11. Unleashed? Developing creativity-friendly leadership theory

Suze Wilson and Sarah Proctor-Thomson

All organisations, we are told these days, need more of two things: 1) strong leadership; 2) creativity. A closer look at influential leadership theories, however, quickly shows up their focus on leaders as the movers and shakers who drive new initiatives, while the role expected of followers is merely that of enthusiastic supporter. We think these leader-centric models are problematic given that, and as others in this volume have shown, fostering creativity in an organisation entails leaders embracing others’ perspectives and allowing multiple parties to help shape the change agenda.

At a time when more and better leadership is sought as the solution for almost every problem, the possibility that leadership theory – and its potential flow-on effects to leadership practice – might sit in a relationship of conflict with enhanced creativity in organisations seems counterintuitive. Yet through tracing developments in thinking about leadership over the course of the last century, we show that central to the origins and assumptions of today’s most influential leadership theories is a concern to ensure leader-driven control of employees which may be detrimental to creativity in organisations. To the extent that these theories inform practitioners’ actions, leadership – as conventionally theorised at least – may in fact be a problem if our aim is to enhance creativity in organisations, rather than the solution we normally take it to be.

Thus, picking up where Lucy Küng left off in the previous chapter, we take a rather more critical approach in drawing the connections between extant leadership theory and the objective of enhancing creativity in our organisations. We propose an alternative set of underpinning assumptions to those we see informing dominant leadership theories today, thus repositioning leadership so it is more conducive to the promotion of creativity in organisations: leadership for creativity means tipping conventional assumptions on their head so that we:

- value creativity as a priority in the leader–follower relationship and the leadership process
- conceive of leadership as focused on unleashing others’ creativity
value follower agency and freedom to act and provide extensive scope for this

assume follower creativity is as equally likely as leader creativity, and

place a value on the free exchange of ideas and constructive critique as supporting mechanisms for creativity to flourish.

By privileging both creativity and followers as the focus of a creative leadership model, we see the leadership process as a facilitative mechanism, thus shifting attention away from the person of the leader and onto the individual and collective potential of the group. Heywood, Bilton and Cummings’ case study of change at the RSC (Chapter 13) illuminates and expands on these assumptions, while Hall and Grant’s chapter (Chapter 12) shows how we might go about developing leaders capable of both enacting creative leadership and leading creatively.

LOOKING BACKWARDS TO LOOK FORWARDS

In recent decades leadership has come to be understood as the potential panacea to much, if not all, that ails organisations and societies (Alvesson and Spicer 2011, Bolden et al. 2011). Leadership as THE solution has arisen at least in part in response to what was seen as the overly tight bureaucratic control of workers in earlier forms of management and organisation. Beginning from the late 1970s leadership in and of organisations has been associated with talk of ‘vision’ and ‘transformation’, of the creation of ‘strong cultures’ which reduce ‘bureaucracy’ to a bare minimum and in which employees are ‘empowered’ to achieve ‘excellence’ (e.g. Bennis and Nanus 1985, Burns 1978, Peters and Waterman 1982). Little wonder then that today we would simply presume more and better ‘leadership’ will result in more and better ‘creativity’.

‘Leadership’ now carries with it connotations of a workplace where employees are both encouraged and allowed to give vent to their creative abilities and desires. For our part we accept there is ample evidence showing that employees managed from a distance, allowed autonomy and given the scope to explore new possibilities and question conventions tend to produce more and better innovations in services and products (Ryan 1992, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). As others in this volume have highlighted, leadership enacting ‘loose control’, stimulation of ideas, promotion of teamwork and adequate recognition of creative workers provides the model for creative organisation (Amabile 1998). In turn, the leader’s role in creativity becomes one of asking inspiring questions,
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seeking diverse perspectives and promoting teamwork and collaboration (Amabile 2008).

