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GARDNER ON LEADERSHIP

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GARDNER ON LEADERSHIP

“There is no psychology; there is only biography and autobiography.”
(Thomas Szasz)

“The term ‘leadership’ is an incantation for the bewitchment of the led.”
(Christopher Hodgkinson)

LEADING MINDS
Teachers and students of management know Howard Gardner as the author of Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership (1997). This celebrated book, written with the collaboration of Emma Laskin, offers a cognitive approach to leadership (i.e. Gardner is interested in the ‘minds’ of leaders and followers), discusses leadership in relation to stages of human development, and provides readers with a fascinating series of case studies of eleven ‘leaders’: Margaret Mead, J. Robert Oppenheimer, Robert Maynard Hutchins, Alfred P. Sloan, George C. Marshall, Pope John XXIII, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Margaret Thatcher, Jean Monnet and Mahatma Gandhi. These eleven ‘leaders’ are compared with a ‘control group’ of ten political and military leaders of the twentieth century. They are leaders because Gardner describes a leader as “an individual (or, rarely, a set of individuals), who significantly affects the thoughts, feelings and/or behaviors, of a significant number of individuals” (1997, xiii). Some leaders affect others directly through story-telling (Thatcher) and others indirectly through their creations (Mead). Gardner’s leaders are of different personalities and they appear before us as, alas, human-all-too-human.

Gardner’s eleven vignettes represent a rich source of biographical data and he does not spare us details of the strengths and weaknesses of his leaders. Their human frailties and Gardner’s biographical honesty are such that we pause to wonder how these people became leaders, which is, of course, the point of the book. Too often readers encounter, in the leadership literature, sanitised descriptions of the lives of the authors’ heroes. Gardner goes to the heart of the achievements and failures of his leaders so that we are left to reflect on the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for the emergence of leaders. To assist us in our reflections he acknowledges that he is interested in the minds (thoughts, feelings, images) of leaders (and followers); he is not interested in their personalities or motivational states.
Readers should be grateful to Gardner for sparing them another study of the personalities of so-called leaders since the dispositionalist approach to leadership has singularly failed to produce any meaningful generalisations, although tautologies abound. When authors emphasise the personalities or motivational needs of leaders they invariably depend on tautologies for their plausibility. One reads, for example, in the leadership literature, that ‘charismatic leaders have special personal qualities.’ Gardner flirts with tautologies (e.g. his central thesis is that leaders influence their fellow human beings), but he does not claim that there is a ‘leader personality’. Indeed, his eleven biographies quickly disabuse readers of the very idea of a consistent leader personality. The personality trait approach to the study of leadership - based on inferences from leader behaviour - faces the challenge of explaining the behaviour of followers, and it runs into insuperable problems (Spillane & Martin 2005).

Yet there is in Gardner’s cognitive approach to leadership a lingering sense that there are consistent qualities of people which qualify them for the status of leader. In the section headed *The Antecedents of Leading* Gardner offers several generalisations about the personal qualities of future leaders and their relations with others (loss of parent, contrasting set of relations with parents, unhappy childhood, striking appearance, predisposition to risk-taking, sense of personal toughness, need of power, linguistic intelligence) (32-34). To be fair, he does not claim that these qualities and relations are necessary conditions. He does, however, write of the ‘early markers of leadership’ which apply to ‘some’ proto-leaders. These are, at best, generalisations with little or no predictive power.

It can confidently be said that the search for stable and enduring personal qualities of leaders has failed, and must fail, because leaders cannot adequately be understood apart from the dialectical relationship in which they are involved with their followers. Both must be considered partners in the game of leadership and attempts to analyse one party at the expense of the other are invalid. Leadership is a relationship between leader and followers.

Gardner acknowledges the truism that leaders cannot exist without followers (36) and uses story-telling as the basis for the dialectical relationship between (direct) leaders
and their followers, but confuses the issue by recommending his ‘cognitive approach’
with its emphasis on the ‘minds’ of leaders and followers. He never explains the
relationship between the behaviour of story-telling and ‘minds’, leaving it to the
reader to wonder whether the term ‘mind’ is merely a metaphor. In fact, the word
‘mind’ does not even appear in his subject index.

