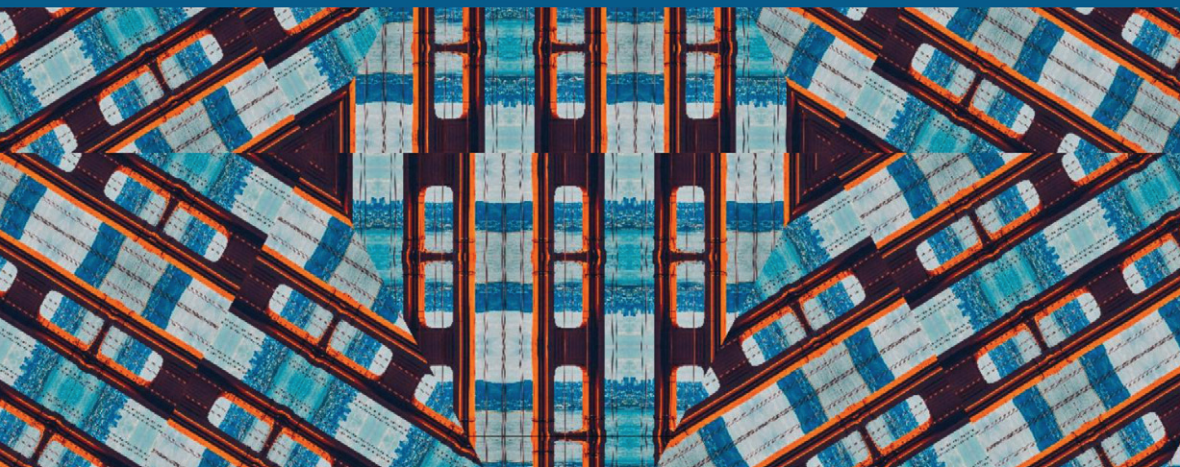




Advances in Cultural Psychology

Culture and Leadership

**From Approximation Towards
Symbiosis**



Edited by
Enno von Fircks

Culture and Leadership

Advances in Cultural Psychology

Series Editor

Jaan Valsiner

Niels Bohr Professor of Cultural Psychology, Aalborg University

In the beginning of the 21st century, a new direction has been emerging at the intersection of developmental and social psychologies, anthropology, education, and sociology—which has become labeled cultural psychology. This fits the vast global social processes of most countries becoming multi-cultural in their social orders, and the World becoming one “global village”—with the corresponding need to know how different parts of that “village” function. The knowledge base of developmental psychology and education has become truly inter-disciplinary, and its applications in the vast variety of cultural contexts need to be informed about varieties of cultural expectations. In that inter-disciplinary synthesis, the knowledge base of contemporary developmental psychology and educational sciences is increasingly international. At the same time, any application of the know-how of the social sciences in the areas of education and social life in any society remain local.

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**From Approximation Towards
Symbiosis**

Edited by

Enno von Fircks

Sigmund-Freud-University, Austria



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ABOUT THE EDITOR

Enno von Fircks (PhD) is a Cultural Psychologist whose work bridges Cultural Psychology, Philosophy, and Developmental Psychology. As a Gestalt practitioner, lecturer, and tennis instructor in Germany, he integrates theoretical insights with practical, real-world applications, refining his ideas in dynamic, hands-on settings. He has authored over 50 articles and chapters spanning clinical, educational, organizational, and general psychology. Among his published works is a monograph in the *SpringerBriefs* series, edited by Jaan Valsiner and Pina Marsico, titled *Conservatism: A Cultural-Psychological Synthesis*. In 2024, he published a second monograph, *Learning With William Stern: Personology for the Future*, exploring William Stern's Critical Personology and its transformative potential for holistic psychology, released by IAP. His ongoing projects include two edited volumes on Goethian science and its implications for psychology, as well as a French-language volume dedicated to cultural-psychological theories and methodologies for the francophone community.

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Anna Ghazi is a psychology student at Sigmund Freud University in Vienna with a strong interest in everyday psychotherapy, leadership studies, and graphology. Her academic focus lies in understanding how psychological principles apply to daily life and professional environments, particularly in leadership dynamics and personality assessment through handwriting analysis. Beyond her studies, Anna has gained diverse professional experience in both hands-on and strategic roles. She has worked in a bakery, where she developed a deep appreciation for interpersonal interactions in customer service, and in consulting for start-ups, advising emerging businesses on their strategic and operational development. This unique combination of practical and analytical experience fuels her passion for bridging psychology with real-world applications. With her interdisciplinary mindset, Anna is eager to explore new ways of integrating psychological insights into everyday life and professional leadership.

