Exploring Leadership:
Individual, Organizational & Societal Perspectives

BY RICHARD BOLDEN, BEVERLEY HAWKINS, JONATHAN GOSLING & SCOTT TAYLOR

Summary

This book explores leadership within an organizational context—that of corporations and non-profits. It seeks to provide a broad overview of theories of leadership, drawing from several disciplines, such as psychology, philosophy, history, politics, and management.

The book has 5 primary themes, which it presents in chapters 2-6. They are:

- *Theoretical Perspectives on Leadership* outlines three approaches to conceiving leaders—that of the leader as an individual, that of the leader as a relationship between the leader and his followers, and that of leadership a social process.

- *Individual Perspectives on* leadership investigates the conception of the leader as a person.

- *Organizational Perspectives on Leadership* examines the roles leadership can fulfill within organizations.

- *Societal Perspectives on Leadership* considers how organizations interact within society, and how they can replicate social structures to organize themselves more effectively.

- *Emerging Perspective and Enduring Dilemmas* outlines some long-standing and recent problems in leadership for which leadership study has not yet been able to offer any remedies.
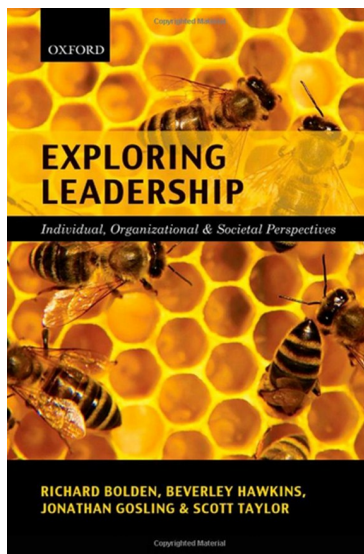
About the Authors

"**Richard Bolden** is a senior lecturer at the Center for Leadership Studies (CLS), University of Exeter Business School" (p. xiii). He was a research psychologist the Institute for Work Psychology, University of Sheffield. He is extensively published.

Jonathan Gosling transitioned from a career in mediation to management education after completing an MBA. He now works in management education at Lancaster University, where he directs executive programmes and co-founded a management education program: the International Masters in Practising Management. He is also the Director at CLS.

Beverley Hawkins is a lecturer at CLS. Her research focuses on "recruitment and selection practices, leadership and corporate culture, resistance to leadership and teamworking practices" (p. xiii).

Scott Taylor is a senior lecturer at CLS. He approaches leadership come from a religious and spiritual perspective. His recent writing critiques management practices in US society.

Chapter 1— Introduction: Exploring Leadership

This book focuses on leadership within organizations. The authors argue that while leadership is currently a heavily studied topic, there is much debate about whether this scholarship is constructive in enhancing leadership performance and practices. While the authors perceive a disconnect between leadership study and practice, they have nevertheless written this book for students of leadership, with the hope of informing leadership practice in a useful way.

The authors explain their approach in this book is "exposing the common assumptions that inform the ways in which we go about recognizing, rewarding, and developing leaders and leadership, and subjecting them to a degree of scrutiny and critique" (p.1).

They seek to provide a variety of answers to the following questions:

- Are leaders born or made?
- Does good leadership study lead to better leadership practices?
- What is the role of followers?

"Leadership, then, is not just a theoretical arena but one with critical implications for us all and the limits of leadership— what leaders can do and what followers should allow them to do—are foundational aspects of this arena. Leadership, in effect, is too important to be left to leaders."
-Keith Grint, as cited in Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, & Taylor, p. 3

Reframing Leadership

The authors contend that because of the perceived gap between leadership study and practice, there is a need to reframe leadership study to make it more useful for leadership development. They outline three principles they will apply in this book to do this:

1. "**Redress the balance accorded to the individual and the collective accounts of leadership**, and the relative importance attributed to leaders and followers" (p. 13). The authors argue that by putting too much responsibility on a leader, followers ignore their own role in enabling leaders.

2. **Reconsider "how we recognize, reward, and develop leaders"** (p. 14). They distinguish between leader development, which is "an investment in the human capital of selected individuals" and leadership development, which is an investment in social capital through developing networks and enabling collaboration "between people and organizations" (p. 14).