At first glance, dominant theories of leadership since the 1980s including ‘transformational leadership’ (with its intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration, inspirational motivation and idealised influence, Bass 1985a) – and ‘authentic leadership’ (with its self-knowledge, ethical standards of conduct, balanced processing of information and transparency, Walumbwa et al. 2008) appear to be well placed to lead creativity in contemporary organisations. Indeed recently, numerous research programmes have been developed based on the assumption of a natural link between transformational leadership and creativity (e.g. Cheung and Wong 2011, Jung et al. 2008, Zhang et al. 2011). However, we think this rather rosy picture is only a partial account of the relationship between ‘leadership’ and ‘creativity’. The mainstream of leadership theorising may today be portrayed in words and phrases more acceptable to current sensibilities, yet we think a concern with control of others remains central to leadership theory – and potentially much leadership practice. To the extent that controlling another person’s freedom of thought and action is detrimental to creativity, we therefore argue that the relationship between creativity and leadership, as conventionally theorised, may not be the easy marriage it is normally taken to be.

Our approach here builds on an assumption that discourses which claim to speak the truth constitute – when widely dispersed, accepted and acted upon – potent forces which shape our understanding and experience of the world and our very selves (Foucault 1977, 1979). Consequently, the study of such discourses offers us the opportunity to understand, reflect on and potentially resist the conventionally accepted wisdom that otherwise marks out the limits of what can be thought, spoken and done in the name of truth. Discourses on different truth topics arise in response to a phenomenon coming to be perceived as a ‘problem’ that requires attention, thus inviting inquiry into the emergence and development of ideas over time (ibid.). However, it is important to not only examine how discourses develop but also to explore what they do, in particular their effects for human subjectivity and relations of power between persons. By applying these methods of inquiry to leadership discourse we have found that a more ambiguous relationship between it and creativity emerges than is normally understood.

In what follows we begin by tracing the influence on today’s dominant leadership theories of both the scientific management and human relations traditions of management theory, a heritage that has not previously been well understood. We show how these traditions gifted to modern leadership theory an orientation toward maintaining the unquestioned
legitimacy of managerial authority and perfecting managerial control of employees.

We then turn to consider the underpinning assumptions and origins of visionary, transformational concepts of leadership which came to dominance in the mid-1980s and which remain highly influential today. We show how ideas underpinning this paradigm about the nature of ‘leaders’, ‘followers’ and their relationship are problematic in terms of fostering creativity, as they carry with them the effect of intensifying managerial control of employees.

We then assess a more recent theoretical development now rising to prominence in the field: authentic leadership theory. If a key priority for leadership in contemporary organisations is to foster creativity, we again find this approach of limited value. What our analysis of these limitations in extant theories leads us to is the uncovering of key assumptions which are needed to inform a model of leadership conducive to enhancing creativity.

We conclude by considering the potential impacts of these assumptions not only for enabling greater creativity but for changing our understanding of leaders, followers and the leadership process.

DEVELOPMENTS IN (MOSTLY AMERICAN) LEADERSHIP THEORY

Pre-1980s

Though it may seem surprising to us now, in the early part of the twentieth century ‘leadership’ was not connected to talk about organisational performance (Huczynski and Buchanan 2006, Parry and Bryman 2006, Wren 2005). At this time, largely US-based leadership researchers focused on identifying the traits of leaders by studying youth groups and students. Some of this early research sought to confirm the hypothesis that leadership was an inherited capacity, with influential leadership researchers such as Sir Francis Galton active in the then popular eugenics movement. Meanwhile, and quite separately, management theorists’ focus was on controlling the bodies of workers via Taylorist techniques and ensuring management made decisions on ‘rational’ grounds, pursuant to Fayol’s principles of management (Fayol 1930, Huczynski and Buchanan 2006, Parry and Bryman 2006, Taylor 1919). This early stage of organisation science sought to bring data, logic and ‘reason’ into the workplace and emphasised values of productivity, orderliness and efficiency (e.g. Fayol 1930, Taylor 1919). However, even in the ‘land of
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opportunity’, the ‘scientific’ division of labour promoted by Taylor and his supporters carried with it a division of rights, privileges and status which rendered workers subservient to management (Huczynski and Buchanan 2006, Wren 2005). Maintaining the desired subservience in the face of worker resistance was thus a key ‘problem’ that early management theorists sought to address (Bruce 2006, Bruce and Nyland 2011).