The backcover of the paperback edition tells readers that, although there have been
many previous studies of leadership, Gardner’s book is the first to concentrate on “the
crucial component of leadership - the human mind” - by exploring the dynamic
relationship between the minds of leaders and those of their followers. Gardner’s
cognitive approach views leadership as a process which occurs within the minds of
individuals who live in a culture. He is interested in “the mind of the leader and the
minds of the followers (whom I sometimes refer to as audience members or
collaborators). Accordingly, this book is a sustained examination, first, of the ways in
which leaders of different types achieve varying degrees of success in characterizing
and resolving important life issues in their own minds and, second, of how in parallel
or in turn, they attempt to alter the minds of their various audiences to effect desired
changes” (15, emphasis added). This is what Gardner means by a cognitive approach
to leadership: he studies ideas, thoughts or images rather than observed behaviour,
personality or motivational factors. “Confronted with the phenomenon of leadership, a
cognitively oriented scientist is likely to ask such questions as, What are the ideas (or
stories) of the leader? How have they developed? How are they communicated,
understood and misunderstood? How do they interact with other stories, especially
competing counterstories, that have already drenched the consciousness of audience
members? How do key ideas (or stories) affect the thoughts, feelings and behaviours
of other individuals?” (16)

Just how his cognitive approach can provide an answer to the last (and, given his
definition of leadership, the crucial) question is by no means clear on Gardner’s
account. Questions about the thoughts and feelings of individuals cannot be answered
from the eleven biographical sketches. In fact, they cannot be answered at all because
it is impossible to study the ‘minds’ (thoughts, feelings, images, etc.) of leaders or
followers. One can study what they do and what they say; one cannot study thoughts
and feelings except as inductive inferences from observed behaviour (public data) of
from communications about private data. As a cognitivist Gardner would argue that inductive inferences from observed behaviour and communications are reasonable and helpful; nominalists, behaviourists and existentialists would argue they are unreasonable and unhelpful. Critics would want to ask Gardner to explain how thoughts and feelings differ from behaviour and how they can be variously assessed. What do we add to our understanding of leader/follower behaviour by invoking such concepts as thoughts and feelings, which are at best inferences from behaviour, and at worst abstract nouns which we reify at our (linguistic) peril?

Gardner is not just interested in leadership, which would be pointless given the scope of his description of leaders as individuals who significantly influence others, he is interested in effective leadership. In one sense ‘effective leadership’ is a pleonasm since the fact of leadership attests to its effectiveness, so that leadership cannot be ineffective. In another sense, ‘effective leadership’ means that the relationship is to be judged pragmatically by its consequences, and this is the sense in which Gardner uses the term. But pragmatic interpretations invariably suffer from problems of circularity, i.e. leaders are successful when they succeed. It is a truism that leaders achieve a degree of success and an historical fact that their effectiveness is finite and, in many cases, short-lived. Is it accurate to say that, for example, Churchill was an effective leader in 1940 and an ineffective leader in 1945? Or was it the case that he was a leader in 1940 and he was not a leader in 1945? The scope of Gardner’s definition of a leader is, however, so wide that he is able to say that Churchill was a leader in 1940 and remained so until his death (since he significantly influenced a significant number of people every year of his life after 1940). The advantage of Gardner’s pragmatism is that it enables him to use the criterion of effectiveness after the event without modifying the status of a leader. So he can say that Churchill was effective in 1940 as a leader because of the effectiveness of his communications, and he was ineffective in 1945 as a leader because of the ineffectiveness of his communications. Circular reasoning of this type has haunted pragmatic thinkers since the days of William James.

Gardner’s central thesis is: leaders fashion stories, especially and importantly stories of identity. Not only should leaders be good story-tellers, they should embody the stories in their lives. “The ultimate impact of the leader depends most significantly on
the particular story that he or she relates or embodies, and the reception to that story on the part of the audiences (or collaborators or followers)” (14). The pragmatism is obvious in the assertion that “(w)hat links the eleven individuals with whom I lead off, and the score of others from this century whose names could readily have been substituted for them, is the fact that they arrived at a story that worked for them and, ultimately, for others as well” (14).

It is well known that, philosophically, pragmatism is concerned with consequences rather than causes and Gardner’s pragmatism is no exception. Gardner says that leaders tell stories “about themselves and their groups, about where they were coming from and where they were headed, about what was to be feared, struggled against, and dreamed about” (14). But most people tell such stories (to priests, psychotherapists, friends, lovers, students, business subordinat es, football teams, and so on), so what is special or different about leaders’ stories? Presumably individuals become leaders when their stories ‘significantly affect’ a ‘significant number of people’. In short, particular stories do not guarantee leadership; an individual becomes a leader by virtue of the consequences of his story-telling for a significant number of people.

Pragmatic philosophers say that truth is what works. Gardner says that leaders’ stories are those that work. If the stories don’t work, the story-tellers are not leaders and Gardner is forced back to his general description of leaders as individuals who influence others. Clearly, some types of stories do not produce followers, and so they don’t ‘work’. We are led, therefore, to the pragmatic (and circular) conclusion that we only know that leaders’ stories work, when they work. But a theory which explains everything (after the event), can predict nothing (before the event). So leaders fashion stories which work for them and for others. A particular story is only known to be successful after it succeeds. We are caught again in circular reasoning - leaders relate influential stories, they are influential because leaders relate them. And moreover, “ordinary leaders relate ordinary stories, innovative leaders relate innovative stories, visionary leaders relate visionary stories” (10-11). Well, yes.

