‘Ladies and gentlemen: leadership has left the building’

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Leadership scholars tend to conflate managerial leadership with leadership of political, humanitarian or religious movements. Thus, definitions of formal leadership (management) versus political leadership are called for. For theoretical development and empirical research, it is imperative to distinguish managerial leadership from political leadership. What properties must exist for leadership to exist and to be what it is? The argument here is that leader, subordinates and tasks are the properties that must exist for managerial leadership to exist. Political leadership, however, contains the properties of leader, leader’s goals and followers. The political leadership concept does not specify any tasks assigned to the followers. Additionally, some leadership researchers argue that we need to rethink leadership by making or changing leadership into a question of the science of philosophy, as though questions of ontology and epistemology were especially imperative or crucial for leadership research. Some argue that leadership scholars should be philosophers and supreme experts on scientific methods. Finally, an answer is given to those few researchers who have questioned the very existence of leadership.

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1 LEADERSHIP THEORY

1.1 Definitions of leadership

Do we need definitions? Here is the answer from Pirsig (1999, p. 206): ‘If you can’t define something you have no formal rational way of knowing that it exists. Neither can you really tell anyone else what it is. There is, in fact, no formal difference between inability to define and stupidity’.

Whether a theory is one of leadership or not depends on how the study object of leadership is defined. The problem of definition was addressed by Marturano et al. (2013, p. 1):

The very definition of ‘leadership’ is contested, but in the pages of this journal we encourage a broad conceptualization that allows for the widest possible spectrum of analysis. We propose an understanding of leadership as an asymmetrical (albeit interactive and mutual) influence process that serves to articulate, clarify, and facilitate the accomplishment of a group’s (organization’s, community’s, society’s) objectives (including, importantly, survival). Thought of in this way, it becomes clear that leadership in some form or another exists

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essentially any time humans come together to accomplish things. Such a definition permits – indeed, invites – studies of the phenomena of leadership that include not only a fixed focus on ‘task accomplishment’ or ‘member satisfaction,’ but also the consideration of broader matters such as the dynamics of context, the philosophical ‘meaning’ and moral implications of leadership and its objectives, and the impact of leadership on people, both in groups and considered as individuals.

For theoretical development and empirical research, it is imperative to distinguish managerial leadership from political leadership. Sayer (1992, p. 91) has written: ‘What does the existence of this object (in its present form) presuppose? Can it exist on its own as such? A key question could be: What cannot be removed without making the object cease to exist in its present form?’ If the object is *managerial leadership*, we may ask: What properties must exist for leadership to exist and to be what it is? What makes leadership possible? The argument here is that leader, subordinates and tasks are the properties that must exist for managerial leadership to exist and to be what it is. The terms ‘leader’ or ‘manager’ refer to a position in a group or organization. A formal leader (manager) is a person who is responsible both for the subordinates and for the results.

Additionally, Blake and Mouton (1985, p. 9) have stated that

the process of achieving organization purpose through the efforts of people results in some people attaining authority to set direction and coordinate effort; that is, to exercise the responsibility for the activities of others. The foundation for understanding leadership is in recognizing that a boss’s actions are dictated by assumptions regarding how to use authority to achieve organization purpose with and through people.

Naming individuals in senior positions in formal organizations as ‘leaders’ rather than ‘managers’ does not change the reality. Leadership, however, is a function performed by managers as well as by informal leaders (as they have an informal position in the organization).

Several hundred definitions of leadership have been presented over the years (Bass 1990). However, most definitions include one or more of the elements of goal attainment, group or organization, structure, task (activity), and interpersonal relationships. This indicates a strong link between leadership and organization. In management and organization theory, the function of leadership is tied to an organization or group. Tannenbaum et al. (1961, p. 24) define leadership as: ‘interpersonal influence, exercised in a situation, and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals’. Torrington and Chapman (1983) state that this definition has been generally accepted and embraces the key concepts.

Blake and Mouton (1985, p. 198) have defined leadership as follows: ‘Processes of leadership are involved in achieving results with and through others’. They have, indeed, pinpointed what may be seen as the dilemma of leadership. The formal leader (manager) is responsible for results in accordance with organizational goals (that is, effectiveness), but the leader can only achieve this through the efforts of subordinates and the actions of other people. Managers cannot achieve the goals of the organization by their own efforts alone. If that were possible, there would neither be a need for a formal organization nor for a leader.

