA students to become 'philosophical leaders' who, through dialogue and discussion, would learn to think more critically and reflexively about leadership, organizations and themselves. Informed by psychoanalytic, psychodynamic and feminist perspectives, Sinclair (2007a) encouraged Australian MBA students to rethink their assumptions and experiment with alternative ways of 'doing' leadership through 'practical reflexivity'. By working experientially as well as critically, she was able to raise challenging leadership issues in classroom dynamics about gender, emotions, the effects of structure, collusion and dominance and flights into fantasy. Both these studies focus on MBA executive classes where participants are likely to be particularly enmeshed in prevailing managerial ideologies, structures and control systems.

Our focus here is on teaching leadership critically to final year undergraduate and specialist masters students. We have been teaching critical leadership courses for a number of years in our respective UK universities. Students typically begin our courses holding taken for granted assumptions, particularly about: the value of heroic leaders (often defined in

terms of charisma), the positive nature of follower conformity (often defined in terms of 'loyalty') and the problematic or negative nature of follower dissent and resistance (often defined in terms of 'trouble-making'). In our experience, students are typically influenced by the tendency to romanticise leaders that continues to pervade everyday thinking and is often evident in the popular, practitioner and business press. Many also expect the course to focus primarily on prescribing tools and techniques on how to be a 'good' leader: that is, one who sets a direction for others, influences and persuades them to support a corporate vision, and who overcomes 'resistance'.[10]

Against this background, our inter-disciplinary critical courses challenge students to think more deeply and reflexively about leadership dynamics, and encourage them to be more proactive in their reading, writing and classroom interactions. In seminars students are required to undertake research on specified leadership topics and to make small group presentations based on their work. The seminar programme is designed to involve students proactively in the learning process in the belief that participation generates real, rather than parrot-fashion knowledge. As part of the process of increasing participation, students are encouraged to draw on their own experiences of leadership and followership dynamics in schools, workplaces and families. Through this and other methods, we encourage students to become proactive, co-constructors of leadership knowledge through group discussion and debate. Informed by our own teaching experiences, the following sections now outline three guiding principles that underpin the design and delivery of our critical leadership courses: (1) critiquing romanticism, (2) foregrounding power and (3) rethinking followership.

(1) Critiquing Romanticism

[10] During the opening session of a recent course one student announced that she wanted to learn how to 'influence' employees without them being aware that such influence was taking place or of the means by which it was being accomplished. The ethical problems posed by this had not occurred to her.

After outlining mainstream leadership theories, our critical courses introduce students to debates on leadership romanticism (e.g. Meindl et al 1985). They are encouraged to recognise the tendency to credit responsibility for organizational success to the supposedly superior insights of formal leaders, such as CEOs, and for most blame to be apportioned to these same people when organizations fail. This means directing students' attention to the complexities of organizational life; the role of accident and coincidence in determining the outcomes of leader decisions; and the need to distinguish more clearly between correlation (the presence of Leader A when Organization B succeeds or fails) and causation. Challenging simplistic attributions engages students in a much deeper dialogue about the role of powerful individuals, and the possibilities and limits of their agency. It also surfaces the gendered and racialized assumptions that typically inform the heroic leader identity which underpins romanticism.

Equally, it urges students to question conventional ideas around the ascription of charisma to individual leaders, and the assumption that such leaders must be exceptional people who hold their position of authority because they possess powerful personalities and unique capabilities. Through this enquiry, critical courses encourage students to recognise how organisational success can be (over)attributed to leadership in general, and to the CEO in particular (Rosenzweig, 2007). Equally, the converse tendency, to over-attribute blame for failure to individual leaders can also be examined (see Amar et al, 2012). When performance dips, hero leaders of yesterday are suddenly blamed for decline. Accordingly, assumptions of either Messianic leadership or its Satanic antithesis (as the prime determinants of organisational performance) can be critically interrogated.

Recent illustrations of leadership romanticism are used to encourage students' critical reflection. For example, Finkelstein's list of 'best' and 'worst' CEOs of 2013 (Businessworld, 2013) named Amazon's CEO, Jeff Bezos as 'CEO of the year'. A tone of

hyperbole is evident in Finkelstein's[11] observation that 'Bezos is building a huge talent pipeline via MBA hires and his recent use of the drone delivery story as a PR coup just before Cyber Monday was a stroke of genius. Jeff Bezos is the new Steve Jobs of business.' This is not to say that the actions of CEOs are inconsequential or make no difference. But puffery of this kind places excessive credit or blame on their shoulders. It depicts leadership in terms of great men performing miraculous deeds, whose behaviour the rest of us are encouraged to emulate unreflexively. The complexities of the business environment are reduced to the innate wisdom or clumsy misjudgements of a single individual. Hindsight also affords commentators the luxury of judging the quality of their decisions without confronting the elements of uncertainty that existed when they were made.