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Sigmar Malvezzi (PhD) is a distinguished Brazilian psychologist and Full Professor (University of Sao Paulo) known for his contributions to work and organizational psychology, particularly in the areas of social psychology. With a strong academic background, Malvezzi has conducted research on how social and psychological factors influence professional identity, career development, and organizational conduct. His work integrates theoretical perspectives from social psychology to understand how individuals

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Casper Schmidt is an Assistant Professor in Clinical Psychology at Aalborg University. His research focuses on cognitive and clinical psychology, particularly the psychophysiological mechanisms underlying health issues. He investigates emotion regulation, cognitive biases, and stress responses, integrating advanced methodologies such as neurophysiological measurements and behavioral experiments. Dr Schmidt is dedicated to bridging research and clinical practice, aiming to enhance evidence-based interventions for mental health treatment. His interdisciplinary approach contributes to a deeper understanding of psychological well-being and the development of innovative therapeutic strategies. Through his work, he strives to improve both theoretical models and practical applications in clinical psychology.

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE: LEADERSHIP: A USEFUL FICTION

Jaan Valsiner

Leadership does not exist—as an object. Yet it is very important—similarly to all other non-existing concepts of very high importance in human lives it so-sists¹—it encompasses human activities setting up the conditions for those, without being explicitly discernible. What is sometimes possible to discover is the agent who creates the leadership—the leader. This is possible in social groups or communities of explicit structural power hierarchies. Yet even in organizations like that the role of the leader may be taken by a different agent—there are formal leaders (CEOs, directors, department heads, officers) whose actual leadership actions may be guided in the background by informal leaders (secretaries, knowledge owners, etc.). Leadership is—with all of its ephemeral state of existence and great importance in all human institutions—a prime target for our new cultural psychology that starts from the meaningful nature of all human action.

The present volume is an internationally representative coverage of various facets of understanding leadership involving scholars from all over the World (Austria, Estonia, Germany, Japan, Brazil, Denmark, Norway, Canada, China). Its predecessor in the present book series with a similar line of coverage by cultural psychology was dedicated to the wide domain of work—Pedro Bendasolli's *Culture, work and psychology: Invitations to dialogue* (Bendasolli, 2019)—was an important contribution to the extension of cultural psychology to the whole domain of human work. The present focus on leadership follows in a more focused way—how can we understand the social and psychological processes involved in performing leadership roles. These roles are found in a great multitude of informal and formal

organizations—ranging from organizing working groups of highly skilled knowledge workers (Baldursson and Schmidt, Chapter 4) to the highly motivated years-long training sessions of figure skaters (Jancosek, Chapter 11) where the formal leader (the coach) is actually under the fate control of informal leaders (mothers of the figure skating girls). Somewhere in between these extremes is the “traditional” set of large institutions—factories, bureaus of administrative institutions, and crowds-organizing undertakers—where leadership has been studied traditionally in the framework of “the Leader leads, the Follower follows” axiomatic standpoint (Figure 1). This model reflects a simplified understanding of the social and psychological processes involved in the actual work in organizations where different individuals are brought together to strive toward achieving work or innovation tasks. Even in the most over-regulated institutional systems—in cases of military discipline or the totalitarian prescription of following the designated leader—a general, a president, or a king—this model does not apply to reality. The varied perspectives collected in this volume by Enno von Fircks who is leading the field of cultural work psychology give us

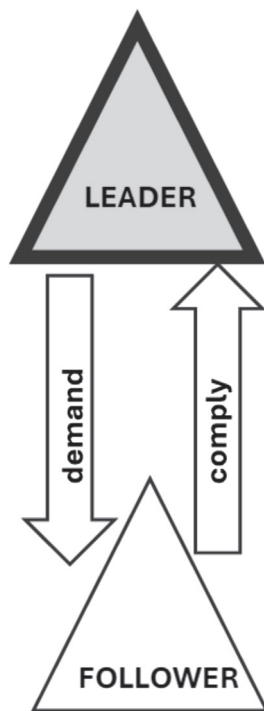


Figure 1 A simplified model of leadership.

evidence of how cultural psychology widens the intellectual scope of theoretical models of understanding leadership.

