

LEADERSHIP

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LEADERSHIP

The Current State of Play

BY

W B Howieson
Edinburgh Napier University, UK



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To my father
James McMillan Howieson: 1933 – 2018
An honest and good man.

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Sophia Looney has worked in and around the public sector for more than 20 years, starting as a Youth Worker, working in different roles in strategy, policy and operational delivery working in some of the most interesting, dynamic and cutting-edge local councils in the country. She often leads change and transformation, using innovative and creative methods to support radical thinking about how local services can be better. Throughout her work, she has been deeply committed to thinking differently about relationships that public services have with citizens and local people.

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Jack has worked with PFA Scotland and the World Players Union FIFPro, leading projects in areas of the sport such as Career Planning and Transition, Mental Health and Sports Betting Integrity. He has an MA (Hons) in Economics and is a UEFA-licensed Coach.

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FOREWORD: LAURENCE CLARKE

I first met Brian some 10 years ago after a colleague recommended that I meet this ‘very interesting man’. I was not disappointed. I was struck by his down-to-earth approach to academia and his ability of moving easily from an academic discussion into a practical one. We enjoyed exchanging stories about leadership and its development and application. It was, therefore, with great pleasure that I agreed to write a foreword to this book which exemplifies Brian’s easy movement between the academic and the practitioner’s viewpoints.

As one who has tried over the last 30 years to bridge the gap between academic theory on leadership and its application in the workplace, I admire that Brian has attempted to take on this herculean task. But take it on he has with his usual deftness. I, particularly, find his matrix helpful in trying to sort out the many theories and approaches to leadership development. I remember reading an article on Organisation Development that tried to make a connection between theory and practice. The author argued that the two factions spoke different languages and that any attempt to reconcile the two would require both to spend time in the other’s domain and to concentrate on finding a way to translate between the two. He also argued that much was to be learned in either discipline from the time spent on the other. This book neatly

bridges that gap and helps us spend time on both the domains.

I remember having a debate with one of my academic-leaning colleagues that we simplified things too much for our leadership development programmes. My argument then, and now, is that leaders don't have the time to wrestle with the complexities of the theory and the situational vagaries that face them. They need us — as Leadership Development Practitioners — to synthesise the theory into useable tools and templates that will work most of the time. This can feel like the antichrist to many an academic but life is too short for most leaders even to read the theory, let alone work out how to apply it. So, the act of translation from academic theory to practical tool is the work of the Leadership Development Practitioner and this book.

Change is the crucible on which leadership is wrought. A typical example from this area of leadership theory is the Kubler Ross Curve, which leadership science has taken as the curve to represent the emotions we go through as we experience the change. There is no doubt that we do experience some of these feelings as we lose what we treasured of the past. However, Kubler Ross' research plots the emotions of 30 patients that were told they were dying of incurable cancer, from the point of being told through to their eventual acceptance of the inevitable. Leaders want change to be experienced more positively than that and they want to know what to do to help people through the change. The work of Catford and Ray, *The Path of the Everyday Hero* is also based on research that the average leader would reject — An Analysis of Fairy Tales! However, its curve is similar to those of Kubler Ross and allows the Leadership Development Practitioner to present a model of change that has hope (there is a happy-ending) and purpose (there are things you can do to get through your change adventure). Not only does the

leader have a model to help them intervene during change, it may also be that the model can also be presented to the leader that this is their journey and that by responding to the 'call' of change they are growing and so might their people. So, the Practitioner of Leadership Development has to find research and models that will help the leader and, in this case, make sense of their journey and give them some practical tools to help them guide their team.

As pointed out in the book, leadership is difficult to tie down as a concept. As Keith Grint points out, it is a contested concept. Therefore, finding ways to make sense of leadership in a particular situation is vital. This book has many practical examples of leadership to give colour to the practitioner's part of the book. Leaders love to hear about the exploits of other leaders in similar situations, hence the plethora of 'How I Lead [...]' books nowadays. The use of vignette stories in this book is particularly helpful if you are reading it as a potential or existing leader. It also helps those studying leadership from an academic viewpoint get a sense of the reality of being a leader.

So as Brian puts it, the 'What' needs translated into the reality of the leadership practitioner's context and simplified to make it digestible and useable for the leader.