Critical courses also encourage students to consider the ethical dilemmas of leadership practice in much greater depth than is normal in mainstream approaches. In the case of Bezos, for example, this means going beyond an evaluation based on Amazon's balance sheet to ask how well the organization treats its workforce. As Friedall (2013) noted, Amazon's initial warehouses largely neglected to install air conditioning, on the assumption that it was cheaper to place private ambulances outside to treat those employees who collapsed from heat exhaustion. Huge efforts are made to prevent employees organising in trade unions, normally considered a basic democratic right (Stone, 2013). McClelland's (2012) in-depth account of working in an Amazon distribution centre paints a bleak picture of training regimes that resemble indoctrination, exhausted employees, poor pay, excessive performance goals, and relentless monitoring to ensure that goals are met and exceeded. Such issues do not seem to have been considered by Finkelstein when evaluating Bezos's performance.

[11] Finkelstein is based at The Tuck School of Business, which is named after Amos Tuck – the father of Edward Tuck (1842-1938) who was an international financier and philanthropist. Critical courses can explore how this naming process tends to inscribe leader romanticism into organizational identity (which in turn encourages an excessive reverence towards business leaders on the part of students).

But even if we grant that Bezos and other business leaders deserve such accolades other questions arise for students of leadership to consider. For example: did Bezos by himself deliver all that he is being credited for, or was he assisted by the 109,000 people that Amazon now employs? What evidence is there that the decisions being singled out for praise even originated with him? Did group processes influence decision making at Amazon? More importantly, can someone's performance in a complex environment be meaningfully evaluated, and causal links identified, over a twelve month time frame? Perhaps if Amazon falters slightly in the year ahead, Finkelstein will then conclude that Bezos neglected to develop internal talent, and brought in outsiders who undermined the culture that made it successful in the first place. Through such examples, students begin to learn that behaviours depicted as 'positive' in a context of success can just as readily be re-defined as 'negative' in conditions of failure. In either case, the leadership attribution being made is linked to knowledge of the outcome, which tends to undermine the validity of the causal attributions being claimed.

Similarly, *Harvard Business Review* regularly seeks to identify 'the best performing CEOs in the world'.[12] Typically, such articles attempt to identify 'which global CEOs actually delivered solid results over the long run' (e.g. Ignatius, 2014: 47). In this instance, the metric of 'solid results' was shareholder return and market capitalization. The point is not whether, or to what extent, leadership makes a difference to organizational performance, however narrowly such performance is defined. Rather, total agency is here invested in the leader whose stewardship is depicted as the primary causal factor behind organizational success or failure. Can this really be an accurate account of organizational dynamics? However brilliant a leader may be, whatever they are attempting to achieve requires a great deal of help from others. Publications such as these illustrate the extent to which romanticism

[12] HBR is recommended reading on most MBA leadership courses. It therefore has a particularly direct impact on how leadership is taught and on the mind-sets of students.

continues to pervade leadership theory and practice. Critical courses, in contrast, explore alternative perspectives that view leadership as more distributed, relational, situated and contested.

Critical courses also question the often inter-related essentialist assumption that there is one best way to lead, regardless of context. Whilst we challenge the depiction of individual leaders as paragons of effectiveness, to be admired and emulated uncritically, we do not question the value of business leaders addressing students, as they often do, or of treating their views with respect. But we do question the tendency to introduce them as 'rock stars' and 'legends'. This is typical of how Jack Welch, among others, has been introduced to students at prominent institutions, including MIT and Stanford (Tourish, 2013). The implication is that the academy can do little more than learn lessons from what such leaders have done, as though their behaviour is bereft of error, self-interest or self-aggrandizement. Our courses encourage a more critical attitude to the flattering interviews and hagiographies that appear in such outlets as *Harvard Business Review*, and in which the voices of employees are largely silent – a drama with only leading parts, but without a supporting cast. We sometimes ask the simple question: if you were an employee of this organization, is this a picture of how it works that you would recognise? And we add a corollary: is there evidence in this article or book that gives you any insight into what employees think?[13] By encouraging students to question the self-proclaimed (and sometimes self-aggrandizing) stories of leaders, critical pedagogies seek to explore the purposes of leadership, and question who is most likely to benefit from the attainment of leader-declared goals (Sinclair, 2007b).

[13] Grey (2013) offers an interesting example of this absence in relation to Semco, a Brazilian company whose seemingly participative and democratic approach has been popularized by its CEO (Semler, 1993) – or, as he prefers to be termed, its 'counsellor.' Semler's book has been influential, and led to invitations to speak at many leading business schools, including MIT. Grey's point is that 'we hear nothing at all of the voice and experience of those who actually work there. We are simply invited to take on trust the organization as refracted through Semler's lens' (p. 83). Note that we are not suggesting Semler's account is necessarily a distortion. But we are pointing out that in the absence of evidence that brings other organizational voices to the fore we have no way of knowing either way.