What is missing in the leadership image provided in [Figure 1](#). While the externally observable actions—the Leader demands, the Follower complies—are adequately in place, all the psychological framework of such behavioral exchange between the dominant and the sub-dominant actors is missing. The notion of resistance ([Chaudhary et al., 2017](#))—both by the Leader (who may resist making different demands) and the Follower (who can resist the demand—by refusal, neutralization, or delays in compliance) constitute the psychological side of the missing [scheme](#). A major further overlook is the absence of understanding that the Leader <> Follower unit is a system that operates by its established social rules. As a system it can function—but it can break down at any moment when circumstances demand it. Followers often break the rule of complying to the demands—thus rendering the Leader powerless. Leaders are often forcibly displaced from their power positions. The systemic nature of leadership concentrates on the role of the non-leaders (followers, bystanders, etc.) in the actual leadership process. It is from that angle where cultural psychology of leadership enters the stage.

Cultural Psychology of Leadership: Coordinating Meanings Within the System

Cultural psychology is a new psychological framework that starts from “the top”—from assuming the central role of higher psychological processes of intentional, goals-oriented and goals-setting actions that are made meaningful by signs. The centrality of sign mediation within the leadership process sets the meanings (designated as M for the Leader and Mb for the Follower in [Figure 2](#)) the center for all human collective acts that involve leadership.

The process that is crucial for coordination of the meanings M and Mb is *context tuning*. The Leader sets up the action context—usually by pleromatic sign-fields of affective kind—for the whole system ([Valsiner, 2021](#)). Pleromatic fields are abstracted affective fields that generalize to create “unifying flavour” for the current action situation. In other—more familiar terms—such sign fields are captured by the common sense terms of “affective atmosphere” of the given setting. The Leader needs to constantly monitor and maintain the context in ways that catalyze² the schematized demand → comply chains of action. Conversely, the Follower needs to context tune the Leader to feeling into the unity of the joint action. If the latter fails the Leader is likely to start making demands that lead to resistance of different kinds and can end in the disposal of the Leader from her or his role.

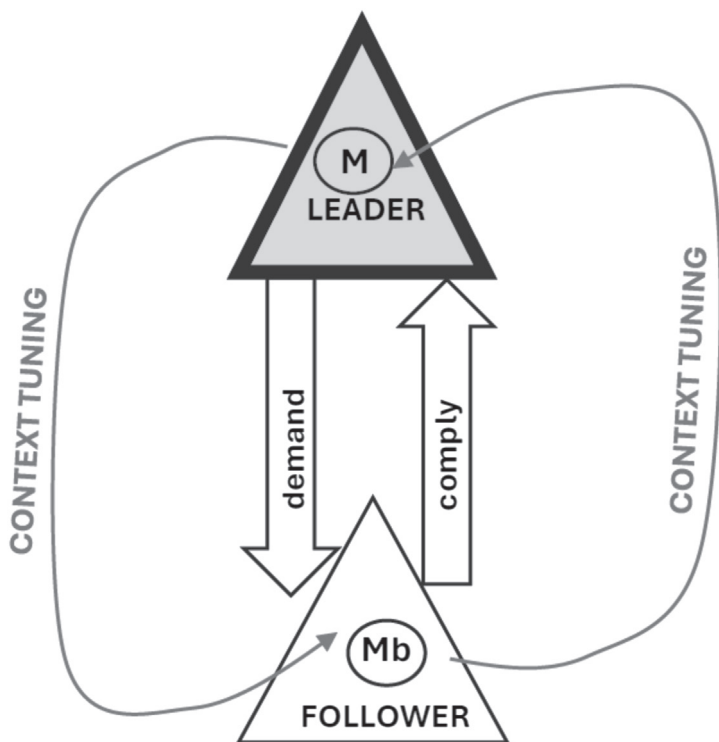


Figure 2 Cultural psychological model of leadership.

Rich Theoretical Roots in History

Cultural psychology of leadership as presented in this volume shows close connections with the best practices of psychology in the past. It is the seminal work of Kurt Lewin in the 1920s–1940s that applies immediately to the investigations of leadership. Bringing back the key concepts of Lewin’s theory—field, vector, life space—allows our contemporary cultural psychology to understand the complex unity of the phenomena of dynamics of leadership. Furthermore, theoreticians who in their time had little contact with tasks of leadership studies—such as Ernst Boesch, Lev Vygotsky, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, or George Herbert Mead—have created systems of ideas that the contributors to the present volume creatively apply to their analyses of leadership. There are also very new elaborations—of holacracy, of zone of proximal development, as some examples. Cultural psychology of today thrives in its efforts to find new approaches to complex problems, and resists the existing fashions of the empiricist domination in

contemporary psychology. It is free from the quantification imperative that seriously hinders the development of all psychology today.