I have been particularly struck over the years how leadership can pop up in the most unlikely places. Distributed leadership suggests that everyone can be a leader and that the role of the leader is to create an environment where these small acts of leadership can take place and flourish. When I was running a cooperative advertising agency early in my career, I observed one of these small acts of leadership. We were extremely strapped for cash having taken on a deficit from the previous agency that several of us had worked for, which had gone bust. This meant that in order to function as an agency we had to be able to pay the media within the

payment terms and without a cheque bouncing. It rapidly became clear that we needed an overdraft which I negotiated with the bank. I argued, as a cooperative, that all 18 of us would need to give personal guarantees or none, expecting the bank to waive this requirement. However, they said they would take them from us all. I called for a meeting of the cooperative and gave them the good news that the bank had agreed to support us (and, therefore, keep us trading) but the bad news that we all had to give personal guarantees. There was a deathly hush! At last, the most junior member of the staff, who had just completed her probationary period and was barely 17, asked what was involved in a personal guarantee. I explained that if we failed to pay back the overdraft on demand then the bank would ask each of us for £1,000. She hesitated and then said 'I'll do it'. A moment later another member raised his/her hand and said they were in and soon everyone had agreed to the personal guarantees. A little act of leadership.

The '**How**' we have seen is often brought into focus by leaders telling their stories and getting reactions from others to these. Also hearing the stories of other leaders helps leaders calibrate their approach and validate it. The ensuing discussion helps leaders form a view of their strengths and weaknesses as leaders and helps them decide what style and approach best suit them in their particular situation. Feedback helps with this. But the '**How**' also includes the manner in which leadership is displayed. How often have we been party to an e-mail being misinterpreted or even when we have the advantage of seeing and/or hearing the other person, offence is taken when none is intended? Hence, a leader has to consider how 'the **What**' is delivered. Think of how many ways the phrase 'Please give me the report' can be delivered, from sarcastic to angry and from meek to assertive. Hence, leaders have to be able to read the reactions in others

to what they say and enquire if they have not been picked up correctly or modify if it is not having the desired effect. A 'shouty', aggressive leader may get compliance but they rarely get commitment and discretionary effort. I am still bemused that so many leaders believe that the best way to get action is to tell people with increasing amounts of emotion until compliance is achieved. But leadership is not about compliance. It must be about inspiring, motivating and engaging your team to commitment to the goals you set as a leader.

Some time ago I came across some research on teaching that suggested that the best teachers were the ones that cared about their subject and cared about their pupils. I think this is also true in the leadership arena. People will forgive a leader for pushing too hard or making mistakes if they believe that the leader cares deeply about them and what they are doing together. I remember Norman Schwarzkopf, 'Storming Norman' of the First Gulf war, who epitomised my view of the 'shouty' leader, give a speech at his retirement passing out parade of 2,000 troops. At the end of the speech he said 'I'll never forget you. I love you all!' Clearly, he cared deeply about his people and this was what made them want to follow him through thick and thin despite his bombastic approach.

There would be no Leaders if it were not for followers. Goffee and Jones in the December 2001 issue of the *Harvard Business Review* 'Followership: It's Personal, Too' set out three emotional responses that followers want to get from their leaders. First, a sense of significance, that you really matter no matter how small your contribution. Second, is a sense of community that somehow you belong to something bigger than just you. And thirdly, followers want to feel a 'buzzy' feeling when the leader is about. Goffee and Jones argue that this means leaders need to be extroverted and energetic. This would rule out half the population and, as an

introvert myself, seems to limit the pool of leaders too much. I think the care I mentioned before is what makes the difference. Whether you are outgoing or retiring, we all can evidence a deep care for what we are doing and for the people that join us in the quest.

Brian is an introverted leader, who through his obvious passion for the subject of leadership and his deep care for those that try to carry it out, galvanises followers to be better leaders. This book adds to this quest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Kimberley Chadwick, Niall Kennedy, Kerry Laundon, and Sophie Darling at Emerald. Kimberley ‘got’ this project immediately and handed the idea over to Niall (ably supported by Kerry and Sophie) who made it happen.

In addition, I would like to thank the 11 contributors to this book: Bernard, Laurence, Andrew, Amanda, Paul, Edel, John, Sophia, David, Drew and Jack. I am most aware how incredibly busy these people are; therefore, I place on record my sincere gratitude to them for taking time to write and to share their thoughts with me (and you). They were also a pleasure to work with and I do hope that this relationship can continue well into the future.

Last year my ‘life path’ crossed with that of a well-known British cancer charity. This organisation has a clear strategic purpose. Of note, they do what I have, for many years, considered to be the singular purpose of leadership, namely to make community. I was – and continue to be – hugely impressed with everything that they stand for and achieve. Any royalties from this book will, therefore, be donated to this organisation.