Ladkin (2010, p. 186) has asked: ‘What is leadership *for*?’ Here are some answers. In managerial leadership research, the concept of effectiveness is central. In management and business administration, organizations are regarded as contrived entities that are established as vehicles for the owners (that is, founders or mandators) so that they

can achieve their goals. Goal attainment is therefore the core issue and the basic definition of effectiveness in management theory for private enterprises as well as for public agencies. Effectiveness (that is, the dependent variable) and what causes effectiveness (that is, the independent variables) must, however, be kept separate. In business administration profitability can be seen as the major criterion of effectiveness for private enterprises. Profitability (that is, return on investment, cash flow, and market-share change) is the most conventional measure of current business performance (Hambrick 1983). The ultimate goal of a company is profitability (that is, degree of return on assets) (Shetty 1979; Nash 1983; Walton and Dawson 2001).

Jacques (1990, p. 5) has written: 'The managerial role has three critical features. First, and most critical, every manager must be held accountable not only for the work of the subordinates but also for adding value to their work'. The supreme task of the formal leader (manager) is to contribute to organizational effectiveness. However, current managerial leadership research neither directly nor indirectly addresses this issue. It is thus irrelevant and unhelpful to managers. Indeed, managers themselves appear to perceive this inapplicability (Burack 1979; Astley and Zamuto 1992; House and Aditya 1997; Ghoshal 2005; Brownlie et al. 2008). Burack (1979) has noted that managers have regarded leadership research as useless to anyone in leadership positions and that much leadership research is leaderless.

2 CONFLATION OF MANAGERIAL LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

2.1 What to lead and whom to lead?

Weber (1978) presented three pure types of authority based on rational (legal authority), traditional grounds or charismatic grounds (charismatic authority). Consequently, legal authority is afforded to managers while charismatic authority is attributed to or mobilized by political leaders. In Weber's writings there is no conflation of managerial leadership and political leadership. Leadership scholars, however, tend to conflate managerial leadership with leadership of political, humanitarian or religious movements.

A problem when dealing with leadership comes from different ideas about *what* to lead and *whom* to lead. Managers lead business enterprises or public agencies. Political leaders lead political, religious and humanitarian movements. In psychology, the premise is often that it is a group to lead. It is also usually assumed that those to be led (and the leader) pursue a common goal (for example, Hogan et al. 1994). Leadership is related to groups, which are based on common goals. When discussing the importance of leadership as a topic of socioeconomic research, Wallis (2002) defined leadership in terms of collective goals and realization of group members' shared goals.

But this is not so in management. Organizations and groups (departments, etc.) are *not* based on common goals. Organizations are established to solve tasks in order to achieve given goals, and the major goals are decided by the owners of the organizations. The people, who constitute the majority of the working population in the modern world, work in private or public organizations in order to achieve the goals of the shareholders or owners of companies or the citizens of their society. The employees may, however, support the goals of the organization more or less sincerely. The issue is leadership in organizations (Yukl 2010). Formal leadership is management.

Blake and Mouton's (1985, p. 198) definition of leadership stresses the following: 'Whether it is called management, supervision, or administration, the underlying processes establish direction and permit coordination'. In any scholarly work on leadership, it is imperative that it is absolutely clear whether the writer addresses leadership in social, political or religious groups or movements based on common goals *or* leadership in private and public organizations based on the goals of the owners, shareholders or citizens.

2.2 Followers or subordinates?

Burns (1978) identifies two types of leadership (that is, transformative and transactional) on the basis of a qualitative analysis of the biographies of political leaders. Additionally, he believes that all leaders can be classified by transactions *with* subordinates versus transformations *of* subordinates. Burns' (1978) treatise deals only with political leaders and their followers. He makes no references to business or public managers. Ladkin (2010) refers to John F. Kennedy, Barak Obama and Hillary Clinton, but has few references to business managers. For that reason alone, the contributions of these famous politicians are of limited value to managerial leadership.

The consistent use of the term *follower* instead of subordinate is unfortunate. In fact, Burns (1978) does not contain any definition of the term follower. According to *Webster's Dictionary* (1989, p. 551) a *follower* is 'a person who follows others in regard to his ideas and belief; disciple or adherent'. The term is a synonym of (1) *adherent*, meaning one who gives full loyalty and support to another (*follower* may apply to people who attach themselves to either the person or the beliefs of another); or (2) *adherent*, which suggests a close and persistent attachment; or (3) *disciple*, implying a devoted allegiance to the teachings of one chosen as a master; or even (4) *partisan*, which suggests a zealous, often prejudiced attachment (ibid.). Nothing is gained by calling individuals in subordinate positions *followers*. Do we want managers to perceive and interact with their subordinates the way religious and political leaders do?