3. **Review approaches and methodologies to leadership study.** They argue that leadership study has been founded in scientific rigor and quantitative methodologies, while the qualitative aspects, such as "the relational, ethical, and emotional dimensions" have been neglected (p. 15). They seek to emphasize the latter.

Division between Leadership Study and Practice

The authors outline some reasons why leadership study may not be useful to management:

- Even when we acknowledge a broad concept of leadership, we continue to examine obvious examples of leaders, such as politicians, when we study leadership. This reaffirms a limited view of leadership and ignores group dynamics.

- We tend to focus on good leadership— we can learn just as much from bad or toxic leadership.

- We prefer a normative approach to leadership—that which prescribes most effective form of leadership intervention for a given situation. We do not consider a range of effective leadership options.

This chapter seeks to determine where authority is based. Leadership grounded in the leader himself, or does he need his followers to enable him? It groups these theories into three categories: (a) those that regard **leadership as the property of leaders**"; (b) those that **regard leadership as arising from the relationship between leaders and followers**"; (c) those that regard **leadership as a social process**" (p. 41).

Leadership as the Property of Leaders

- The **trait** approach. This is the belief that there are those who are born with the necessary personality traits that make good leaders. As such, leadership cannot be a learned behavior.

- The **behavioural** approach. This methodology has been strongly influenced by Douglas McGregor, who suggested that one's leadership style is influenced by their understanding of human nature. He said there are two views of human nature, and that each one results in a different leadership style. These views are:

  - *Theory X*: the belief that people inherently dislike work and try to avoid it. These leaders rely on coercion to ensure that what is necessary gets done.

  - *Theory Y*: the belief that people inherently seek responsibility and that work is just as essential to humans as eating. These leaders seek to enable their followers' capacities to solve problems through creativity and imagination.

- The **situational** approach. This methodology rests on the assumption that leaders will adapt their style depending on the particular situation, or the actors involved in the situation. "No one leadership style is right for every manager under all circumstances" (Bolden et al. 28).

- The **skill-based** approach. This methodology is based in Greek philosophy, particularly that of Socrates and Plato. They believed that professional and technical competence were essential qualities of leadership.

Relational Leadership

- **Leader-Member Exchange** (LMX) theory is based on the belief that the quality of the relationships the leader forms with each follower influences the followers' capacity to perform. It focuses on furthering organizational success through strengthening relationships between the leader and his followers.

- **Transformational Leadership** is based on a belief in that quality outputs cannot be achieved without quality inputs. The theory, as presented by James MacGregor Burns, emphasizes that leaders must lead by example. They must follow a high moral code and seek to influence followers through motivation and empowerment. This theory highlights the ability of charisma to engage followers.

- **Servant Leadership**, as proposed by Robert Greenleaf, refers to a leadership style in which the leader assumes the position of leader out of the desire to serve. Similar to transformational leadership, servant leadership seeks to enable followers and assist them in maximizing their capabilities.

Leadership as a Social Process

- **Shared Leadership**. Pearce and Conger describe shared leadership as "a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead on another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both" (as cited in in Bolden et al., p. 35). Shared Leadership refers to a variety of theories that allow tasks traditionally associated with a leader to be shared by a number of actors.

- **Discursive Leadership** theory views leadership as a social construct. Discursive theorists see organizations and social systems in a state of constantly being assembled and never finished. In this model, leadership is an organizing activity to assist in the process.

Was Hitler a Good Leader?

The authors propose this question as a way of determining our own conceptions of the nature of leadership. One would answer yes if the primary duty of a leader is to get the job done. One would answer no if one thinks a leader has to be moral. Additionally, one could ask who bears responsibility for the Holocaust. If we believe the blame lies entirely with Hitler, we accept a leader-as-an-individual approach to leadership. If we believe it is the responsibility of multiple actors, we view leadership from a relational or social process perspective.

Chapter 3— Individual Perspectives on Leadership

This chapter focuses on the notion of the leader as "the central character in the leadership process" (p. 65). It examines conceptions of leadership from a **character-based perspective** (what is a leader like?) as well as from an **action-based perspective** (what do leaders do?).