To escape the charge of circularity Gardner has to offer an account of the special nature of leaders’ stories. He attempts this difficult task in the chapter headed The Leaders’ Stories. He begins by admitting that he uses the term ‘story’ in a broad
sense, in that he includes narratives (in the linguistic sense), but also “invented accounts in any symbol system, ranging from a new form of explanation in the physical sciences to a novel mode of expression in dance or poetry” (42). Very broad indeed. In short, Gardner offers readers the tautology that leaders communicate with followers and the truism that stories reflect different levels of sophistication. More specifically, and of empirical interest to researchers, is the proposition that leaders attempt to convince others of a clear vision of life based on personal and group identity. “I maintain that the most fundamental stories fashioned by leaders concern issues of personal and group identity; those leaders who presume to bring about major alterations across a significant population must in some way help their audience members think through who they are” (62). Now this proposition applies to many categories of people who would not normally be called ‘leaders’, e.g. factory supervisors, football coaches, business executives, professors. If Gardner wants to say that leadership is, or can be, a feature of these job categories, then he has an interesting view, to say the least, of followership.

‘Leader’ derives from ‘laedare’ which means to lead people on a journey. The concept carries the assumption that followers choose to accompany the leader on his travels and this assumes that there is no conflict of interest between the parties. Obviously, these assumptions cannot be said necessarily to apply to all super- and subordinate relationships. Factory supervisors and business executives have coercive power over their subordinate colleagues and it is naive to believe that the latter freely choose to ‘follow’ the former. Gardner’s dependence on the general relationship of ‘influence’ means that he fails adequately to consider the power relationships involved in hierarchical relationships and the diverse ways in which people ‘follow’ others, most of which are not examples of leadership.

*Leading Minds* concludes with ‘six constant features of leaders’ and six features which characterise modern leadership. According to Gardner the ideal-typical qualities of an exemplary leader include: youthful interest in people and excellent speaking skills; willingness to confront individuals in authority; willingness to take risks; concern with moral issues; widely travelled; wide range of contacts; capacity for sustained reflection. The six constants of leadership are: the story (leader must have a central message); the audience (must be receptive to the message); the
organisation (as a basis for leadership); the embodiment (leaders must embody their stories); direct and indirect leadership (creative leaders influence others through their creations, political leaders influence audiences directly); the issue of expertise (as a basis for technical authority). Finally, Gardner offers guidelines for effective leadership built around the need to: appreciate enduring features of leadership; anticipate and deal with new trends; encourage recognition of the problems, paradoxes and possibilities of leadership.

These conclusions are derived from Gardner’s sample of ‘leaders’ and so the validity of his conclusions depends on the validity of his sample. Neither is convincing. For example, Gardner makes such astonishing assertions as “(t)here is little question, however, that from an early age, certain individuals stand out among others for their personal attractiveness, as is true of E.L. (the exemplary leader). Most often, the traits are physical - leaders are often tall, good-looking, and graceful” (288). The first sentence is a tautology and so trivially true. The second sentence is empirical and false. Not only is the second sentence not true of leaders generally (Alexander, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Churchill, for starters), it is not even true of Gardner’s sample. He qualifies his assertion with the following tautology: “If they lack these physical characteristics, they may at least have strong defining facial characteristics or piercing eyes” (288). Well, they may and then again they may not. Furthermore, these sentences would seem to cover all cases because it is difficult to imagine who would be exempted from these descriptions. Who lacks strong defining facial characteristics?

The main problem is that, in trying to work with the relational concept of ‘influence’, Gardner casts his net too wide. When we start calling academics, business executives and administrators ‘leaders’ there is no line of demarcation between those who influence others because of the position they occupy and those who influence others because of their exemplary personal qualities. We can be influenced by others in various ways (positively or negatively, voluntarily or involuntarily), and we follow others for diverse reasons (traditional, legal, rational). By relying on ‘influence’ as the fundamental relationship between leader and followers, Gardner fails to acknowledge cases where a conflict of interest exists between the parties and where it does not. This would seem to be an important issue where people are ‘influenced’ coercively by
people in positions of power compared with those whose influence is personal and benign. And Gardner’s distinction between direct and indirect leadership allows, say, builders and architects to be called leaders simply because a significant number of people have to live in their ‘creations’. Since, indirect leadership, through artistic creations, does not require story-telling the status of leader is based on the very general concept ‘influence’.

Obviously proud of his theory of direct and indirect leadership, Gardner writes: “The distinction between indirect leadership, through the creation of symbolic products, and direct leadership, through story-telling and embodying, is also novel: I have sought to build bridges between the influence exerted by a creative individual and the influence wielded by a traditional organizational or national leader” (296). Without the qualifying requirement of story-telling, Gardner’s approach to leadership reverts to the study of those individuals who significantly influence a significant number of people, directly or indirectly. The potential number of leaders is therefore indeterminate and the analysis of leadership pointless. With the inclusion of story-telling (narratives, messages) as a necessary condition of (direct) leadership (i.e. leaders communicate with their followers), the theory is tautological since the negation of Gardner’s proposition is self-contradictory. The pragmatic claim that his study has focused on ‘individuals generally seen as leaders by their contemporaries’ (296) begs the question. That, say, Hutchins and Sloan were capable administrators is clear; that they were leaders is not.