One valuable means of developing this critique of essentialist assumptions is to explore the influence and diversity of contexts, cultures, and countries on leadership dynamics.[14] Historically, the perceived significance of contexts in relation to leadership has shifted back and forth, but the general tendency has been to privilege 'heroic' leaders and downplay contexts. Exploring the impact of context on leaders is anathema to heroic perspectives, since, if 'great men' make 'his-tory', then it is (male) leaders, not contexts that should be the primary focus of study.

The importance of contexts and cultures

More recently, there has been growing recognition that organizational (Bligh, 2006) and national cultural contexts significantly shape leadership dynamics (Jepson, 2009). The multiple cultures, values and identities of leaders and followers in diverse societies significantly impact on the possibilities and limits of leadership (Dickson et al, 2012). Globalization processes also crucially shape contemporary leadership dynamics. Rapid changes in political, economic, social and technological landscapes are transforming the modus operandi of organisations around the world. Research also demonstrates that many global business ventures fail because of the mismanagement of intercultural differences (Wibbeke and McArthur, 2014).

Exploring these transnational and inter-cultural meanings in the classroom can open up new ways of thinking about leadership and followership. It also helps students to appreciate how contexts can significantly shape leadership practices in important ways. For example, local labour markets, product markets, supply chains and cultures and histories all facilitate and constrain leadership dynamics. Equally, contexts are often contested and competitive, frequently characterized by intersecting inequalities based, for example, on class, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, etc. Highlighting the importance of context encourages

[14] Rosenzweig (2007) provides a particularly incisive critique of such promises, and shows how similar strategies and behaviours produce radically different outcomes depending on context.

the voices of those students from non-North American backgrounds to raise cultural issues about leadership assumptions and practices in their own countries and regions.

This critical appreciation of the importance of contexts may also be explored with students through a focus on alternative organizations (Parker et al, 2014). Beyond the not-for-profit and voluntary sectors, these include worker co-operatives, communes and indigenous communities, social change movements and families. For example, research into social movement organizations explores how participants prohibit people from assuming permanent leadership roles and seek to distribute power and responsibility as widely as possible. However, the absence of formal leaders does not mean the absence of leadership (Sutherland et al, 2013). Studies have also revealed profound patterns of leadership dysfunctionality in some radical social change organisations, where the systems of domination often evident in more conventional organizations have been faithfully reproduced, sometimes in an even more extreme form (Tourish, 2013). Alternative organizations are useful sites for exploring leadership dynamics and bringing different perspectives into the classroom. In this way, the benefits and limits of participative forms of leadership, and the emancipatory ideologies that often underpin them, can be brought into sharper relief. This approach also demonstrates what businesses can learn from alternative organizations, rather than assuming that the flow of learning is always from business to other sectors. To facilitate this kind of reflection we encourage the systematic study of leadership practices in non-corporate settings.

Contexts are also important in relation to the conditions in which knowledge about leadership is produced. As most studies are conducted by US researchers in US companies about US employees, informed by US perspectives and methods it is perhaps unsurprising that leadership research articulates primarily US values. Similarly, most textbooks on which leadership courses are built tend to be US in origin and orientation. CLS perspectives suggest that the Western, white, male dominated paradigm of transformational leadership is the new

colonial model, with global leadership development programmes often shaped by the cultural history of the US with its masculine mythical heroes from 'John Wayne' cowboy figures to charismatic business entrepreneurs (Jones, 2006). This US cultural affinity with heroic individualism informs the tendency to privilege individual leaders (Lipman-Blumen 2000).[15]

In sum, by highlighting the considerable influence of contexts and cultures on leadership dynamics, critical courses challenge romanticised views of leaders and the essentialist assumptions that frequently underpin them. Encouraging students to reflect on leadership romanticism and its detrimental effects has valuable learning outcomes. The cultural-specificity of leadership also brings to students' attention how US values have shaped leadership studies, and how many other ways of understanding and enacting leadership are possible. Accordingly, topic areas such as cross-cultural and indigenous perspectives on leadership, organisational/national cultures, and eastern ethical systems (e.g. Confucianism), help to enhance students' cultural intelligence and understanding of global leadership dynamics.

(2) Foregrounding Power

Critical leadership courses view an understanding of power dynamics as fundamental to the examination of leadership (Alvesson and Spicer 2012; Collinson, 2011; Tourish, 2013). They recognize that, for good or ill, leaders exert significant power and influence over contemporary organizational processes. Whilst the exercise of power and authority is sometimes necessary and may deliver desirable ends, CLS also addresses the dangers of concentrating control in the hands of a few. Finkelstein (2003: 43) noted that 'Being CEO of

[15] Equally influential in US leadership studies are the positivist methodologies that underpin mainstream perspectives. Positivism seeks to produce 'objective', primarily quantitative findings that try to separate 'fact' from 'value', and 'science' from 'common-sense'. Many social scientists have argued that positivism is fundamentally flawed, not least because the distinctive nature of human beings requires more interpretive and qualitative research methodologies and because all observation is in fact 'theory-laden'. Suffice it to say here that the quest to discover universal laws of leadership encourages researchers to privilege leaders' agency as the primary causal factor. Equally, the pressure to generalize and measure marginalizes complex context specificities, which are especially difficult to quantify given their shifting and unpredictable nature.

a sizeable corporation is probably the closest thing in today's world to being king of your own country.'[16] CLS encourages students to question the view that such extreme power imbalances in corporations are both desirable and immutable features of organizations.