Finally, thank you to you — the reader — for considering reading this book. If you read it, I do hope that it may be of interest to you.

WBH

December 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKDROP

I think a lot about leadership. Indeed – and over the last 30 years – I have though a lot about leadership.

I recall in professional practice trying to be clear in my mind about many aspects of this subject. For example, several questions would come regularly to me:

- What exactly is leadership?
- How does one do it – in other words, is there a certain ‘way’ to do it?
- Is it a theory – in fact, I am not sure if I even understand what a leadership theory (or for that matter a theory) is?
- Is leadership a verb (i.e., a ‘doing’ thing) or a noun (a person, a place and an object)?
- Is it only Chief Executive Officers who do leadership – is this what strategic leadership means?
- Where does it take place? Indeed, why does it take place?

- Is it only the private/corporate sector that understand and do it? – for example, many leadership books seem to be written by corporate ‘gurus’.

I would now like to think that over the last 30 years – and having undertaken a PhD degree in the subject – and importantly, discussing it with many colleagues and indeed, postgraduate students and post-experience professionals that I understand the answers to these questions a lot more.

Of note, however, it would appear that it is not just me who asks questions such as these. For example, in 2013, a friend and colleague – himself a Leadership and Organisational Development Consultant – said to me that the problem with leadership (according to his many clients) was that ‘they did not know **what** it (leadership) was and **how** it (leadership) was translated into practice’.

This problem (**what** and **how**) was, then, the genesis of this short book.

This problem may be visualised in [Figure 1](#).

In the present, and as a leadership academic, I am very interested in trying to keep abreast of the relevant leadership literature and trying to understand the latest ‘thinking’ in this subject. I do not, however, forget my 23 years of professional

Figure 1: The Problem.

I am in a leadership position/role:

- What is a leadership position/role?
 - What is it (i.e. leadership)?
 - How does one do it (i.e. leadership)?
-

practice – prior to entering academia – when I tried to ‘do’ the subject on a daily basis. This is why I consider it very important that books such as these do not lose sight of the importance that practitioners *at the coal face* have in contributing to this subject and importantly, helping others understand how it is translated into practice. To this end, and in this short book, I am deliberately interested in examining both current leadership thinking (the **what**) and understanding the practice of leadership from a variety of practitioners in the private, public and third sectors in the United Kingdom today (the **how**).

At this stage, and to address the first question in [Figure 1](#), I define a leadership position as when one has supervisory responsibility for other people. This may be as a Supervisor, Team Leader, Line Manager to Chief Executive, Board Director and Chairperson.

The purpose of this book, then, is to provide a theoretical and practical understanding of leadership in the second decade of this century for students of the subject and practitioners alike. I am, of course, reminded that a multitude of books on leadership has already been written.¹ As an overview, it would seem to me that this literature can be divided broadly into populist and academic categories:

- The populist genre includes a huge commercial market in management books on leadership and a circuit of celebrity for those who write them. Populist books range from the hero leader reflections and biographies to works by so-called gurus. Most books are written about, and by, well-known charismatic leaders accompanied by convincing stories and snappy sound bites. These books follow a similar vein, in that they espouse the ‘I did it my way’ approach and are often

criticised for their lack of theoretical and methodological grounding. Such books provide an often-longed-for level of simplicity, yet – and of note – there is no evidence that they enhance the learning and success of leadership (Howieson & Hodges, 2016).

- In contrast, academic books on leadership (which include student-orientated texts, critical monographs and research studies) tend to posit leadership as a complex phenomenon and are often couched in language that the practitioner, I suggest, may find most impenetrable. In addition, this material can be overly theoretical, which may be difficult for many practitioners and, indeed, academics such as me to follow. These books do, however, provide extensive theoretical grounding but fail frequently to relate it to practical examples in the business world. Indeed, I get somewhat irritated by the many academic textbooks that do not give voice to the practitioners who are doing it (i.e., ‘leading’) at the coalface.

On the positive side, many of the above offerings do, however, make excellent reference guides and provide valuable suggestions for leaders in organisations.

AIM

Leadership: The Current State of Play is a short book about leadership. Its aim is to locate, in a single volume, current thinking in leadership from an academic and practitioner perspective. It offers an easy-to-read précis of leadership thought and its applications to problems in the second decade of this century.