By the 1930s Mayo et al.’s human relations perspective began challenging the scientific management paradigm by posing an alternative set of means for achieving the same overall end (Bruce and Nyland 2011, Wren 2005). The earlier concern of scientific management to control worker bodies was however now widened to one of a general interest in securing their ready compliance with management wishes (Bruce and Nyland 2011, Huczynski and Buchanan 2006). The focus of human relations research at this time was on supervisory behaviours as the key labour–management interface and it aimed to enhance productivity and reduce labour–management friction while retaining the privileged status of management know-how and authority (Bruce and Nyland 2011, Huczynski and Buchanan 2006, Wren 2005). An underlying political concern was to eliminate the influence of unions and the perceived associated risk of socialism, with Mayo’s research being backed by elites such as Rockefeller, who held that the interests of big business would be better served by the human relations approach (Bruce and Nyland 2011).

The connection between ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ in theoretical and research terms is largely a post-Second World War development, although it had of course attracted some limited interest prior to this time (e.g. Gowin 1915, 1918). However, quite suddenly in the late 1940s, leadership researchers shifted their focus away from identifying leader traits and started focusing on supervisory behaviours. While Stogdill’s (1948) review of trait-based research is typically credited with bringing about this change, we suggest that a post-war antagonism toward ideas of inherited superiority was influential in shifting research attention to the much ‘safer’ territory of observable behaviour. Around this time in influential studies at Michigan and Ohio State Universities the supervisory work of managers was thus relabelled and reconceptualised as ‘leadership’, and research began aiming to identify and prescribe the most effective supervisory ‘leadership’ behaviours (Fleishman 1953a, Huczynski and Buchanan 2006, Parry and Bryman 2006). This work was directly informed by developments in management theory: Fleishman, who participated in the Ohio State studies, explicitly acknowledged the notion of ‘consideration’ used in the Ohio leadership model was a concept which ‘comes closest to
representing the “human relations” approach toward group members’ (1953b: 154).

In entering into the workplace, leadership research adopted the same orientation of management research more generally: a presumption in the ‘natural’ authority of management in decision-making, the design of the work environment and the controlling and directing of others (Bruce and Nyland 2011, Reed 2006). Subsequent developments in the field through to the 1980s, adopting contingent rather than universal prescriptions for supervisory/leadership behaviours, maintained this managerialist perspective (Huczynski and Buchanan 2006, Parry and Bryman 2006).

Through to about the 1980s talk about ‘leadership’ was typically focused on supervisory behaviour. Even Mintzberg’s (1973) influential study on managerial work only treated leadership as just one aspect of a CEO’s role. Thus the primary focus of leadership research from around the 1940s through to the 1980s was control of operational-level employees, through supervisory behaviours that would solicit worker co-operation rather than dissent.

VISIONARY, TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP:
A NEW PARADIGM

By the mid-1980s a new conception of leadership had emerged and has since come to dominate mainstream leadership theory (Jackson and Parry 2011, Hunt 1999, Parry and Bryman 2006). This paradigm positioned leadership as the purview of those at the top of organisations and tied leadership closely to issues of strategy, vision, transformational change and the shaping of organisational culture. Early texts by a small set of key authors have shaped transformational leadership studies and continue to underpin this field today (e.g. Burns 1978, Bass 1985a, Bass and Avolio 1997, Bennis and Nanus 1985).

In this visionary, transformational conception of leadership (VTL), ‘management’ and ‘managers’ were rendered dull, orthodox and concerned with routine matters, while ‘leadership’ and ‘leaders’ were rendered extraordinary but essential to organisational survival and success (Bass 1985a, Bennis and Nanus 1985, Zaleznik 1977). Leadership became essentially synonymous with the role of senior management and with the persona of a successful senior manager.