Viewing leadership in terms of the effective or ineffective exercise of power, authority and influence, CLS examines the situated power relations through which leadership discursive practices are socially constructed, frequently rationalized, sometimes resisted and occasionally transformed. It challenges mainstream assumptions that power relations are unproblematic and that white male leaders are the people in charge who create visions, make decisions and transmit orders, whilst followers are an undifferentiated collective who carry out orders from 'above'. Our courses seek to illustrate how leaders' power can take many structural and interpersonal economic, political, ideological, discursive and psychological forms. CLS suggest that leaders construct strategic visions and agendas, shape structures and cultures, hire and fire, monitor and intensify work, provide promotions and rewards, and apply sanctions. Through this and other means they can define situations and 'manage meanings' (Smircich and Morgan, 1982) in ways that suit their purposes, and which may or may not meet the needs of other organizational actors.[17] Rather than viewing power as simply a functional resource, critical leadership courses explore how organizations may be saturated with power dynamics and how leaders' control can be exercised through coercion, manipulation and domination.

Critical leadership courses also reveal how the exercise of power can be disguised, for example through ideologies that seek to rationalize sectional as universal interests, through

[16] Finkelstein discusses major problems with how many leaders exercise authority over others. But, consistent with mainstream approaches to leadership, he does so purely from the perspective of identifying toxic personal habits and traits of particular leaders, such as John DeLorean, and does not problematize wider, systemic power relationships.

[17] CLS also recognize that leadership is often distributed. Leaders can emerge informally in more junior positions and dispersed locations, as well as in oppositional organizations such as trade unions (Knowles, 2007) and in revolutionary movements (Rejai, 1979).

discourses that construct excessively positive definitions of reality and by leaders 'distancing' themselves from particular local practices. One of the important learning objectives of critical leadership courses is therefore to render transparent and explicit such disguised dynamics of power and control. Critical courses seek to denaturalize leadership, question taken for granted relationships, and explore how leadership dynamics are the product of an ongoing process of social construction between myriad organizational actors within particular cultural contexts. This approach involves going 'beyond the affirmation and reconstitution of the familiar world to recognize other possibilities' (Calhoun, 1995: 2).

The study of power in this way encourages a focus on dysfunctional leadership and its paradoxical and sometimes unintended effects. We acknowledge that many leadership programmes now feature Enron and RBS, among others, in a sort of 'rogue's gallery' of leadership practice gone wrong. However, in our critical courses these examples are used as part of a wider study of dysfunctional, toxic or bad leadership, that goes beyond a focus on individual character traits and locates these failings in a more systematic study of how the concentration of power in the hands of a few has an innate potential to move in such directions. Put bluntly, the teaching of leadership needs to go beyond a 'rotten apple' theory of dysfunctionality and corruption to examine the barrel within which the apples have soured. The 'bad apple' theory often avoids the fundamental questions of power dynamics in leadership practices, particularly around issues of organisational politics, social justice, exploitation, discrimination and intimidation. These downsides of organisational life are common to most people's experiences of work. They need greater recognition in any serious study of leadership. There is much to learn from leadership dysfunctionality and the strategic mistakes that it produces.

The banking crisis and CLS pedagogy

In line with this, we encourage students to examine the behaviour of banking leaders in the run-up to the recent financial crisis that precipitated the Great Recession. Equally, we explore how dominant leadership theories contributed to the banking crises, rather than maintain what Board (2010: 275) has described as a 'deafening silence' on the issue. The few studies that have addressed the leadership behaviours implicated in the crash explore how: bankers became an 'elite field' detached from their own organizations (Kerr and Robinson, 2009); how power was concentrated in the hands of a few people, with deleterious effects on the quality of their decisions and their ability to manage risk (Martin, 2013); the development of grotesque systems of privilege and reward that facilitated hubris and narcissism (Fraser, 2014); the dominance of excessively positive discourses that silenced dissent (Collinson 2012) and how banking leaders have subsequently produced accounts that systematically downplay their responsibility for the Great Financial Crash (Tourish and Hargie, 2012). We encourage students to appreciate how such accounts can damage banking leaders' ability, and that of others, to learn from failure. Thus, critical pedagogies analyse the discursive strategies employed by key banking actors to build trust in business practices that proved to be self-serving and disastrous (e.g. Bourne and Edwards, 2012).