What Are Leaders Like?

This perspective focuses on the personality traits of the leader. While there is no definitive list of traits that leaders must have, extensive research has been dedicated to examining the role of personality traits in making good leaders. Psychometric tests have been frequently used to correlate character traits with those who are likely to become leaders. Mumford's Learning Style Indicator and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are examples of such tests. Personality traits are thought to be unchanging personal qualities, thus the notion of being a "born leader."

The authors are critical of both such tests and leadership theories that emphasize the role of leaders' personality traits. They argue that if personality traits are unchanging individual qualities, then the study of leadership development has no merit.

"The longevity, breadth, and sheer number of studies into leadership traits suggests that personality does have a role to play in influencing who becomes a leader, and who does not" (p. 43).

What Do Leaders Do?

These theories examine what sort of actions are required to unite followers to work towards achieving the leader's vision. *Authentic leadership* is a prominent action-based theory. It is grounded in the notion that in order to enact the kind of moral integrity required to motivate followers, leaders must identify and clarify their personal values and sense of purpose which then guides their behavior.

The authors have two criticisms of personality and action-based leadership approaches:

1. They are too normative: they propose best character traits or actions, but do not consider that these may vary with context.
2. They ignore the roll of followers in enabling the leader's capacity.

"Leadership is not a 'zero sum game' in which leaders are 'agents' and followers are passive recipients of this agency. Rather, leadership emerges from the interrelationships between group members, which given priority to the proposals suggested by the prototypical group members, and which construct a social reality through which some proposals for action are mobilized, and others are rejected and foreclosed" (p. 50).

Emotional Intelligence

Bolden et al. contend that theories focusing on the role of individual leaders should consider the role of emotional intelligence, which links leaders to their followers. Harrison and Clough argue that emotional intelligence enables leaders in five ways:

1. *Self awareness* helps leaders understand their emotions the effect they have on others

2. *Self-regulation* enables leaders to think before acting and control negative moods

3. *Self-motivation* allows leaders to pursue goals in the absence of other tangible benefits such as monetary reward

4. *Empathy* helps leaders to understand the emotions and motivations of their followers and use them to pursue organizational objectives

5. *Social skills* assist leaders in developing relationships and networking

Bolden et al. note, however, that while emotional intelligence should not be ignored, it may not always be a requirement of leaders. Maccoby's research suggests that while emotional intelligence might be beneficial in some leadership roles, productive narcissism is also important. Productive narcissists have the following characteristics: eloquence; egotism; control; risk-taking; and aloofness. According to him, high emotional intelligence scores are associated with particular kinds of leaders such as project managers, but two thirds of executives display both high emotional intelligence and productive narcissism.

Chapter 4— Organizational Perspectives on Leadership

This chapter illustrates the roles leadership can fulfill within organizations. The authors identify six possible roles:

"1. A factor contributing towards organizational performance.
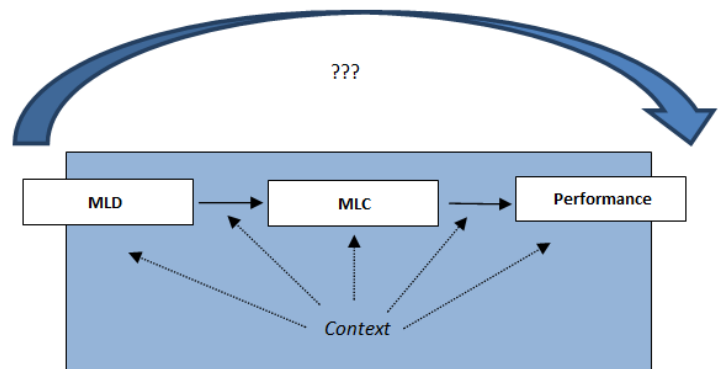
2. A source of power.