A notable feature of the elevation of ‘leadership’ from the low and rather prosaic level of ‘supervisory behaviours’ through to the visionary transformational agent is that the concept of leadership changed from being a set of behaviours (e.g. Fleishman 1953a, 1953b) to something
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now understood as vested in and emanating from a human subject (e.g. Burns 1978, Bass 1985a). This subject in turn was understood as having an underlying personality and a set of values and goals which effectively compels them to act in a leaderful manner (e.g. Bass 1985a, Bennis and Nanus 1985, Peters and Austin 1985). For leadership theory this was in many ways ‘back to the future’, because trait theory also presumed an intentional subject ‘behind’ the observed ‘traits’ in a manner that was, from the late 1940s through to the 1980s, largely absent from leadership theory.

This return to a focus on the leader as a knowing, intentional subject in leadership theory offers a conception of leadership highly appealing to cultural norms which privilege individual action and individual interests: systemic inequality, collective values and impersonal structural forces are rendered largely invisible in such a perspective (Fletcher 2004). It offers a human face allowing all-comers the opportunity to ‘try on’ (at least in our imagination) the idealised leader persona in a way that conceptualising leadership as ‘supervisory behaviours’ simply did not encourage. By situating leadership back in ‘the self’ of the leader, albeit while claiming to conceive of leadership as a process, these developments simultaneously democratise leadership as something open to everyone at the same time as leadership is rendered the work of the elite whose position in the organisational hierarchy provides them with strategic responsibilities.

A much expanded scope of managerial control is encouraged in this ‘new’ conception of leadership, which remains the dominant perspective even today (Jackson and Parry 2011). Followers’ minds and sense of self now come within the purview of leader-manager attention, as leader-managers are encouraged to ‘manage meaning’, instil appropriate values, promote self-belief and self-development in followers and in all ways ensure that followers put aside personal interests in favour of corporate interests (Burns 1978, Bennis and Nanus 1985, Smircich and Morgan 1982). Followers’ ideas about ‘who rules and by what means; the work-group norms, as well as ultimate beliefs about religion, ideology, morality, ethics, space, time, and human nature’ are here passed over for leaders to mould as they see fit, given their allegedly superior vision (Bass 1985a: 24).

The recommended techniques of leadership comprise encouragement, challenge, the presentation of the leader as a role model for followers to emulate, as well as the use of corrective feedback when followers fail to meet the leader’s expectations (Bass 1985a, Bennis and Nanus 1985, Peters and Austin 1985). These mechanisms of control are almost always subtle, yet their expected persistence coupled with the intrusion into the follower’s sense of reality, values and of self could hardly be more complete. Any act of resistance in this conception of leadership can be readily pathologised
as arising from follower inadequacy or bad intent, because the unitarist
assumption of common interest between leader and follower has been so
deply entwined with the managerialist assumption of the legitimacy and
primacy of managerial interests.

The implications of the VTL concept for how leaders are to under-
stand themselves are multifaceted. Change is said to be a compulsive
requirement for leaders while routine work and matters of detail are an
anathema, as they distract from the visionary focus that is said to be the
hallmark of effective leadership (e.g. Bass 1985a, 1985b, Peters and Austin
1985). Leaders are expected to have unwavering confidence in their own
abilities, possessing an ‘inner strength’ which compels them to act, without
any scope for doubt (e.g. Bass 1985a, Bennis and Nanus 1985). The
leader is expected to see further ahead than others, interpret with greater
insight and explore possibilities more boldly and creatively (e.g. Peters
and Waterman 1982, Bennis and Nanus 1985). In this paradigm leaders
are associated with all that is good, desirable, effective and important and
thus by implication distanced from all that is mediocre or bad, ineffective,
mundane or modest.