Central here is the extent to which critical leadership courses move on from an analysis of *individual failings* in order to challenge leadership models that encourage over-dependency on the wisdom or otherwise of designated leaders through a close analysis of how leader power is institutionalised, and used to stifle critical voices. For example, Fraser (2014) reports that, under Fred Goodwin, the Royal Bank of Scotland imported 'rank and yank' into its appraisal process. This system of forced curve measurement required RBS managers to classify employees into three categories: those that performed well, and who received huge rewards; a middle group who were deemed to be satisfactory; and a 'bottom' group alleged to be under performing and who were targeted for dismissal. This approach

was used within Enron (Tourish and Vatcha, 2005) and its effects at RBS were similar. A culture of fear took root which discouraged dissent. High sales targets were set, and became the ultimate criteria for promotion and bonuses. Numerous side-effects proliferated, including attempts to poach customers from other banks who were often poor credit risks and in need of further loans that their existing banks would not provide. But persuading them to switch enabled individuals to meet high targets for new business, and so prosper under the system in place.[18] Self-interest over-rode the wider institutional interest that regulators erroneously assumed would act as a safeguard against what became collectively irrational behaviour. The discursive framework and ideological assumptions that justified such behaviour fed institutional isomorphism, with short term success breeding copycat behaviour on a wide scale (McKenna and Rooney, 2012).

Moreover, the lionization of business leaders and the absence of critical analysis that we have highlighted in this paper, and which certainly characterised much dialogue about banking leaders before the crash, legitimises and encourages excessive executive pay (Koehn, 2014). In turn, this can feed a narcissistic mind-set that encourages the quest for even higher levels of remuneration and wider differentials between those at the top and the rest of their organizations (O'Reilly et al, 2014). The effects have been damaging. A key role of critical pedagogy is to bring these varied interests and paradoxical processes to the fore in classroom discussion, thereby challenging the notion of more or less homogenous organisational interests and 'the assumed rationality of the economic 'individual'' (Roberts and Ng, 2012: 101).

Thus, a critical pedagogy challenges the tendency among many students to assume that large organizations invariably have a sound rationale for their strategies and practices. It denaturalises such practices as rank and yank and encourages students to consider the

[18] Fraser (2014) discusses one individual who was highly rated by this system, and who was named business manager of the year three times. Unfortunately, he also embezzled £21million from RBS. In mitigation, his defence cited the pressure he was under from RBS to meet sky high sales targets.

intended and unintended consequences of employee conformity and dissent, the quality of leader decision making, the consolidation of power in elite hands, and organizational efficacy. Such critical interrogations of leadership practice offer lessons for understanding power, authority and control far beyond the banking sector. For example, Padilla et al (2007) identify various features of destructive leadership that includes dominance, coercion and manipulation, and locates these within a dynamic whereby the inclinations of destructive leaders interact with susceptible followers and conducive environments to produce unwelcome outcomes. Thus, the failures at organizations such as Enron are not seen as purely the products of the individual pathologies of individual leaders. Rather, they are the outcome of leader predisposition, environmental context and the active role of followers, whether as questioning or conforming subjects of power in their own right. CLS acknowledges the need to explore these issues, rather than focus relentlessly on the positive aspects of leadership, but also to 'account for the difficult balancing act *between* leadership as a productive source of power *and* a destructive one' (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012: 382). Such critical thinking means examining truth claims, the alleged evidence base behind theories and being sceptical of conventional wisdom. In the context of leadership, it means encouraging students to question leader claims for agency, and problematizing the dominant leadership theories of the past thirty years that have tended to take such claims at face value.

Reconceptualising power in leadership studies

Power can be (re-)conceptualised in multiple structural and interpersonal ways. For example, a recent review of the literature (Sturm and Antonakis (2015: 139) defines (interpersonal) power in terms of 'having the discretion and means to asymmetrically enforce one's will over others'. Power in all its diverse forms and embeddedness in structures, cultures and practices is a central concern of critical studies of organization and management (Fleming and Spicer, 2014). Critiquing rhetoric, tradition, authority and objectivity, Critical

Management Studies (CMS) in particular, opens up new ways of thinking about alternative forms of management (Mingers, 2000). Comprising a variety of approaches, CLS often draws on the more established field of CMS which, in turn is informed by a plurality of perspectives, from structuralism and labour process theory, to feminism, post-structuralism, postcolonial theory, environmentalism and psychoanalysis. Critical feminist and post-colonial scholars, for example, show how power is also exercised in gendered and racialized ways (as well as through other sources of diversity and inequality).

CLS differs from CMS by emphasising that leaders and leadership dynamics (not just managers and management) exercise significant power and influence over contemporary organizational processes. Whilst CMS concentrates primarily on management (and neglects leadership[19]), the emergent field of CLS suggests that power is also a central feature of leadership dynamics (Gordon, 2002). This issue is now attracting greater, and much needed, attention. For example, a study of the neglected area of corruption (Bendahan et al forthcoming) highlights power and testosterone as key determinants of leader malfeasance. It shows that even the possession of a small amount of power increases people's willingness to engage in corrupt practices – a challenge to leadership models which suggest that leaders should have greater power rather than less.