As if to anticipate objections to his description of leaders, Gardner writes: “It remains an open question whether leaders defined in a radically different way can still satisfy my criterion of ‘affecting thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of a significant number of individuals’” (296). That his criterion is so elastic as to be pointless to try to satisfy seems to have escaped him. And should we be able, in a ‘scientific’ study, to define ‘leaders’ in radically different ways?

Gardner acknowledges that his study raises several obvious questions. He admits to a traditionalist approach in that his “focus is on the single leader - generally recognised as such - and on the considerable agency that the person may gain because of his authoritative position and/or powers of persuasion” (295). He accepts that he has not
emphasised or questioned the validity of other approaches to leadership, based on power, politics, the public or the personality of leaders. Nor has he concerned himself with “contemporary revisionist critiques of leadership - leadership as collective; leadership as instigated by the audience, rather than by the nominal leader; leadership on the part of those who have been relatively ‘without voice’ or ‘without a place at the table’, or a deconstructionist or postmodernist critique that would question the entire legitimacy of talk about leadership” (for which many thanks) (295). He admits that he has focused on individuals ‘generally seen as leaders’ by their contemporaries and, in so doing, begs the question about the crucial relationship that obtains between them. For Gardner that relationship is ‘influence’. I shall argue that it is ‘authority’.

LEADERSHIP AS RELATIONSHIP

When Gardner writes about the several choices confronting a student of leadership - a choice between the study of leaders or the study of followers - he gives the impression that these are, methodologically, viable alternatives. They are not. The leader/follower dichotomy is false and it is not a viable method for the study of leadership. The only viable prospect for studying leadership is the relational approach favoured by social psychologists. Here one chooses to regard the relationships between leader and followers as the objective element in the picture. At first blush this seems unpromising as a scientific strategy because the very words used to name these relationships are unavoidably abstract and lack the kind of physical referent commonly associated with science. Nevertheless, science often works with abstract constructs. Several important thinkers in the social sciences have taken the stand that the key to the puzzle of how to be scientific about personality and society, leaders and followers, managers and subordinates, psychiatrists and ‘patients’, and so forth, lies in regarding these relationships as the primary reality. George Herbert Mead in sociology and Thomas Szasz in psychiatry are well-known contributors to the discipline of social psychology in which this orientation persists most strongly.

According to the social psychological perspective, a relationship once named refers to an irreducible element in the researcher’s conceptual scheme. There is no way in which the relationship between leaders and their followers can be analysed in terms of component relationships. Leadership stands for a relationship; it is not the sum of
leaders’ personalities or minds. We may, of course, make inferences about the personalities or motivational states of individual leaders and their followers from the way the relationship manifests itself, and these inferences can be used as explanations for particular cases of leadership. It is also true that leadership overlaps with other relationships between the parties, such as conformity, obedience, influence, power and authority. But all of these may be present and leadership absent. So a relationship correctly identified can be regarded as irreducible, and this gives it valid status as a scientific starting-point. (Spillane and Martin, 2005, 16-17).

Gardner, as we have seen, emphasises ‘influence’ as the key relationship underpinning leadership. So inclusive is this concept that he is faced with the difficult, if not impossible, task of deciding who are leaders and who are not. Because he fails to undertake an adequate conceptual analysis of the relationships between influence, power and authority, his selection of leaders is unconvincing. And because his generalisations and conclusions are based on his sample, they too are unconvincing.

INFLUENCE AND POWER

Gardner’s eleven ‘leaders’ represent an odd collection of prominent men and women, or what Americans call ‘celebrities’. Of their fame and influence there can be no doubt. But it is not at all clear why celebrities should be called leaders - not clear until one realises that the scope of Gardner’s description of a leader is so broad that celebrities would qualify. A leader is, for Gardner, an individual who significantly affects (i.e. influences) the thoughts, feelings and/or behaviours of a significant number of individuals. This description is qualified by the admission that a significant number of individuals has to recognise (i.e. authorise) the individual as a leader. The notions of influence and authority are thus confounded.

That ‘affects is synonymous with ‘influence’ is apparent when Gardner writes: “I see both Churchill and Einstein as leaders - as individuals who significantly influence the thoughts, behaviours and/or feelings of others...Einstein and Churchill mark two ends of a continuum that denotes the capacity of a person (or group of persons) to influence other people” (6, italics in the original). “(Indeed, I could have termed this study An Examination of Influence, but that lexical move would have undermined the
reorientation in thinking about both creativity and leadership that is my goal)” (6). It is unfortunate that Gardner did not elaborate because this bracketed sentence is of primary importance.