In dealing with followers leaders are, according to the VTL paradigm,
expected to connect with their values: at the same time it is asserted that fol-
lowers’ values are, in the absence of the leader’s intervention, naturally self-
serving (Burns 1978, Bass 1985a). In fact, followers are generally portrayed
by proponents of VTL as persons of unrealised potential pending the lead-
er’s guidance and incitement to a course of action (e.g. Burns 1978, Bass
1985a, Peters and Waterman 1982). This passivity is, of course, a perfect
counterweight to the energy of the leader as conveyed in this paradigm.
This kind of dualistic thinking is in fact pervasive throughout this concep-
tion of leaders and followers. Table 11.1 identifies some of these dualities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Follower</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>active</td>
<td>passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivator of others</td>
<td>needs to be motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serves the common good</td>
<td>naturally self-serving unless leader provides guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visionary</td>
<td>has no vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bold</td>
<td>cautious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seeks to develop self and others to highest potential</td>
<td>needs significant guidance to develop self to highest potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategic thinker</td>
<td>operational do-er</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The implications of the VTL model for promoting greater creativity in organisations are concerning. By vesting such agency in the hands of leaders to determine reality, values and priorities, it remains for followers simply to execute the vision by following the agenda set by the leader. The dynamic of the leader–follower relationship conveyed by the VTL discourse positions leaders as the creative source of new visions and possibilities to which others merely respond.

However, the depiction of followers here compared with the depiction of creative workers in other literatures is one of stark contradictions. In his study of media work, Mark Deuze (2011) describes creative workers as passionate, pioneering, entrepreneurial and profoundly and emotionally tied to their work. Genius, relentless ambition, innovation and internal drive also endure as descriptions of workers across creative spheres including advertising, music and beyond (Bilton and Leary 2002, Nixon 2003, Negus and Pickering 2004).

Thus, the discursive attempt in the VTL literature to render followers passive and reactive is highly problematic for it encourages leaders to regard themselves as superior beings. Simultaneously, it places enormous pressure on leaders to function at super-human levels. This conception of leadership places such primacy on the leader as the centre of action that it results in a turning away from and a silencing of the creative capability of all others.

This shift in thinking about the nature of leadership emerged at a time when America had benefitted in recent decades from leaders whose visionary and charismatic approach had attracted strong support and who were widely perceived as bringing about major social change (e.g. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, John F. Kennedy). America’s post-Second World War economic dominance had also at this time come under such sustained challenge that the perception of the need for fundamental change in American business was widespread (Magaziner and Reich 1982, Peters and Waterman 1982). Meanwhile, the effects of the 1960s’ counter-culture, along with the loss of confidence in political leadership arising from Watergate and the Vietnam War, also combined to help give rise to an environment in which traditional, positional authority no longer carried the same influence and respect as it had before (Ackerman 1975, Capitman 1973, Heath 1975, Roos 1972). For some commentators of the time, ‘management’ had come to imply authoritarian, conservative, rule-bound and inflexible modes of interaction (e.g. Corneuille 1975, Peters and Waterman 1982). In the context of a culture long receptive to stories of heroic individual achievement, all of these factors coalesced to produce an environment open to this new conception of leadership.
Tasking leaders with the requirement of bringing about change, which is the central proposition of the VTL paradigm, means it is little wonder that we have now come to associate ‘leadership’ with ‘creativity’, insofar as change requires creative thinking. However, as our analysis of the key claims and assumptions embedded in the VTL paradigm has shown, this relationship is problematic insofar as it is the leader’s assumed creativity which is emphasised, while followers’ potential for creativity is obscured. There is little in this paradigm which encourages leaders to seek out others’ creative potential, much less to defer to that. There is little sense of a two-way dialogue wherein followers’ ideas bring about a change in the leader’s vision; instead, the influence process is generally conceived as flowing one way, from the leader to the led (e.g. Bass 1985a, Peters and Waterman 1982).

The notion of ‘empowerment’ is a common feature of these texts and does mark an important shift from earlier thinking (e.g. Bennis and Nanus 1985, Peters and Austin 1985). However, we think it also important not to overlook the fact that the intended scope and focus of followers’ freedom to act is still expected to be prescribed unilaterally by the leader and to be consistent with the vision, values and culture the leader has chosen for the group (e.g. Bass 1985a, Peters and Waterman 1982). The leash may have been let out; however, the leader still determines its length and retains the right to tug upon it at any time.