3. A set of competences which can be developed and assessed.

4. A strategic vision setting out the organization's future.

5. A property and product of organizational culture" (p. 67).

Leadership and Organizational Performance

It is generally assumed that effective leadership results in good organizational performance. However there is "little empirical evidence" to confirm the link between the capabilities of managers/leaders and productivity, or to prove the effectiveness in leadership/management development and improved organizational performance (p. 68). Burgoyne et al. express this in their 'black box' diagram. While we know that management/leader capability (MLC) and development (MLD) are elements that effect an organization, we do not know how they affect each other or to what extent they contribute to organizational performance/productivity.

Power is "the capacity to ensure the outcomes one wishes, and to prevent those one does not wish."
- Gardner as cited in Bolden et al., p. 73

Leadership and Power

French and Raven outlined 5 sources of power leaders can utilize to attain the compliance of followers:

1. **Reward power**- the use of incentives (such as pay bonuses)

2. **Coercive power**- the use of punishment (such as suspension from work)

3. **Legitimate power**- the belief of followers in the system that gave the leader power, who therefore respect his authority (frequently observed in democratic countries where the authority of elected officials is widely accepted because they were chosen through popular majority)

4. **Expert power**- the belief of followers in the specialized knowledge and capabilities of a leader that suits him to the position (for example consulting scientists when writing climate change policy because of their advanced understanding

5. **Referent power**– when the personal admiration of followers for the leader results in their desire to work to please him

While leaders can draw on several sources of power simultaneously, many have commented that certain types are more important than others. Bratton et al. argue that other types of power will not be effective without referent power, stating "no individual leader can ever be successful without a network of supporters" (as cited in Bolden et al., p. 75). Weber further added that referent power cannot be achieved without legitimate power.

Strategic Management

We often think of power as the ability of leaders to get followers to comply with their wishes. Gardner said that power is "the capacity to ensure the outcomes one wishes, and to prevent those one does not wish" (as cited in Bolden et al, p. 73). By this definition, leaders are often not very powerful, especially in light of the uncertainty of the future, which can impede the realization of goals. Bolden et al. propose that leaders utilize strategic management techniques to overcome this. Achua and Lussier list the following steps in strategic leadership: analyzing the environment; developing a vision statement; establishing goals; setting up actions; and reflecting on the results.

Chapter 5— Societal Perspectives on Leadership

In this chapter Bolden et al. seek to draw lessons from naturally emerging structures of social organization such as that of communities. The authors firmly advocate for greater engagement of followers in leadership dynamics.

Are Communities Organizations?

The authors state that communities are often thought of as organizations, given that they also create their own social structures. The authors disagree, however, noting several distinctions, as outlined in the table below.

They do conclude, however, that since they are both forms of social organization that organizations may be able to learn from communities. They suggest that these characteristics of community can be used as organizational strategies:

Organization on a local scale. "The principle of subsidiarity suggests that decision-making powers and resources should be located as close to those affected as possible – that is, devolved rather than centralized" (p. 105).The advantage to this approach is to be more responsive to local interests and characteristics. The belief is that organizations can foster better relationships with the people they serve. The authors illustrate this approach with the example of McDonald's, which has had global success by adapting their products and marketing to local tastes.

Culture. There is now a great movement among organizations to create 'corporate culture.' In fostering a common identity, organizations hope to "bind people together in a shared and mutually supportive sense of what matters" (p. 106).

Language Games

Language shapes our understanding of the world. As such, Pondy proposes that "the dual capacity to make sense of things and to put them into language meaningful to large numbers of people gives the person who has it enormous leverage" (as cited in Bolden et al., p. 135). Bolden et al. thus suggest that leaders can mobilize followers by selecting empowering language. For example a manager telling a line worker that he is 'entrusted' with a certain task will make him feel that he is being trusted with a great deal of responsibility. He is more likely to rise to the occasion.

Community	Organization
"General sort of belonging, often associated with a place, and characterized by informal relationships" (p. 104)	Clear roles. "Sites of alienation and inauthentic relations" (p. 104). Members can be excluded at the will of the leader.
All members are partial owners of the community	Organizations can be bought or sold
We contribute our whole selves	We contribute particular skills
Do not always have a clear direction or vision	Have a vision and are organized to try and realize it

Ways of Organizing: Community Leadership Approaches the Could Work for Organizations

Bolden et al. draw on some community-based leadership approaches as models of organizing that do not need the leader at the forefront.