The objectives of the book are threefold:

- (1) To explore the theoretical and practical issues of leadership in organisations.
- (2) To provide practical guidance for undergraduate and postgraduate students and post-experience professionals.
- (3) To enable thinking, reflection and ‘self-conversation’ of leadership and importantly leading.

AUDIENCE(S)

This book will be of interest to undergraduate students (who are studying business and management), postgraduate students (from a variety of disciplines who plan management careers after graduation), post-experience professionals and a variety of practitioners in all sectors of the United Kingdom and beyond.

STRUCTURE

This book has four chapters:

- (1) Introduction.
- (2) What Is Leadership? – An Academic Perspective.
- (3) How Does One Do It? – A Practitioner Perspective.
- (4) Conclusion.

It is hoped that this structure will allow a ‘flow’ between developing a general appreciation of extant academic thinking and gaining an insight into how leadership is enacted (i.e., the leading) by practitioners. Throughout the book, the **what** and **how** will be offered in the context of an organisational setting.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In Chapter 1, I will offer a backdrop to the book, explain the purpose of the book — including its purpose, aim and audience — detail its structure and introduce the Leadership Matrix.TM

Chapter 2: What Is leadership? — An Academic Perspective

In Chapter 2, I will provide an overview of the different academic thinking that exists currently about leadership. There are many scholarly (research) articles published annually on this subject — this chapter will not provide a meta-review and analysis of such material. Rather, it will draw from a variety of sources to probe and understand what we think we mean by leadership in the closing stages of the second decade of this century. In detail, the chapter will have the following sub-sections:

- Etymology and the Language of Leadership.
- The Definitional Problem.
- History of Leadership Research.
- A Key Debate.
- Leadership Models, Philosophies and Styles.
- Criticisms of the Mainstream Approach — Challenging the Western Hegemony.
- Its Difference to Management and Command (i.e., Being the Boss)
- Looking Ahead — The Next 30 Years.

Chapter 3: How Does One Do It? – A Practitioner Perspective

In Chapter 3, current practitioner literature (from, e.g., CIPD, Chartered Management Institute (CMI), *The Economist*, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the *Royal Society of Arts (RSA)*) will be reviewed to offer a summary of this current practitioner thinking. I will then compare this ‘thinking’ with the academic thinking – set out in Chapter 2 – where applicable and locate this practitioner thinking on the Leadership Matrix.TM

Throughout Chapters 1–3, I will offer vignettes by leadership practitioners. These personnel are from the private, public and third sectors in the United Kingdom and work at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of organisations. In this way, this book is distinctive because it provides a focus on theory and practice, with an emphasis on the practical aspects of leadership across all sectors in the United Kingdom. The purpose of these vignettes is to complement the academic and practitioner thinking and to provide an opportunity for the voices of such individuals to be heard and who are rarely considered in such leadership literature. A broad cross-sample of people has been identified for the book – they have been asked to provide their candid views on leadership today and the challenges they face. These reflections, therefore, serve as an illustration of the benefit of approaching leadership through the eyes of those practicing leadership.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In Chapter 4, a comparison will be made of the academic and practitioner literature. This thinking (academic and practitioner) will be located on the Leadership MatrixTM and general conclusions and reflections will be offered.

A WORKING FRAMEWORK: THE LEADERSHIP MATRIX™

Many leadership textbooks offer such sections on, for example: leadership and values; leadership and ethics; relational leadership; leadership and power; and leadership and culture. When I started thinking about the subject of leadership, such approaches would often confuse me. For example: where are values and ethics ‘located’ (is it, e.g., only senior executives who are concerned with values and ethics), is it sector-specific (does it only take place in (say) the private sector?) and is culture not part of leadership as opposed to it being something different, that is, an ‘add on’?

In this book, I will aim to address some of these approaches. Indeed, I have developed a working framework or Leadership Matrix™ that has helped me locate much of this current leadership thinking and helped me answer my many questions.

I proceed as follows. In his book *Leadership in Organizations*, Yukl (2013) conceptualises leadership at an individual process, a dyadic process, a group process and an organisational process. These levels can be viewed as a hierarchy, as depicted in Figure 2.

Leadership conceptualised at a higher level usually assumes that related processes occur at lower levels, even although they are not explicitly described. For example, in a cohesive team (i.e., the group level) – with high mutual trust and cooperation – some assumptions can be made about the likely pattern of dyadic leader–member relationships and about each individual’s values, attitudes and perceptions (Yukl, 2013).²

A brief description of each level is as follows:

- Organisational: at this level, the focus is on the leadership as a process that occurs in a larger ‘open