Above we suggested how CLS perspectives approach the banking crisis, by emphasising systemic institutional practices rather than the individual frailties of banking leaders. The consideration of power, utilising the above cited studies and others, is a further apposite illustration. Following Foucault, Hardy and Clegg (2006) discuss the disciplinary nature of power, and how this is manifest through surveillance, routinization, and cultural practices, all of which seek to codify and control employee behaviour. In this view, power is

[19] Despite their concern to examine the exercise of power and control, many CMS writers ignore the study of leadership (Collinson 2011, 2014). An index of this neglect is the influential *Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies,* edited by some of the key names in CMS (Alvesson et al, 2009). There is no chapter on leadership. 'Leadership' attracts just three mentions in the book's index. All are from a chapter dealing with gender and diversity which discusses leadership briefly (Ashcraft, 2009).

not a neutral resource to be used for unproblematic organizational ends as determined by its formal leaders (e.g. Pfeffer (2013). Rather, it serves variegated interests, and while inviting compliance, it often generates resistance. Drawing on these insights, we explore the disciplinary role of the 'rank and yank' systems in place within organizations such as RBS. By monitoring employees through measurement and ranking they seek to promote an ideal, conformist self on the part of employees, where leader decisions are assumed to be beyond critical interrogation. We challenge students to think through the intended effects of such systems, which in themselves can be questioned, but also to consider their unintended consequences, and how these can produce dysfunctional organizational outcomes. Both implicitly and explicitly, this kind of dialogue creates a space in which conventional assumptions about the role of heroic leaders can be critically evaluated.

It also creates opportunities to consider the dysfunctional consequences for individual leaders themselves. Harding (2014) draws attention to the toll that leadership often place on leaders. In assuming greater power, they find themselves dealing with multiple, competing demands, which can be very difficult to manage. She suggests that leaders are therefore simultaneously powerful and powerless. They hold decision making power over more and more issues, about which they often know less and less. They lead people whom they must trust to deliver, while simultaneously managing systems of surveillance that implicitly assume subordinates cannot in fact be trusted. Thus, it is clear that in many instances banking leaders had a minimal grasp of the complex environment within which they operated, and of the likely consequences of their own decisions. This runs counter to the image of powerful leaders found in mainstream approaches, and which rarely considers the possibility that leaders may have less knowledge and power than is imagined, or that would be needed to deliver a 'transformational' agenda. Critical courses open up such considerations of power, and explore the paradoxical and often unwanted effects of having a great deal of it. Rather

than prescribing a new or morally superior view of the world and the place of leadership within it, critical courses seek to encourage a greater sensitivity to the limits of power, to draw attention to its institutional manifestations in appraisal and ranking systems, and to highlight the problems that it often creates.

Flowing from this understanding, we emphasise to students that although leadership power dynamics are important, they are rarely, if ever, so asymmetrical that they are invariably one-way, all-determining or necessarily effective. Exploring the dialectical nature of leadership power dynamics, CLS highlights the fundamental tensions, dilemmas, paradoxes and contradictions that can also characterise the ways leadership power is enacted. These tensions and contradictions are based on opposing but interdependent forces that produce conflict and change, 'a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies' (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996: 3). This means acknowledging that in certain contexts leaders can act in contradictory ways. For example, whilst leaders' excessive optimism may have short term motivational effects, in the longer term it often leaves organizations ill-prepared to deal with unexpected and problematic changes (Collinson 2012). It may also encourage leaders to escalate their commitment to already failed courses of action (Staw, 1976). Such optimism is evident in forecasting discourses within the banking sector that are inherently predisposed to play down or exclude elements of uncertainty in favour of overly precise 'fictions' about the state of the world that encourage complacency in the face of difficulty (Svetlova, 2012).

Critical courses subject such discourses to rigorous interrogation, and challenge the widespread preference for discursive closure over open-ended inquiry. Conversely, excessive forms of coercive control, surveillance and micro-management can alienate subordinates who subsequently feel that trust and respect have been eroded and compromised. In a further manifestation of the law of unintended consequences, follower alienation can lead to

disaffection, de-moralization and a reduction in commitment: the very opposite outcomes to those intended. This in turn is likely to generate follower conformity and resistance, as the next section now elaborates.

(3) Rethinking Followership

We argue that an important component of any critical leadership course is a reconceptualization of the importance of followers' agency, knowledgability, and proactivity. CLS courses focus more fully on what constitutes 'effective' follower behaviours, examining the impact of followers on leaders and vice versa (Chaleff, 2009).[20] There is now a growing literature on followership (e.g. Uhl-Bien et al, 2014) which highlights the systematic neglect of followers in leader-centric perspectives. In our experience, insights about followers' knowledgeable agency and their latent potential resonate with many students in ways that facilitate their re-appraisal of leadership dynamics. This deeper understanding also encourages students to appreciate the importance of follower diversity, expressed for example in multiple possible meanings of the term (from disciples and supporters to employees) and in various embodied follower identities related to gender, ethnicity, class, age, religion, etc.