It is clear throughout his book that Gardner is indeed concerned with the process of ‘influence’. He asserts that “these eleven individuals all became leaders in the sense that I am using the term: persons who by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behavior, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings (here termed followers or audience members )” (8-9). These descriptions of leaders, built on the notion of ‘influence’, inform Gardner’s theory, methodology and conclusions and raise, as we shall see, a number of conceptual and logical problems which Gardner does not adequately deal with. For example, he does not analyse the relationships between influence, power and authority which is especially indicated given the difficulties facing researchers who try to separate a leader’s personal influence from his positional power. This separation is important for Gardner’s study because he is interested in ‘leading minds’, i.e. influential individuals (Thatcher) rather than influential positions (Prime Minister).

What does it mean to talk of a leader ‘affecting’ the behaviour of followers? It is not clear whether Gardner, who claims scientific legitimacy for his study, assumes a causal relationship when he uses the word ‘affects’. If so, a power relationship must apply - so that any case in which the behaviour of person A is affected by person B is an instance of the power of B over A. But Gardner’s analysis suggests that for this power to exist it has to be accepted (or authorised) by followers (otherwise they would not qualify as collaborators or followers). The quandary which then arises can be expressed thus: (a) leader power is equivalent to cause; (b) its operation requires the consent of the persons operated upon (followers); hence, by deduction, (c) followers must consent before a leader may cause anything to happen to them. The absurdity of this conclusion attests to the falsity of the premises. It is of the essence of power, as it operates upon people, that their consent is irrelevant. Where a person’s consent is relevant, the situation has moved beyond power to authority. By relying on the general term ‘influence’ Gardner obscures the important differences between power and authority.
Gardner’s failure to set up conceptual distinctions between influence and power means that the issue of conflict of interest is by-passed. This is important when we compare such ‘leaders’ as Pope John XXIII and Gandhi with, say, Hutchins and Sloan, where conflict of interest is more likely to be an issue in the two latter cases. Where no conflict of interest between the parties exists influence is not regarded as power, for such activities as inducement, encouragement and education are then simply what the terms suggest. But where a conflict of interest does exist, even if latent, such activities are defined as manipulation and regarded as cases in which the terms ‘influence’ and ‘power’ are synonymous. Where a conflict of interest exists and either force or coercion comes into play, power of a kind not classified as influence is present.

In the study of leadership it is important to identify power independently from influence. Followers may be influenced by anything and everything about a leader, including his habits, manners, actions and rhetoric, whether or not these are directed at influencing them. That seems to be incontrovertible. But it is not the same as saying that a leader is exercising power over followers, or that what is influencing followers is the leader’s power. Followers may be quite correct in believing that a leader has certain powers and may be suitably impressed; but they may be equally impressed when their beliefs about the leader’s power are in fact false. On the other hand, a leader may make every effort to influence followers psychologically and fail completely, even if his powers extend to beating them to death. Even at this extreme it can be said that followers are influenced by the leader since they do something (die) that they would not otherwise do. Obviously, the extent of confusion that can be engendered by conflating two such terms is infinite.

Gardner acknowledges the importance of power in the study of leadership but offers a remarkable opinion about its effects - or non-effects. “I do not for a moment underestimate the importance of power as a motivation of a force in its own right, but I insist that - of itself, power - as opposed to terror - cannot bring about significant changes. The vantage point of power, however achieved, needs to be yoked to specific messages - to stories that can direct and guide an inner circle and a wider polity” (16). This assertion is patently false. Power can, and does, bring about significant change. An individual’s personal power may be used in unauthorised ways. This may occur
within a formal organisation but is more usually found outside it (e.g. crime). A state of affairs in which personal powers were not bounded by authority would, accordingly, be a state of barbarism. The movement towards a civil state, or organisation, is characterised by success in the struggle to bring power and its exercise under the moderating control of authority. This involves profound social and psychological developments: social because consensus has to be achieved as to which actions are morally acceptable; psychological because individuals have to control themselves according to these rules. Gardner is surely right to suggest that power is conditional upon the concession of authority. Whether that is achieved through leaders’ stories and their acceptance (i.e. authorisation) by followers is another matter.

POWER AND AUTHORITY

Power and authority must also be distinguished. The power exercised by leaders is dependent on their abilities to mobilise the activities of their followers and this is, in turn, dependent on the extent to which followers concede authority to leaders. The power attributed to leaders is, therefore, conditional on the concession of authority and is defined and circumscribed by these concessions. It is not enough merely to state the tautology that leaders influence people. Nor is it enough to say that leaders have the power to influence people because of the stories they relate. Their stories are successful insofar as they are judged to be authoritative.