Bass's (1985) development of the concept of transformational leadership from Burns (1978) conflates political leadership with managerial leadership. Managers in business and in public agencies do not have followers; only political and religious leaders do. Managers have subordinates. This kind of muddling is illustrated in Seltzer and Bass (1990, p. 694), who – in the very same sentence – use the two terms *follower* and *subordinate* indiscriminately: 'Transformational leaders may inspire their followers, may deal individually with subordinates to meet their developmental needs ...'. Current researchers also use the term *follower* even if their investigations concern private companies or public agencies (for example, Simola et al. 2010; Nahum-Shani and Somech 2011; Nielsen and Cleal 2011; Tims et al. 2011).

It is indicative of this implicit bias that Ladkin (2010) lists neither *subordinates* nor *employees*, but only *follower* in the index. Yet the concept of follower is not defined. Managers are hired to contribute to the attainment of organizational goals, which can only be done by having subordinates (not followers) performing tasks that lead to productivity and effectiveness. However, some scholars use the terms *manager* and *leader* interchangeably (for example, Yukl 1989), which is unproblematic when it is made explicit. The use of the terms *follower* and *subordinate* (employee) as if they were the same, on the other hand, creates confusion. As the term *follower* is not defined, we have neither a formal, rational way of knowing whether followers exist nor empirical studies on the existence of followers in private and public organizations.

2.3 Transformational leadership and servant-leadership

Ladkin (2010, p. 32) claims that transformational leadership ‘concentrates on the “leader” side and speaks from an interest in organisational change’. It may, however, be more accurate to say that transformational leadership has a stronger focus on changing the followers than on changing the organization. As Burns (1978, p. 4) has written: ‘The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full potential of the follower’. In Burns’s view, transformational leadership is about influencing followers, doing something with the followers. It is evident that the focus of the transforming leader is on converting followers. ‘Transforming leaders “raise” their followers up through levels of morality ...’ (ibid., p. 426).

The conflation of managerial and political leadership is also problematic when effects of transformational leadership are claimed to be valid for managerial leadership. Bass (1985) has maintained that transformational leadership is superior to other kinds of leadership. If effectiveness is a dependent variable and defined as (1) a ratio, (2) the degree of goal attainment, and if (3) the goal is profitability and (4) the measurement of profitability is an objective one, then the claim that transformational leaders are more effective lacks empirical support (Lowe et al. 1996).

Bass (2000) has drawn parallels between transformational and servant-leadership. Others have also examined the relationship between transformational and servant-leadership (Graham, 1991; Smith et al., 2004; Stone et al., 2004; Humphreys, 2005; Hamilton, 2007). Farling et al. (1999) have used Greenleaf’s (1970, p. 13) definition and compared it with Burns’s (1978) definition of transformational leadership, whereby the leader and follower act to assist each other’s improvement in all facets of life. As a transformational force, servant-leadership has the potential to move leaders and followers towards higher levels of motivation and morality (Hamilton and Bean 2005).

Servant-leaders are those who serve with a focus on the followers, whereby followers are the first concern, and the organizational concerns secondary. Servant-leaders, indeed, serve followers. Yet managers are hired to contribute to organizational goal attainment. Organizations can only attain these goals by having subordinates solving tasks that enhance goal attainment. Managerial leadership has to do with the systematic influence on other people so that they solve tasks related to the pursuit of organizational goals. However, since servant-leaders do not concentrate their efforts on achieving the goals set by the owners, they can hardly achieve them (Andersen 2009). According to Stone et al. (2004, p. 350), idealized influence (or charismatic influence) is the same as servant-leadership. Idealized influence is the charismatic element of transformational leadership through which leaders become role models who are admired, respected and emulated by followers. Servant-leadership theory pertains to humanitarian, religious and political leadership.

2.4 No tasks to solve

Arguably, the properties of leader, subordinates and tasks must exist for managerial leadership to exist and to be what leadership is. So what happened to the task? Again, if leadership is regarded as the set of behaviours that one or more individuals in a group or organization exhibit, which involves systematic influences that seek to induce other people to perform tasks or to solve problems in order to attain the goals of the group or organization, then three main components emerge: leaders, subordinates, and tasks (cf. Adair, 2010). Leadership and management are then about the achievement

of organizational goals through the execution of goal-orientated tasks with and through the efforts of other people. The tasks are those which contribute to the goal attainment of a group or an organization which has a structure (with positions of managers and subordinates) and the interpersonal relationships between them.