A further factor in the relationship between this leadership paradigm and creativity is the strong performativity orientation of this conception of leadership. The performativity that is sought from and by leaders in the VTL model is strongly aligned with the interests of capital in expanding markets, developing new products and services, and increasing productivity and profitability (e.g. Bass 1985a, 1985b, Peters and Waterman 1982, Kotter 1988). Consequently leaders who subscribe to this paradigm will likely encourage creativity only to the extent that it serves these interests and not for its own sake or for the sake of conflicting interests. This effect need not be understood as inherently problematic or venal, but it does nonetheless mean that the relationship between ‘leadership’ and ‘creativity’ in this model is one that functions within the constraints of that which is understood as serving business interests and is thus a limited relationship. If the aim is to value creativity for its own sake then adherents to the VTL paradigm are unlikely to act in support of such an outcome.

While the VTL model continues even today to dominate both scholarly and popular notions of leadership, over the last decade ‘authentic leadership’ (AL) has emerged as a new focus of scholarly research and practitioner action. Again, we think that the underpinning assumptions and key claims of this paradigm warrant scrutiny for their potential impacts...
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on creativity in organisations, so we now turn to consider this recent development in leadership thinking.

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

In recent years new, less leader-centric models such as distributed leadership (e.g. Gronn 2002) and relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006) have developed and established some support. Indeed, theoretical proliferation is now a marked feature of the leadership studies field, with Grint (2005) arguing that leadership is an ‘essentially contested concept’. However, amongst the various new theories competing for attention and support, authentic leadership appears at this stage to be making particular ground (Jackson and Parry 2011, Ladkin and Taylor 2010).

Early advocates of authentic leadership theory include highly respected and influential scholars Bruce Avolio, Fred Luthans and John Gardner (see, for example, Luthans and Avolio 2003, Gardner et al. 2005). Seeking to respond to the examples of corruption and malfeasance by high-profile leaders such as Jeffrey Skilling of Enron, authentic leadership theory was early positioned as offering an increased focus on leader ethics: this connection to a matter of great contemporary salience along with the high standing of its early advocates has been crucial in advancing its development, despite the very limited number of empirical studies yet undertaken to test this theory (Jackson and Parry 2011).

While there is ongoing debate amongst proponents of AL as to its precise componentry and functioning, Walumbwa et al. (2008) have influentially argued it comprises four key elements: knowing oneself; using one’s own moral compass; considering information in a balanced fashion; and taking a transparent approach to dealing with others. As with VTL, this model also positions a knowing, intentional subject at the centre of its conception of leadership; however, so-called authentic leaders are depicted as persons who are rather more down-to-earth than their charismatic, visionary predecessors (e.g. Avolio and Gardner 2005, Luthans and Avolio 2003, George and Sims 2007). The promise of ‘authentic leadership’ is that leaders act in accordance with their ‘true’ values and beliefs when leading others (e.g. Avolio and Gardner 2005, George and Sims 2007, Walumbwa et al. 2008). The silent opposite of ‘inauthentic leadership’ which this model conjures up is implicitly expected to be overcome by the more morally virtuous notion of leadership it claims to offer. This development does constitute a concerted scholarly effort to challenge the seemingly never-ending cases of corporate corruption, often by those previously lauded for their visionary and transformational leadership. Responding to this, leader ethics
constitutes a central concern of the AL paradigm, in the same way that leading change was the central concern of the VTL paradigm, this in turn being a response to conditions prevailing at the time of its emergence. However, this move does leave unasked and unanswered the question of whether what has occurred constitutes a perversion of VTL or, more concerning, a predictable consequence of a model which credited leaders with such extensive powers (Tourish and Vatcha 2005).

The implicit assumption made by proponents of AL is that leaders’ values will simply align with organisational interests (Ford and Harding 2011). In this regard the performativity constraints which we noted earlier limit VTL adherents to act only in accordance with business interests apply also to adherents of AL. These performativity demands, however, are somewhat ‘softened’: in ‘relating transparently’ to others AL prescribes a less utilitarian orientation than that of VTL (e.g. Walumbwa et al. 2008). It also places a greater emphasis on the intrinsic worth of each party to the leader–follower relationships and the value of non-coercive modes of interaction between persons than does VTL.