The significance of this volume is in its versatility of ideas, bringing together scholars of senior and junior status to the intellectual interchange that is about to lead the whole field in new directions. I am sure the readers will find much to relate with in reading these contributions, as they are the leaders in the never ending efforts to make sense of the complex world.

Jaen Valsiner
Chapel Hill, NC March 2024

NOTES

1. In terms of the *Gegenstandstheorie* of Alexius Meinong that distinguishes existing and non-existing objects (*Gegenstande*)—Meinong (1904). Most—if not all-major concepts in psychology are non-existing—and in their abstract status play important roles in the lives of the existing people (Josephs et al., 1999).
2. Catalyzing involves conditional guidance role where the presence of the catalyst is obligatory while the catalyst itself plays no causal role (Cabell & Valsiner, 2014).

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EDITOR'S PREFACE: NEW AXIOMATIC UNDERPINNINGS FOR RESEARCH ABOUT LEADERSHIP

Enno von Fircks
Sigmund-Freud-University, Austria

I began this journey almost four years ago (von Fircks, 2020). I was astounded by the fact how little qualitative research about leadership was contributing to the general inquiry about the phenomenon—in comparison to quantitative leadership. When I was immersing myself deeply into the general literature about leadership, I was not only surprised but confused about the predominance of several big umbrella theories of leadership penetrating the general research arena of the given phenomenon such as transactional, transformational and situational leadership (Brymer & Gray, 2006). Then of course, I was observing how other researchers tried to expand the different leadership styles while constructing some new—which reminded me of the segregation of psychotherapy into different competing schools. For sure, every leadership school—be they transactional, transformational or situational—argued for their incremental value in making sense of leadership and followership (e.g. Rodriguez et al., 2017). For this purpose, they relied on results drawn from large, accumulated statistics—namely sample to population generalizations—and were not shy in administrating sophisticated statistical procedures in order to underline their core arguments. Yet, I had a bad gut feeling when I was screening this kind of literature. I was asking myself whether this kind of research is doing justice to the complexity of leadership. The reasons for this question and my doubts were manifold because I consider school thinking as atomistic which considers leadership not as a whole. Here, school thinking—as far as my education

goes (von Fircks, 2024)—focuses on one or two parts of the larger wholistic phenomenon and argues for the superiority of this particular part in contrast to other parts (transformational leadership has incremental value beyond transactional leadership is one of the core arguments, for instance). If two people come together and discuss matters of leadership—and maybe negotiate where the need emerges for leadership—we cannot simply focus, for instance, on the transaction of this interaction as argued by researchers within the branch of transactional leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Rather we need to begin from a different perspective—that is we need to analyze the situation as a whole. Imagine a doctor wanting to assess a specific disease of one of his clients. For this purpose, he cannot simply start to concentrate on one simple aspect of the client's body—for instance his hands. On the contrary, he needs to start from the whole and then analyze how the whole is affecting the parts. Atomistic thinking which is done by the general leadership literature due to school thinking considers the parts to be more important than the whole. I believe that this is a theoretically flawed thinking which brackets many interesting features of the leadership phenomenon.

Yet, we are not only confronted with a theoretically flawed thinking because the methodological imperative employed by the school leadership styles comes also with major issues that we need to unravel as a research community. I want to start my short critique with the quantitative methodological imperative that is the pre-dominant one when analyzing the methods employed by the different leadership research communities. What is mostly done within the different leadership styles centers around the distribution of questionnaires to the staff of a given enterprise or public institution. Here, various questions are asked such as within transformational leadership—*My leader helps me to attain my goals*. When the particular researcher distributes the questionnaires, s/he appeals to the participants that they should fill out the questionnaire so as to answer the items in the way that reveals their understanding of the questions. Hence, the researcher—as far as the leadership style inventories argue—is expected to answer a question by not simply answering it but to let it open for meaning elaborations.

When I was still fascinated by the distribution of questionnaires and the statistical analyses based on the data, I was experiencing that the participants were trying to specify the items by raising questions. This was not the exception but rather a rule. Hence, they wanted to negotiate the meaning of the items—and often they raised the question whether this or that experience is meant by the specific item. Yet, I was instructed to not answer their questions and to not dialog with the participants but to specify that they should fill out the questionnaires up to their understanding. Often, the participants were confused and irritated by this answer. Some even shook their heads. Then they proceeded to answer the leadership inventory.