Ladkin (2010) focuses on the relationship between the leader and the followers. She holds that leadership is about influencing followers, doing something with the followers. Yukl (2010) has criticized what he believes to be a narrow focus on dyadic processes. There is a disproportionate emphasis on the relationship between the leader and his or her followers. Burns (1978) does not deal with the challenge of making followers perform tasks in order to achieve organizational goals. His book contains 466 pages of running text and the index 992 words (excluding authors' names). If task is a *part* or a *central part* of leadership we would expect to find *task* mentioned in the running text and amongst the almost 1000 words in the index. This is not the case. According to Burns's theory, there are no tasks to solve.

Likewise, Ladkin (2010) does not deal with the challenge of making followers perform tasks in order to achieve organizational goals. 'Task' is not listed in her index either. Ladkin's idea about leadership does not contain the task-oriented functions of leaders that are essential for effective performance. There are no tasks to solve. Leadership is exercised when persons mobilize resources so as to arouse, engage and satisfy the motives of followers (*ibid.*).

2.5 Managerial versus political leadership

Now, what is the difference between managerial and political leadership? Leadership in formal organization – managerial leadership – is a function. Managers have subordinates. The core of managerial leadership is that managers are hired to contribute to the attainment of organizational goals, which can only be done by having subordinates performing tasks that lead to productivity and effectiveness. The goals of organizations are not a problem for the managers. It is the reason why they hold executive positions. The subordinates are given more and less specific tasks to do that facilitate goal attainment.

Political and religious leaders have followers (for example, supporters, members, participants). A religious organization, for instance The Church of England, has managers like the vicars. They are also spiritual leaders (Andersen 2000). The goal is the goal of the leader or a common goal. The followers are not given specific tasks to do. The definition of leadership proposed by Marturano et al. (2013) permits a leadership concept that does not include tasks. Thus political leadership is pinpointed. To conflate managerial leadership with political leadership creates problems, especially when it is argued that scholarship on political leadership is relevant and useful for managerial leadership. Blake and Mouton (1982, p. 24) still offer us a most useful reminder: 'The exercise of leadership involves a task to be accomplished and people to do it. These two concerns are interdependent; one can't be had without the other'. Since the property of task is missing in transformational leadership and servant-leadership theories, they are basically theories of political leadership.

3 PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AND LEADERSHIP

An ontological approach to leadership can be that leadership exists independently of our perceptions of it. It is hard to understand why Ladkin (2010) refers to Berger and Luckmann (1991), because their work is a treatise on the sociology of knowledge,

as given by the subtitle of their book. The sociology of knowledge analyses how (the understanding of) reality is constructed. The key terms are *reality* and *knowledge*. Berger and Luckmann (1991, p. 13) define 'reality' as a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own will. They (*ibid.*) have excluded epistemological and methodological problems from the sociology of knowledge. The book deals with sociological theory and not sociological methodology. To Berger and Luckmann, the social world is socially constructed. The counter-argument comes from critical realism (Bhaskar 1978). Organizations, for instance, exist independently of our perceptions of them. Whatever the meanings of organizations, for human beings they are social constructions. Organizations are not socially constructed, however; they are contrived (see, for example, Katz and Kahn 1978).

It is an ontological assumption that leadership exists independently of individual perceptions, interpretations, images or metaphors. Thus, leadership exists and can be observed with a high degree of inter-subjectivity so that we may claim that leadership is an objective phenomenon. Our *understanding* of leadership – that is, our knowledge of leadership – is, of course, socially constructed, as all other knowledge is.