The model suggests a greater emphasis on relationships, leader accessibility and egalitarian values, narrowing the status distance that was implied between leaders and followers in the VTL paradigm. These shifts in thinking are potentially democratising in nature when compared with the depiction of visionary and transformational leaders as persons of almost magical abilities. Not only is the power imbalance between leaders and followers potentially reduced in rendering the leader persona less grandiose, the sense of ‘common decency’ embedded in the AL concept in turn suggests that leadership is something truly open to all (e.g. Avolio and Gardner 2005, George and Sims 2007, Luthans and Avolio 2003).

The mechanism of control in AL appears to work in the opposite direction to that of VTL, where the leader articulates the vision and then seeks to propel followers toward the achievement of that vision. In AL, however, it is the leader’s very self which is said to be the source of attraction, with followers drawn toward the leader as a role model which they seek to emulate (e.g. Luthans and Avolio 2003, Walumbwa et al. 2008). Consequently, if VTL entails the leader pushing followers toward the leader’s vision, then AL entails the leader pulling followers towards themselves as the template for replication. Despite this difference, however, the desired scope of control in AL remains as extensive as that of the VTL paradigm: authentic leaders too are to work on followers’ sense of self to bring it into line with a standard determined acceptable by the leader, which in turn implies a standard acceptable to the commercial interests of the organisation (e.g. Avolio and Gardner 2005, George and Sims 2007, Walumbwa et al. 2008).
The leader subject as presented in the AL paradigm is one where it is solidity and stability of character and ‘common decency’ which warrants our appreciation and support. Authentic leaders are said to be ‘confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, transparent, moral/ethical future oriented’ persons (Luthans and Avolio 2003: 243). To the extent that these characteristics are conducive to creating an environment wherein new or different ideas can be openly considered, the relationship between AL and creativity would seem to be positive.

The other implications of the AL model for creativity are, however, less compelling. ‘Leader self-knowledge’, one of Walumbwa et al.’s (2008) four key components of AL, implies that leaders will at least understand their own creative predilections or lack thereof. However, whether that implies action to promote creativity in oneself or others is rather less certain. ‘Using one’s own moral compass’, Walumbwa et al.’s (2008) second factor, seems to suggest no specific implications unless the leader’s moral framework is especially pro or anti the moral worth of creativity. The third factor of ‘balanced processing of information’ (Walumbwa et al. 2008) implies creative ideas will be tested for the logical, practical, financial or other effects and will be neither automatically displaced nor privileged. Finally, transparency in relating to others (Walumbwa et al. 2008) implies that followers’ creativity will be acknowledged and respected; however, whether it will attract active leader support seems less clear. Overall, creativity does not strongly feature as a value or priority in its own right or as a key attribute of leaders in the AL paradigm, suggesting that at best the linkage is fairly weak.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In comparing the relationship between creativity and influential leadership theory in the form of VTL and AL, the key claims and assumptions of each paradigm and their potential effects are summarised in Table 11.2. What our analysis reveals is that the apparently strong and straightforward connection we have come to typically make between ‘leadership’ and ‘creativity’ is rather more vexed. Under a VTL paradigm, creativity is certainly prioritised so long as it has commercial value. But this model would have us rely exclusively on the leader’s creativity and tends to downplay the potential creativity of followers, who are regarded as ‘inherently’ passive and deficient. In contrast, AL appears to imply an environment somewhat more conducive to follower creativity, yet creativity is not here positioned as a priority for leader and follower attention. Moreover, all four elements of Walumbwa et al.’s (2008) influential model of AL seem...
likely to have limited positive effects for workplace creativity. All in all the choices on offer, at least according to the mainstream of scholarly and popular depictions of leadership, are a heavy if not exclusive reliance on leader creativity which relatedly constrains follower creativity, or, alternatively, a fairly diffident view of creativity by leaders more focused on acting in a commercially viable yet still ethical way.

Moreover, if we assume a workplace populated by knowledgeable professionals who are motivated by intellectually stimulating work and peer respect, and who are cognisant of the organisational and market imperatives that will sustain the enterprise, much of the ‘work’ of leadership as conceived by proponents of both VTL and AL seems surplus to requirements. Instead a focus on group facilitation to sustain an environment conducive to individual and collective creativity would seem to be the priority.