Yet many followership studies continue to adopt a functionalist framework, underestimating and/or taking power differentials for granted (Crossman and Crossman, 2011). Accordingly, 'Followership is a relational role in which followers have the ability to influence leaders and contribute to the improvement and attainment of group and organizational objectives. It is primarily a hierarchically upwards influence' (Carsten et al, 2010: 559). Here, it is simply assumed that 'group' and 'organizational,' as opposed to sectional, objectives exist, and that leaders are the prime arbiters of what they should be -

[20] For example, they explore questions such as how might some of the command and control mechanisms that flow from agency theory impede effective follower behaviours, thus distorting the leadership function? How can they be dismantled? What stops many leaders from implementing even elementary mechanisms to institute follower involvement, such as suggestion schemes? In an inversion of normal protocols, we might conceive the follower as a teacher to the leader, rather than the other way round.

albeit while remaining open to an unspecified degree of influence. Moreover, followership is viewed as being what *assists* in the 'improvement' and 'attainment' of such objectives, rather than what might fundamentally interrogate them.

Functionalist approaches of this kind tend to presume that (a) follower conformity is an inherently positive feature of leadership dynamics, and (b) resistance is incompatible with the notion of 'good' followership. Rather, 'good' followers are those 'to whom a leader can safely delegate responsibility, people who anticipate needs at their own level of competence and authority' (Kelley, 1988: 144[21]). Not only do they follow instructions from powerful others, they have sufficiently advanced mind reading skills to determine what these might be. Followers therefore 'display competences that mirror those of their leaders' (Cunha et al, 2013: 87), rather than develop contrary competences, values or objectives of their own. Critical leadership courses challenge functionalist theories and practices of followership. In addition to highlighting followers' proactivity and knowledgeability, critical pedagogies emphasise how followership is implicated in the reproduction of asymmetrical power relations and identity dynamics.

Rather than take follower conformity for granted, critical leadership courses problematize its conditions, the processes through which it is enacted and its consequences. In particular, they show how conformity produces paradoxical and unintended consequences both for followers and for organizations. Equally, our courses encourage students to rethink followership in relation to its potential for dissent (Banks 2008), whether explicit (e.g. strikes) and/ or disguised (e.g. output restriction). They illustrate how followers can express resistance in multiple ways, for example through working to rule, output restriction, working the system and sabotage (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999). The counter-cultures which emerge in some organizations can invert dominant values and hierarchies, as Bakhtin outlined in

[21] Kelley et al's article was published in *Harvard Business Review*. Above its title appeared the caption: 'Not all corporate success is due to leaders.' The clear implication is that although followers could claim some credit for success, most could still be attributed to leaders.

relation to the carnival and Willis (1977) described in relation to the highly masculine working class counter-cultures he found on the shopfloor. To illustrate resistance, studies such as that by Ezzamel et al (2001) can be used, which examine management's failed attempts to introduce what they saw as progressive working practices into a factory that were met with individual and collective resistance from employees and their trade unions. The profound differences in attitudes between senior managers and employees led to conflict and stalemate. Followers may also just 'switch off', distancing themselves physically and/or mentally. By disengaging, employees ascribe primary significance to life outside work, dividing their identity between the 'indifferent me at work' and the 'real me' outside (Collinson, 2003). The discursive processes whereby leaders and non-leaders seek to make sense of each other's world, with varying degrees of success, are central issues in such studies (Fairhurst, 2007). These dynamics offer a far richer insight into the potential and limits of leader agency than can be found in most mainstream accounts.

Conventional perspectives tend to promote the idea that leaders can unproblematically shape followers' attitudes, identities and behaviours, and secure their compliance with centrally-sanctioned goals (Collinson, 2006). There is little focus on the potential benefits of follower dissent, which is often dismissed as an inherently negative organizational feature that needs to be overcome, rather than viewed as potentially useful feedback (Tourish and Robson, 2006). Thus, frank, open and honest feedback from followers to leaders is frequently absent in organisations. Critical courses give more emphasis to critical upward communication and its potential to create a dynamic in which employees feel empowered to highlight the internal contradictions and problems that beset their organisations. While many top US business schools, such as Harvard, Stanford and MIT have sessions billed as 'the view from the top', in which celebrity CEOs share their insights with students, very few courses offer a 'view from below', in which rank and file employees (i.e. 'followers') of large

organizations are given the opportunity to share their perspective on leadership dynamics. In terms of pedagogy, we see no good reason for this. An important message here is that followers (and students of leadership) have considerable insight and experience about both leadership and followership (Kouzes and Posner, 2011; Collinson and Collinson, 2009).