The strength of the radical realism is that it operates with an epistemic relativism and an ontological realism (Bhaskar 1978). We use aphorisms, metaphors and models that are fallible when we try to expose the structures of reality. Although knowledge is socially constructed, it is not socially determined. Knowledge can therefore be revised. Our perception of reality can be revised (through judgemental rationality) simply because the reality itself offers resistance against our fallible attempts to understand it. In short, the knowledge about a phenomenon and the phenomenon itself are not the same. Nor are leadership theory and leadership the same. Larsson (2005, pp. 265–266) writes: 'In recent times a number of thinkers, among them some self-styled philosophers, have advocated the theory that we humans are fundamentally incapable of communicating with one another, that a linguistic message is always equivocal, subjective, open to interpretation.' He adds:

Some argue that each of us goes around with his private picture of reality in his head, different from everyone else's, that each person is as unique as his fingerprints, and that it is a fundamental principle that we cannot know the nature of reality. Even if we could know, we would not be able to convey that same knowledge to anyone else. These philosophers maintain that both knowledge and communication are subjective and relative. Ideas such like these, however absurd they may seem to the average man or woman of sound mind, are not new. This same turning-your-back philosophy thrives today under names like de-constructivism, postmodernism or epistemological scepticism and relativism. To my doubtless naïve mind it is easy to demonstrate the absurdity of many of these theories. If the assertion, 'All linguistic meaning is subjective, relative and private', or any variant of it, were true, it would also apply to the semantic significance of the assertion itself. Its own asserted meaning is negated by its own truth. (*Ibid.*, p. 267)

Relativistic and sceptical scholars claim that we can never know how reality is constituted. All is a question of subjective interpretations, even likes and dislikes. This way of reasoning implies several serious and irresponsible erroneous inferences. People can understand each other and even make mistakes (Sayer 1992). Mistakes do not always come from misinterpretations, but often from lack of relevant information. If the tidal waters are dangerous and the weather forecast says 'south-west gale', these warnings cannot be interpreted to mean 'sail along' by a person in a small boat. 'I am not arguing', Larsson writes, 'that it is always easy to communicate or to know what is reality. On the contrary, it often demands much effort and good will to agree on what words mean. That is why we need science, because our cognisance of reality is not straightforward and

unmediated’ (Larsson 2005, p. 270). We need to appreciate Larsson’s lesson. Indeed, his point is also relevant when it comes to sense-making, as the output of sense-making processes is by no means self-evident (Weick 1995). Larsson (2005) denies that every linguistic utterance can be interpreted to mean more or less anything.

When the top managers announced their decision to move their offices from the top floor to the main floor and next to the reception, Alvesson and Robertson (2006) interpreted this announcement as an attempt to de-emphasize hierarchy and to emphasize equality. On the other hand, the announcement was also interpreted as an attempt to increase supervision and control over the subordinates (Alvesson 2011). Is it a storm awaiting or just a light breeze?

What Larsson (2005) describes is an extreme version of social constructivism. Some other advocates of this line of reasoning do not deny that there is a reality behind the language, a reality which we cannot get access to. They argue that it is more important to investigate how concepts about the world emerge than to study the reality behind them (Suttons 2007).

In fact, Smircich and Morgan (1982), Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) and Ladkin (2010) belong to a group of leadership researchers who may have missed a crucial point. Leadership is neither about defining the reality of others nor is leadership socially constructed. It is the understanding of leadership which is socially constructed.

Some leadership researchers describe leaders as charismatic (for example, Bass 1985). Hatch et al. (2006) believe that it is imperative to integrate the roles of manager, artist and priest in order to face the complexities of present-day leadership, while Amernic et al. (2007) identify one manager (metaphorically) as pedagogue, architect, commander and saint. Other writers attribute beauty, wisdom and ethics to leadership (for example, Ladkin 2010). Both Dubin (1979) and Eccles and Nohria (1992) have turned against the magic of words which imply the reconstruction of management into leadership. Again, nothing is gained by calling individuals who are responsible for other people and their work *leaders* rather than *managers* if they hold formal positions in private and public organizations. Jung (1983, p. 380) has written: ‘If anyone is inclined to believe that any aspect of the *nature* of things is changed by such formulations, he is being extremely credulous about words. The real facts do not change whatever names we give them. Only we ourselves are affected’. And he (ibid.) adds that ‘the change of name has removed nothing at all from reality’. The reality exists and it cannot be dissolved or altered by giving it new names, by using metaphors, construction, deconstruction and sense-making, or by applying different approaches, methods, perspectives and interpretations (Sayer 1992).

4 METHODOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP

The nature of the object under study is the ‘fixed point’ from which one can start regarding the choice of methods – it is the nature of the object that determines the possibilities we have for gaining knowledge about it (Danermark et al. 2002). The purpose of abstractions is to make it possible to separate that which is characteristic in an object from that which is more contingent. The abstractions should lead back to those properties which determine what a certain object is, namely its nature (ibid.).