The assent of the person to whom a story is addressed is a necessary condition for the establishment of it as authoritative, and if this is to occur certain conditions must be met. It must be such that a follower understands it, believes it to be consistent with the purposes of his group (if any), and believes it to be compatible with his personal interests. Authority is, therefore, a quality of a communication (or story) by virtue of which it is accepted. Carl Friedrich (1963) would add that, in the case of political, bureaucratic and managerial authority, it is a quality of a communication that is capable of reasoned elaboration. And reasoning means the ability to argue about relevant issues. Arguing is not, however, a necessary condition of leadership and is often not a feature of it at all.
Authority, then, refers to a relationship between persons or between person surrogates (e.g. institutional positions) and it is dissolved by dissent. Since authority implies more than a net advantage to individuals, it contains a moral element relating to the common good. Accordingly, it is sensitive to psychological factors. Power, on the other hand, does not require assent and its effects are not cancelled by dissent. Power is morally neutral and insensitive to psychological evaluation. Particular uses of power, by leaders for example, are morally evaluated and classed as being in accord with or counter to authority. The use by a leader of power that runs counter to authority may induce assent but not authority (Spillane and Martin 2005, 91).

RULERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

To describe a leader as ‘an individual who significantly affects the thoughts, feelings and/or behaviours of a significant number of individuals’ raises two questions. First, are there individuals who meet this descriptive requirement and yet are patently not leaders? Is, for example, a policeman on point-duty a leader? And Donald Duck would, on Gardner’s account, qualify as a leader. He might answer in the negative to both questions since he has selected for study individuals ‘seen as leaders by their contemporaries’. But this qualification entails more than a relation of influence; it entails one of authority because it assumes a relation involving some form of concession or authorisation.

Second, is the leader’s influence positive or negative in its effects? Are notorious serial killers who significantly affect our behaviour leaders? Again, Gardner’s answer is, presumably, that since serial killers are not ‘seen as leaders by their contemporaries’ (or at least not by a significant number of people), they do not qualify as leaders. But should they become freedom fighters, and their killings re-defined as heroic actions, they may become leaders. Again this involves a series of judgements by potential followers about the right or legitimacy of the potential leader’s actions and their effects on followers and the wider community. And this places us in the domain of authority.
Third, what is the relationship between rulership and leadership? Gardner does not address this issue even though it is clear that most of his ‘leaders’ were rulers in the literal sense of the term - there was a strong probability that their commands would be obeyed, voluntarily or involuntarily. Is this equally true of leaders? Clearly not if we mean Gardner’s indirect leaders. But what of his direct leaders? Do they get their following in the same way rulers get theirs? Both rulership and leadership entail obedience. In the case of rulership it may be voluntary or involuntary, coercive or consensual. If this is true of leadership then there is no difference between the two concepts. If, however, we allow a difference between rulership and leadership, it would seem that leadership entails voluntary, but not involuntary, obedience.

Max Weber can help us here with his analysis of rulership (Herrshaft) in modern capitalist societies. His essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) maintains that Calvinism and other Puritan sects set up those psychological conditions which account for the appearance in the West of a form of capitalism not seen anywhere else in the world at any other time in history; and also, indirectly, the conditions for the accumulation of a uniquely successful body of scientific knowledge. Both capitalism and science have existed elsewhere and at other times, but never with the emphasis on the rational which is the legacy of the New Capitalism. Given Gardner’s choice of leaders (especially Oppenheimer, Sloan, Hutchins, Marshall) it is worth rehearsing some of Weber’s main points so that a more effective distinction can be made between rulers and leaders.

BUREAUCRATIC RULERSHIP

Essentially Weber sees capitalism as a form of social organisation based on the allocation of fixed duties to hierarchically arranged positions. The duties are fixed through the introduction of general rules, often written regulations. Since this applies not only to the separate institutions of the state but to the state itself (in which the general rules take the form of laws), a high degree of concord can be developed
between the state and its constituent institutions, although the extent to which every institution is forced to conform in function to the requirements of the centralised authority may vary. So far as the person is concerned, his job within the total pattern of co-operation is specified in terms of routines designed to deal with the general case. In fact these routines and their concordant regulations may create the general case, since they define all other cases as aberrations or emergencies. The organisation is one which can best produce a standard article or service, so this defining manoeuvre is essential.

The formal power to give the orders required for the carrying out of these duties is distributed in a stable way and includes rules delimiting the coercive means at the disposal of officials. Only persons who have the ‘generally regulated qualifications’ to serve are employed. The hierarchy and the graded levels of authority generate a firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is always a supervisor to every office (except the highest). Ideally the governed have the right of appealing against the decision of any office-holder to a higher authority, in a definitely regulated manner.

Associated with finite roles are regulations specifying what must be done and/or what must not. The role specifications and the regulations then constitute the basis for the institution’s claim that it has rationalised action, since by following them the person should be able to serve the aims of the institution and by implication the good of society at large. Theoretically, he has no need to understand the purposes served by the organisation nor to be able to judge whether any member’s actions support it. He has merely to accept a very narrow responsibility - that of carrying out his own ‘part’ with precision and reliability. On this basis, social structure can be rationalised to stricter and stricter degrees, and so it may be brought to resemble the conceptual model of a social machine.