In line with this pedagogical approach, we also suggest that critical courses rethink the case study method, originally derived from Harvard Business School (HBS). The primary sources for material to be included in these studies are usually drawn from the leaders and managers of the organizations being studied (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007) No wonder that HBS published eleven (now unobtainable) case studies into Enron before it imploded. It also produced a case on the Royal Bank of Scotland entitled 'masters of integration', before it too fell into bankruptcy and disgrace. In these accounts followers are rendered largely mute, their perspectives subordinated to those of leaders. If they are to be of any value case studies need to reflect a much wider variety of organisational perspectives. They need, in any event, to avoid conveying the message to students that leaders can produce definitive strategies based on minimal information and with no exposure at all to actual organizational contexts. Again, this kind of critical analysis highlights the dangers of leadership hubris: a fundamental message of critical leadership courses.

CONCLUSION

This essay has explored the potential of critical leadership courses to offer a different teaching design and agenda to that which remains dominant in many elite business schools. There are many ways to teach leadership critically. The approach outlined above has discussed a number of critical guiding principles designed to encourage students to question the taken for granted and to rethink leadership dynamics in new and innovative ways. In terms of design, critical courses strongly encourage student participation and dialogue in their learning. In terms of content, critical courses go beyond the romanticized assumptions of

mainstream perspectives to highlight the importance of power in leadership practices; the multiple contexts and cultures through which leadership dynamics are reproduced; the potential of follower agency and dissent; the paradoxes and unintended effects of leaders' practices, and the negative consequences of certain leadership dynamics. Critical courses also investigate the damaging effects of over-conformity to destructive behavioural norms, the promotion of monocultures that can stifle critical feedback and the extent and dangers of 'executive hubris' (Picone et al, 2014).

By raising these often under-explored issues, critical leadership courses, we suggest, have a significant educational benefit and are more consistent with the inquiring and independent role of the university in society. There is a stronger recognition in critical leadership courses of the possible tensions, paradoxes and contradictions that power dynamics can engender, and of the need for researchers systematically to explore how these (often unacknowledged) contradictions are typically embedded in extant theories of leadership. We commented earlier that students often want simple prescriptions on leadership. The lionisation of business leaders such as Jeff Bezos and Jack Welch certainly offers such simplicity, and it evidently has considerable appeal to many students. But a critical pedagogy challenges such leader-centric accounts of business success and urges students to dig deeper, however uncomfortable that may sometimes feel.

This poses its own dilemmas and problems. Challenging deeply held views, and the student preferences that come with it, sometimes takes students out of their 'comfort zone'. This can lead to critical feedback (or 'resistance'). Faced with this, we suggest that educators should resist the temptation to replace one orthodoxy with another, by insisting that a more 'correct' perspective on leadership must be uncritically accepted by students. Conformity of this kind would itself be oppressive. Rather than present definite answers and new established truths, our approach can be defined as a dialogic one, in which multiple perspectives are

presented and debated, without an expectation that they will be fully resolved. Our goal is to promote openness rather than closure. To achieve this, those teaching leadership critically should themselves be reflexive about their purpose, values, assumptions and classroom practices.

In that spirit of on-going inquiry, this essay encourages business school educators to avoid reproducing myths which purport to chronicle how powerful and charismatic leaders routinely 'rescue' organisations from the precipice of failure. Few CEOs are women. Even fewer are Supermen. They share the same foibles, weaknesses, doubts, dilemmas and worries as the rest of us. Suggesting otherwise encourages business students to develop inflated notions of their own leadership potential and future role, to invoke leadership theories which over-state the directive role of leaders, and to under-estimate the potential impact of proactive followers. Similarly, a wide variety of stakeholders have a legitimate interest in the outcomes of leader action, and the purposes for which it is deployed. Critical leadership education in general challenges the suggestion that various leadership skills can be taught as if they are neutral vehicles for achieving unproblematic ends. This means foregrounding a wider stakeholder view of who business schools need to serve.

It also means developing the knowledge base of critical leadership studies: an area of research that is still in its infancy. There is a need for more critical studies that examine, for example: leadership power dynamics, the ways in which white men and specific masculinities continue to pervade leadership decision-making, the conditions and consequences of leader hubris, the downsides of follower conformity, the processes and consequences of follower resistance and the emotional dynamics of leadership and followership. There is also a particular need to extend our knowledge of global leadership processes and the many forms that leadership takes in different international contexts and cultures.

Suffice it to say here that heroic models of leadership have legitimised the over-concentration of power, encouraged hubris rather than humility, helped to disempower employees, and played a significant part in business scandals. Neither society nor its organizations have benefitted. It is time to re-think. We propose that business schools adopt approaches to leadership education and research that are more critical, questioning, relational, reflective and reflexive. CLS can make a significant contribution to that effort. It challenges students to think differently about leadership, organizations, societies and themselves both as leaders and as followers. This might be the prelude to different forms of leadership and followership action from which we would all benefit.

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