Danermark et al. (ibid., p. 41) have written: ‘All knowledge is conceptually mediated and it is thus impossible to make neutral observations of “facts” about reality’. Observations are always theory-laden, but observations do not decide what reality is like. Again, reality exists independently of our knowledge about it. Critical

realist analysis is built around the understanding (notion) of natural necessity. Our abstractions should primarily aim at determining these necessary and constitutive properties in different objects, thus determining the nature of the object (ibid.). In this context, the term 'nature' refers to the type of an object, be it naturally or socially produced, to that which at a certain moment determines what a certain object is. The abstractions must show what it is in the object that makes it what it is and not something else (ibid.).

Does leadership exist? The case studies presented by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) do not contain any evidence for the nonexistence of leadership because no definition of leadership was presented. Did they assume that they would find something they did not define? If the difficulties in doing 'leadership' were addressed by studying the execution of the managerial functions defined by Fayol (1923 [1937]), it is evident from the case studies that managers investigated did in fact *plan* (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003, p. 369), *organize* (ibid., p. 367), *coordinate* (ibid., p. 368), *direct* (ibid., p. 368), and *control* (ibid., p. 368).

Additionally, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) have attacked leadership research because it is based on 'forcing' respondents to respond to questionnaire statements. Interviews are the preferred method, they argue. This is simply incorrect: there is no best method. Again, the nature of the object under study is the 'fixed point' from which to begin regarding the choice of methods. The landmark research project from Michigan State University included interviews with managers, subordinates, managers' colleagues and their superiors as well as observation of managers' behaviour in order to describe leadership behaviour (Likert 1961). The researchers from The Ohio State University used the same number of methods (Halpin and Winer 1957; Fleishman and Harris 1962) *before* the questionnaires were constructed and tested. Because these researchers defined what they were looking for, they applied written instruments appropriately. Additionally, the leadership research has made use of a full range of methods like experiments (for example, Bales 1958; Belbin 1987) and observations (for example, Luthans and Lockwood 1984). When concepts are theoretically and empirically defined, measurements like Thematic Apperception Tests (for example, McClelland and Steele 1972) and questionnaires are used. In these cases, there are no reasons for conducting interviews.

Ladkin (2010, p. 186) encourages researchers to experiment with and to devise new methods which might be sensitive enough to 'detect the invisible, absent aspects of leadership'. Is it possible to see something which is invisible or to detect something which is not there?

Yukl (1989) has written that it is neither feasible nor desirable to attempt to resolve the controversy over appropriate definitions of leadership. However, Ladkin repeats this and argues that those researching leadership might bear in mind that pronouncing a final, definite account of this phenomenon is not possible. Furthermore, according to phenomenology, the identity of leadership can never be fully known. Does leadership have an identity, or is 'identity' just another word for the nature of leadership? Asking for a final definition of any phenomenon in social sciences is asking too much. Yet asking for a theoretical and empirical definition of leadership and providing an answer is relevant. In fact, definitions are found. In the social sciences, a specific definition or a generally accepted one is not a necessity. It is, however, necessary to choose a definition before empirical research is performed. Choosing a definition which many other researchers have used has cumulative benefits. Ladkin (2010, p. 188) has in fact provided us with her own definition: 'The notion of the "flesh" of leadership implies that leaders and followers are together implicated in the enactment of leadership which successfully

achieves mobilization towards desired purposes’. What is the real difference between Ladkin’s definition and those of others (for example, Tannenbaum et al. 1961; Blake and Mouton 1985)?

If the purpose is to develop social-science explanations, it is not enough just to collect and repeat the interpretations and explanations that people themselves have of various social phenomena. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) studied the meaning managers ascribe to leadership or construct their leadership, while Holmberg and Tyrstrup (2010) explored the way in which managers perceive and describe the characteristics of their everyday leadership. However, if the interpretations and explanations of others were the real explanation, there would be no need for social science (Danermark et al. 2002).

The question that the critical realist asks himself or herself is this: what determines whether an object or a social relationship is real or not? The answer given is that the object or relationship has a causal effect in the world. Everything that has a causal effect or the potential to exercise a causal effect in the world is real (Danermark et al. 2002).