Weber is explicit that bureaucracy is a machine and that it is an instrument in which people are merely functionaries. This impersonal character means that the mechanism - in contrast to structures based on personal loyalty - will readily work for anyone who knows how to gain control over it. The system specifies powers to be exercised by the person occupying each position in the organisation; formal power is made to cover the
functions required in each office as exhaustively as possible. This power is attached to the position itself rather than to persons and is defined as explicitly as possible.

It is evident that the form of rulership which operates in this system differs from the earlier types. It is attached to a position, not a person, so it is the position which claims the greater stability and importance. It gains this character because its functions are considered essential to the production of some material or service. The rationale for conceding rulership to such a position therefore rests ultimately on the desirability of the item being produced. There could, of course, be much argument about the desirability of producing this or that item, but the Protestant Ethic cut short any debate on the matter simply by asserting that the ultimate value of anything was not to be ascertained by men. With this as a major premise, no argument about the desirability of anything, whether it be bombs or mustard gas, can be conclusive. All participants in these organisations from top to bottom, must take it on faith that production is desirable on its own account, and therefore everyone is relieved of any obligation to show that the organisation serves such abstract purposes as contributing to human welfare or happiness. When the process did actually lead to desirable goods becoming available in quantities, the concession of rulership to the organisational hierarchy came to appear to be simply rational. If there is something a little odd in a conscience which acknowledges the positional rather than the personal, the rational rather than the moral as its source, it is nevertheless effective.

Weber’s analysis leads, therefore, to the question of the difference between rulership and leadership, and on this issue there has been considerable debate. He reduced rulership to three ‘ideal-types’, the ‘charismatic’, the ‘traditional’ and the ‘legal-rational’. Briefly, charismatic rulership is based on a person, usually one who offers a solution to some very deep-seated and recalcitrant problem, and the solution offered is usually of a kind which both defines the problem more clearly than has been done before and gives the impression that the person offering it holds the key to understanding the central problems of existence. Charismatics are, therefore, leaders in the thousand-year tradition of the Anglo-Saxon word ‘laedare’ - to lead people on a journey. Weber would class Gandhi and Martin Luther King as charismatic. Charismatics, it should be noted, are almost always assassinated. In Machiavelli’s terms, they are unarmed prophets who always come to grief.
Traditional rulership is well represented in the feudal system where person and position were usually connected by birth (‘ascribed status’) and there was a certain element of paternalism expected, so that the welfare of the inferior depended to some extent on the personal favour of the superior. Here, the inferior’s estimate of the superior as a person could intrude on what was due to his position.

Legal-rational rulership, in contrast, eliminates the personal and much of the uncertainty that goes with it and concentrates directly on whether a certain task gets fulfilled. Unlike the traditional and charismatic claims to rulership, legal-rational rulership is embedded in the social order. It extends to individuals only in so far as they occupy an organisational office and even then their powers are limited to a ‘sphere of competence’ as defined within that social order. Obedience is due to individuals because they occupy a particular office and perform in their role with the appropriate technical competence. There is no other reason to obey their commands.

The great social change set in motion by the Reformation was, in these terms, a rise to predominance of legal-rational rulership over the traditional type which characterised the feudal system. But the Reformation also saw the transfer of spiritual rulership to the secular rulers, for monarchs and other heads of state became ‘spiritual leaders’ of their nations, and some took on mystical attributes in the eyes of their members. In these cases, the direction of transformation was from charismatic ‘leadership’ to legal-rational ‘rulership’. An obvious case is Hitler who institutionalised his charisma by creating the office of the Führer of the Third Reich, recognised by the personal salute ‘Heil Hitler’.

GARDNER’S LEADERS

It is the merit of Weber’s analysis that we can appreciate the difficulty in classifying as leaders (rather than rulers), business executives (Sloan), military officers (Marshall), scientists (Oppenheimer), administrators (Hutchins), academics (Mead). Charismatics, like Gandhi, Hitler and Mao Zedong are clearly leaders. Where the basis of rulership is legal-rational (without prior charismatic status) it is difficult to understand why such people, however effective they are, should be called leaders.
And this is where Gardner’s dependence on ‘influence’ weakens his case. He repeats the truism that leaders need followers but most of the people we follow are not leaders. We follow the policeman who directs us to the side of the road, but we do not call him a leader no matter how efficient he is. We follow the advice of the car mechanic to sell our car but we do not call him a leader no matter how competent he is. And so it goes for politicians, managers, military officers and bureaucrats. If we follow them, and it is frequently a rational decision not to do so, it is for legal reasons or because we judge them to be technical experts. Who they are as persons is not important.