To forge a stronger relationship between leadership and creativity
we advocate for the re-conceptualisation of leadership guided by the following key assumptions:

- value creativity as a priority in the leader–follower relationship and the leadership process
- conceive of leadership as focused on facilitating others’ creativity
- value follower agency and freedom to act and provide extensive scope for this
- assume follower creativity is as equally likely as leader creativity
- place a value on the free exchange of ideas and constructive critique as supporting mechanisms for creativity to flourish.

These elements constitute a dramatic shift in assumptions and values from the extant leadership models we have considered, suggesting that there is much that could be changed in terms of ‘leadership’ that would better support ‘creativity’ in our organisations. This alternative approach calls for different leader and follower behaviours and different values and priorities such that leadership functions to encourage, unleash and sustain creativity. Here, it is creativity rather than the leader that is privileged as the source of future value, while both followers and leaders alike are conceived as equally likely to make a creative contribution. Thus, it is through the interaction of followers and leaders that enhanced creativity might be achieved.

Theorising leadership as primarily a facilitative function would shift our focus to process rather than the attributes of the person facilitating the process. Such a facilitative role would involve aspects identified as central to the promotion of creative production in Küng’s previous chapter and elsewhere (e.g. Amabile 1998, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011), including: posing stimulating creative challenges; mobilising fruitful networks of relationships; providing appropriate resources; ensuring worker autonomy and ownership of creative ideas and outputs. A conception of leadership which focuses on its facilitative functions also offers a model in which the holding of a formal position becomes a secondary consideration, thus embedding a more egalitarian assumption into our understanding of ‘leadership’.

However, we also acknowledge that calling this facilitative work ‘leadership’ risks dragging in these extant conceptualisations which were clearly intended to deal with different needs and priorities and reflect different values. If creativity is indeed the most vital source material from which our organisations will sustain their ability to produce goods and services of value in the future, it is certainly critical that we think creatively about ‘leadership’ and what role, if any, we want it to play. As our analysis
has shown, treating ‘leadership’ as inevitably necessary and automatically desirable is an assumption that demands greater scrutiny.

Looking forward, we suggest that organisations seeking to unleash the creative potential in their workforce would do well to carefully articulate what model, theory or conceptualisation of leadership, if any, they wish to promote. This is because, as our analysis has shown, influential notions of leadership as visionary, transformational or authentic do not readily lend themselves to the promotion of greater creativity.

Re-conceptualising leadership as fundamentally a facilitative function, as we propose, re-orient attention away from the person of the leader. By removing an idealised and prescribed identity script from our conception of leadership, this approach opens up a space for all persons to consider their leadership contribution in terms of how they can support their colleagues to achieve shared goals. In this, the presumption of control and superiority over others embedded in previous models is also removed. Leadership development in this approach would then necessarily shift away from developing star leaders to the promotion and formation of leadership constellations of multiple actors, or as Heywood et al. later describe in this volume (Chapter 13), leadership ‘ensembles’.

By focusing on process, attention also goes to the very enactment of the creative effort, the experience of individual or collective struggle and resolution in solving a problem which lies at the heart of every creative breakthrough. Brilliant, exceptional individuals will, we think, always lead and inspire us with their unexpected insights and inventions. However, organisations whose very survival is reliant on consistently innovating their way forward would do well to consider how to unleash the creative potential of the great majority by adopting a leadership model which is not dependent on the exceptional individual.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why has the study of leadership risen to such prominence in recent years?
2. Is the notion of leading others to be more creative a paradox? If so, how could this paradox best be managed?
3. Outline a set of three creative people that you most admire. Outline a set of three leaders you most admire. Outline a set of the creative leaders you most admire. Is there any overlap in the people in each of your three sets? If so, what are the characteristics of the people who appear in more than one set? Could you build a theory of creative leadership from these characteristics?
REFERENCES


Handbook of management and creativity

Developing creativity-friendly leadership theory