Consequently, leadership is totally independent of what researchers at any time think about it. Those who adhere to critical realism perceive social objects as relational. Social objects are not simply independent, for they are objects due to the relationship they form with other objects. It is a crucial realization that the objects of social science are relational: they are what they are by virtue of the relations they enter with other objects. When the relations are internal, the objects condition each other. They may condition one another mutually, which signifies a symmetrically necessary relation (Danermark et al. 2002). This is the core of managerial leadership as it is related to individuals, tasks and organizations.

Organizations like other social structures cannot exist independently of people’s actions (Danermark et al. 2002). The meaning managers ascribe to leadership or construct their leadership and the way in which managers perceive and describe the characteristics of their everyday leadership differ greatly from how managers act and behave. Managerial leadership is not primarily about who you are, your ideas, sentiments, perceptions, and your assumptions. Rather, it is primarily about actions and what you do and accomplish (Andersen 2006).

5 CONCLUSION: WHAT HAS IT MEANT TO RETHINK LEADERSHIP?

Linking philosophy to organizations and leadership is not new. Hodgkinson’s (1996) work on administrative philosophy deals not only with the responsibility of organizations for actions affecting the other organizations and individuals, but also the administrators’ responsibility for actions towards their subordinates. Ladkin (2010) considers the implications of rethinking leadership through the lenses of philosophy. By using the concept of the leadership ‘moment’, she does not include the tasks. Finally, a major element previously missed is now introduced, namely the purpose (or goal). Now we are introduced to a definition of leadership which includes ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’ and a purpose to which collective action is directed. It is hard to understand how the concept of ‘moment’ and Ladkin’s (2010, pp. 177–178) description of how leadership emerges can resolve the debate and tension between a positivistic paradigm (in which leadership is defined and found to exist) and the socially constructed paradigm (where leadership is about social processes and attributions). However, one of the major issues in leadership research is whether it is a distinct phenomenon or not (Yukl 1989). Some scholars claim that leadership is no different than the processes of social influence found amongst all members in

all groups. Calder (1977) reminds us that if all behaviours shown by the members of a group are similar, there would be no reason to assume that leadership exists.

The study by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) does not contain any evidence of 'the disappearing act of leadership'. If it did, the research phenomenon would be the group and nothing would be gained by using the term *leadership*. Is this the main argument of the social-construction paradigm? The object under study has certain properties that seem necessary and indispensable for the object to exist at all and to be what it is (Danermark et al. 2002). Leadership has certain properties that seem necessary and indispensable for it to exist at all and to be what leadership is. To Ladkin (2010, p. 178) this is not the case, as she writes: 'Considering leadership as a "moment" resolves this split by integrating the actions of individual leaders into the construction of leadership'. By doing so, Ladkin joins the dominant group of leadership researchers who define leadership in terms of action and behaviour.

However, by finally introducing 'purpose', Ladkin appears to distinguish between formal organizations and political or religious movements. In business and public organizations the purpose or goal is the same as the goal of the owners. It is not the goal, purpose or vision of the leader (manager) that matters, but that of the owners. Again, it is imperative to distinguish between the term *leadership*, which is a function, and *leader* or *manager*, which refers to a position in a group or organization. Both managers and subordinates can fulfil leadership functions; however, it is only the manager who is responsible for the outcome of the actions of all employees.

Ladkin (ibid.) argues that by problematizing the purposes towards which leader activity is directed differently, a new understanding of what leaders need to do emerges. By arguing this way, she leaves the leadership of private and public organizations behind. In a formal organization the purpose or the goal is known. It is an imperative and an order. The formal leaders (managers) are hired to be executives; that is, their main task is to contribute to the attainment of the goals as decided by the owners. The purpose of the organization is the reason for management. If managers do not achieve the goals, the owners will (eventually) fire them. If the managers do not accept the goals, they may resign.

The final comment on leadership by Ladkin (ibid.) refers to how this phenomenon can be studied in a meaningful way. Her answer is to study leadership through the lens of philosophy, as philosophy teaches us how to live with uncertainty. To live with uncertainty is possible by asking questions. To conduct leadership research is, according to Ladkin, to ask questions. After more than 110 years of leadership research, it may be timely to ask for answers. Arguably, the ultimate question in managerial leadership is this: How can managers act in order to enhance organizational goal attainment?

After his concerts it was announced: 'Ladies and gentlemen: Elvis has left the building'. Now Elvis has left this world. Leaders and the leadership function are, however, neither invisible nor absent, nor have leaders and leadership disappeared. Leadership in some form or another exists essentially any time humans come together to accomplish things (Marturano et al. 2013).

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