- **Anarcho-Syndicalism**. Naom Chomsky and other scholars suggest method of governance may allow for a more equitable society.

Based on the principle of worker self-management and solidarity, Bolden et al. note its similarity with the idea of shared leadership.

- **Nomadism.** Martin Wood cites Al Qaeda as an example of a nomadic coalition. They displayed a high level of organization "despite the distinct lack of visibility of its leader Osama Bin-Laden" who mobilized and coordinated "a sustained assault and resistance to the fare more mighty United States and allied military" (p. 133).

Bolden et al. are intrigued by such 'democratic' approaches because they don't require the leader to be the enabler. This allows for a much more adaptable organizational structure that can operate in the absence of a leader or can coordinate initiatives to assist the leader's efforts.

This chapter examines long-standing and new problems for leaders. It proposes to illustrate these with regard to context, stating "you cannot understand or be confident in your knowledge of leadership unless you see it in relation to, for example, gender, globalization, embodiment, technology, ethics, or ultimate concerns of meaning" (p. 139). The authors seem to propose these topics not as much to provide insight as to outline areas that could benefit from further scholarship.

EXECUTIVE WASHROOM

RGJ

"Do you ever worry you've had to sacrifice your femininity to succeed in the male business world."

Managerial Leadership and Gender

"A short exercise in politics:

1. Think of a Leader

2. Think of a political leader

3. Think of a female political leader" (p. 140)

The authors propose that very few will come time mind because: "(a) there are not very many; (b) there are some, but not known outside of their own societies; or (c) we have a very Euro-centric attitude to politics" (Bolden et al 140).

Women are still highly underrepresented in managerial positions. Why is this? Judi Marshall's (1984) research suggested:

Workplaces are "designed, structured, and controlled by men, for men" (p. 142). They often do not accommodate for women's lifestyles, which often include the responsibilities of caring for children, the elderly, and the sick.

Women reported feeling that they were expected to ask "masculine," showing a greater amount of aggression or dominance than they were comfortable with.

The Glass Cliff

Ryan and Haslam observed that women are more likely to be promoted to managerial positions when an organization is struggling. The authors contend this signifies that organizations do this as a last resort—when nobody else wants the job.

Toxic Emotions

"The roots of most of our thinking about management are in rationality, logical models of personality, behavior, and organization – emotions like independent thinking, were something to be hung up on a peg by the door as you arrived at the door of your workplace" (p. 144-5). Theorists now acknowledge that for better or worse, emotions cannot be excluded from the study of work.

The authors illustrate this point by noting that work places were once considered "sex-free zones" but given how many workers have sexual relationships or meet their partners at work that this was clearly an oversight. While the authors previously explained that appealing to emotions can be an effective leadership style, they now add that negative emotions can be 'toxic.' Sociologist Arlie Russell showed that jobs in which employees interact frequently with others can be physically exhausting when the emotions of others are negative. She focused on those working in the service industry, such as sales people and servers, who were particularly negatively affected by this dynamic.

Frost of UBC studied how negative emotions can influence leaders. He found that since leaders are in positions of responsibility, they become sponges for negative emotions, "generally taking responsibility for all the bad things that might happen in his organizations" (Bolden et al., p. 146). As such, without a great deal of self-awareness, they risk spreading this negativity in the workplace.

Virtual Leadership

Work is increasingly being organized online, through emails, cloud sharing and other means; more commonly, communities of workers never meet, or meet infrequently. Managing these collaborations calls for 'virtual leadership.' This has serious implications for leaders given that studies show we are more willing to ignore people's feelings if we can't see them. The authors use the example of a study conducted by Milgram that concluded atrocities such as the holocaust would not have occurred if leaders were directly involved in the experience. Bolden et al. call for research into this arena to see how we can mitigate this potential problem.

Chapter 7— Conclusion: Where Next for Leadership Studies?

The book concludes by examining possible challenges to leadership that may emerge in the near future. Upon considering these trends, they make some recommendations for ways that leaders and organizations could be supported to succeed in spite of them. Finally, they make some suggestions for scholars of leadership.