Charismatics are in a different category altogether, as Weber realised when he referred to them as ‘leaders’. Charismatics acquire their following because of an “uncommon and extraordinary devotion of a group of followers to the sacredness or the heroic force or the exemplariness of an individual and the order revealed or created by him” (Weber 1947, 358-359). In following a charismatic, individuals have to be prepared to suspend their critical judgements and invest considerable emotion, and thus faith, in the person and his proposed journey. Gardner is right to emphasise the importance of story-telling in this endeavour but he is wrong to attribute the success of other celebrities and rulers to this ability.

Contra Gardner, it can be argued that in matters of everyday life we don’t need leaders. If we follow individuals it is because of the role they occupy and/or the technical skills they possess. In short, we follow competent individuals because it is rational to do so. But when we are faced with emergencies, with attendant extraordinary needs, leadership is called forth. History teaches us that ‘natural’ leaders in moments of distress were neither appointed office-holders nor ‘professionals’ but the bearers of specific gifts that were considered extraordinary.

Charisma is radically opposed to bureaucratic organisation because it is self-determined and sets its own limits. It is opposed to the economic infrastructure of bureaucracies and to their rules, roles and rewards. Charismatic leadership is naturally unstable because the mere fact of recognising the personal mission and extraordinary powers of charismatics establishes their status. They must perform heroic, miraculous deeds and should they cease to do so, their status and power evaporate.
If we choose to confine the study of leadership to charismatics, the range of candidates is narrow. If we embrace Gardner’s approach, the range is very wide indeed. Moreover, there is no reason to accept Weber’s trichotomy - other approaches to rulership and leadership are possible.

Weber, for example, makes rationality a basis for legal-rational rulership and considers all personal rulership to be based on non-rational criteria. The competent individual, on this account, derives his power from exceptional personal characteristics of a non-rational nature. Yet it is apparent that some people may secure a sizeable following, not because of their charismatic qualities, but because they propose to solve problems with which others are grappling. One thinks here of survivors of a plane crash who turn to a competent stranger to lead them out of the jungle. In short, there is nothing so rational as following a person because he is likely to solve important problems, even though he may fall well short of charismatic status. We need a separate category that would account for the fact that certain people have special knowledge and abilities, even though they do not hold a formal office. This is to say that particular, non-charismatic individuals may have their personal power sanctioned rationally because of their ability to help a group achieve its goals. Such people may become leaders.

WHY LEADERSHIP?

Rulers throughout history have wanted to believe that others obeyed them, not because they had the power to enforce obedience, but because they were ‘born leaders’. This myth was invented by Plato and has been so successful that it is still debated seriously in business schools and management conferences. Plato, in The Republic, (414) called the story of the ‘born leader’ the great lordly lie. “Could we perhaps fabricate one of those very handy lies? With the help of one single lordly lie we may, if we are lucky, persuade even the rulers themselves.” In this way rulers can become leaders and (attempt to) bewitch their followers.

‘Leadership’ is today a popular notion and especially appeals to politicians, journalists, managers and bureaucrats. Among managers this concern with leadership
has been, for more than half a century, a fetish. In 1951 two American sociologists argued that managers’ fixation with leadership derived from the fact that they wanted to believe that their power over their subordinates resulted from the latter’s recognition of their superior ability. Power was, of course, left out of the story (Miller and Form 1951, 195). The way in which the notion of leadership has been used by ‘servants of power’ in industry and government has been well documented by Baritz (1960) but his book has had little impact on modern management. Today there is no more popular topic in management and government administration than leadership.

Wittgenstein (1997) argued that the meaning of a word depends on its role in the language game of which it is a member. The words ‘ruler’ and ‘leader’ operate in quite different language games - as rulers know only too well. That they (and others) want us to believe they are leaders by invoking a language game which includes the ideas of gifted and superior individuals leading others on a journey to paradise, would appeal to Plato (and to Machiavelli). But history tells us that leaders are just as (if not more) likely to lead us to hell. Gardner tells us that he has selected his ‘leaders’ carefully, a result of which is the convenient allocation to the status of a ‘control group’ such leaders as Hitler, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong. Had he included them in his sample, his conclusions would have been quite different.

Gardner’s book is a bold attempt to analyse leadership. But most of his ‘leaders’ are rulers - Gandhi and King are the exceptions in that they achieved their following largely without the assistance of formal power. There is, however, the possibility in Gardner’s study of separating the rulers from the leaders and conducting a comparative analysis of their backgrounds, skills and rhetorical abilities. There can be little doubt that leaders (but not necessarily rulers) throughout the ages have been masters of rhetoric. So Gardner is surely right to emphasise the importance of story-telling in leadership. But his attempt to explain the success of such rulers as Mead, Oppenheimer, Hutchins, Sloan, Marshall and Roosevelt by an appeal to their rhetorical powers is unconvincing. By failing to distinguish between rulership and leadership he has promoted celebrities and bureaucratic functionaries to a dubious status.
REFERENCES