Leadership in the Next Ten Years

The authors note three changes in the next decade that will influence leadership theory and practices. They are:

1. **Changing Society**. Technological advances, a growing retirement population, increasingly inter-dependent global economies, advancing income inequality, climate change, and uncertainty are all changing the world in which we work.

2. **Changing Nature of Work**. The ways in which we work are changing, as we see more diverse work patterns, decreasing job security, less defined career paths, and sectorial shifts.

3. **Greater Scrutiny of Leaders**. "Leaders will increasingly need to win the right to lead from the front, lead by example, and be prepared to share in hardship" (p. 167).

Phenomenology and Leadership

Our understanding of leadership is grounded in our own experiences, and these experiences are unique to us as individuals. Ladkin wrote of defining such concepts: "From a phenomenological perspective, an entity's identity always remains elusive. As much as we can perceive the sides which make it up, as much as we can be aware of the different aspects from which it can be viewed, as much as we can know about its internal works, its history and its significance within human 'Lifeworlds', we can never know the totality of something which would constitute a definitive identity" (as cited in Bolden et al., p. 171).

As such, concept of leadership will remain elusive. For this reason, we should not seek to find one single or best leadership theory, but endeavor to find value in many.

"In order to generate leadership theory, knowledge, and insights that are perceived as credible and useful to end users, as well as wider society, consideration needs to be given to the nature and role of research" (p. 175)

Rerouting Leadership Studies

The authors make some suggestions regarding the direction they hope leadership studies will take. Their suggestions include:

- Focusing greater attention on the role of followers and leader-follower dynamics, rather than emphasizing the role of leaders themselves: "Leadership [is] a shared process, widely dispersed within organizations and other social groups—both distributed across people at all levels, as well as embedded in culture, systems, and processes" (p. 178).

- Making research relevant so that "leadership theory, knowledge, and insights… are credible and useful to end users, as well as to wider society" (p. 175).

- Reconsidering who is a leader and how to develop leadership potential.
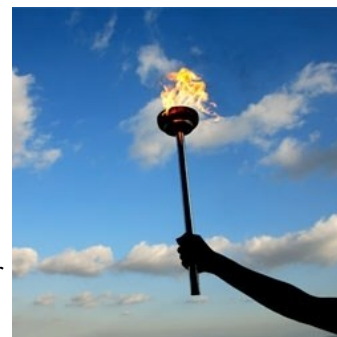
Critical Review

This books approach, which is to provide a brief review of a broad number of leadership theories, has its disadvantages. Firstly, discussing so many authors in such a short volume provides little depth. I felt that I would have had a greater understanding of the key concepts had the authors focused on a more selective number of works, especially since many of the theories are closely related. Secondly, as a result of the breadth of material the authors tried to cover, they were unable to fully deliver on their promise to provide critical analysis. Much of their critique is limited to one or two sentences. This is particularly noticeable when they examine social process theories, of which there is almost no critique. This would be understandable in an essay-style book, given that the authors identified this approach to leadership theory to be their preference, but as this book is intended to be read more like a textbook, I expected a greater level of rigor in their scrutiny.

Morgen Witzel of the *Financial Times of London* noted that the purpose of the book is unclear, and I agree. While the authors note that they are writing this book primarily for students, they also state several times that there is a need to improve leadership study so that it has practical bearing for managers and other leaders. The book therefore seems to split its focus between the highly theoretical concepts of leadership as they apply to a broad variety of leader figures, and practical issues such as the lack of women in executive positions.

Despite these shortfalls, this book provides a good introduction to studies in organizational leadership and would likely work well in an MBA classroom.

Questions to Ponder:

- *Is there value in leadership study that does not seek to inform leadership practice?*

- *Should we measure leaders based on their character or their actions? Is this distinction important?*

- *How can followers enable more effective leadership? To what extent are they limited by the leader's leadership style?*

Reference:

Bolden, R., Hawkins, B., Gosling, J., & Taylor, S. (2011). *Exploring Leadership: Individual, Organizational, and Societal Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.