Retrospectively, I understand the issue with this methodological procedure because the question whether my leader helps me to attain my goals depends upon the person's experience within a given social field of action. Here, it depends upon the person interpreting the question against the background of her personal and social experience whether a given act of a leader classifies as help or not. Importantly, the search for making sense of the item shows that participants are often unsure whether the item matches their experience or not. Hence, their search for meaning when approaching the psychologist distributing the questionnaire. The stance the researcher is instructed to take toward those questions denies the negotiation of meaning and thus brackets the different interpretational processes of what actually leadership means to the participants. Yet, it is this meaning that guides and regulates action being taken in the work environment of the employee—and which can create misunderstandings and conflicts if the meaning making patterns of what leadership means diverge between leaders and followers or between followers themselves. Hence, leadership is a meaning making process that is negotiated between leaders and followers. This is a truism, but it comes rather surprising that this axiomatic truism is bracketed within the general literature of leadership.

Much of what leadership needs to do in order to solve conflicts is centered around the joint negotiation of meaning which first of all invites leaders and followers to give their definition of what leadership means to them, where leadership starts, where the phenomenon might end and how leaders and followers constructed a classification of what good leadership means to them—based on their experiences.

For this purpose, we do not need vague or ambivalent items, but we need to work with the concepts (depending on cultural-personological interpretations) of our research participants in an interactional manner (von Fircks, 2023a). We could call such an approach a person-centered approach to leadership because we start our scientific inquiry with the meaning making patterns of the individual person, yet this label is not doing justice to what we actually want to pursue as a scientific goal. On the contrary, we need to include an ecological understanding of our experience and meaning making patterns because experience as such always happens in a given (cultural) context that shapes our individual interpretation of an event (Boesch, 2021; Valsiner, 2014). It is not an exaggeration to argue that this cultural context is completely bracketed within the distribution of a questionnaire—and surely this cannot be substituted by asking for socio-economic information. The reason why is that it depends upon the person making sense of its cultural context and how the person unifies self-purposes with foreign purposes (Stern, 1906)—thus takes a stance toward her very own environment which is again a meaning making process that can change any moment in time. Leadership is such a dynamic process because

it is centered around the negotiation of personal and social meaning. Yet, items and questionnaires fix leadership in given categories that do not allow to operationalize the process of this negotiation and its consequences.

One of my former supervisors at the University of Keele tried to challenge my perspective arguing that qualitative leadership would argue exactly for what I am discussing in the present chapter. There is some truth in that statement but also some differences. Yet, I want to start with the basic flaws of qualitative research being done within the arena of leadership. If we analyze leadership qualitatively within an interview setting—which is mostly done in the qualitative literature about leadership, we need to be cautious when setting up the interview and especially the interview scheme. This in mind, qualitative leadership tries to approach quantitative leadership if researchers try to fully standardize an interview and come up with fixed questions and categories from which they do not want to diverge for matters of reliability and validity (reliability and validity of qualitative research understood in a quantitative way which is a paradox). Here, again we are confronted with a dialogical setting—researcher and participant—but deny the meaning making process (question—interpretation—answer—interpretation—question—interpretation and so forth) and especially the negotiation of meaning for which we actually want to conduct qualitative research. Also, if we are interested in how meaning between leader and follower diverge concerning matters of leadership, we work with some reconstructions of leadership situations and do not study those situations in vivo and hence we might bracket the perspective of the leader in the given situation. Also, what might be important for the negotiation of meaning might have gone unnoticed by the follower whom we invited for the leadership study. This is one of the reasons why I argue for taking an ethnographic and autoethnographic stance to the issues of leadership where we need to analyze leadership situations that unfold in a given cultural context between leader and follower who dispose of agency (von Fircks, 2021a, 2021b). This context should not be analyzed from a passive perspective meaning just to sample in which environment one has been growing up but how this environment is interpreted for a given individual.

We need to be cautious to those points because if we do not respect them, we might not analyze phenomena that are essentially leadership. It is crucial to observe how far away we are from the phenomenological setting of leadership if we invite a leader or a follower to our offices or to our psychological laboratories and have a chat about leadership. Even if we employ a more democratic interview scheme (Valsiner et al., 2005) which is doing justice to the negotiation of meaning, then we need to be aware that we are far estranged from the real work context in which leadership happens daily. But leadership is a phenomenon that is unfolding in the everyday occurrence (von Fircks, 2022a) of concrete people that want to make sense

of their work meaningfully. Already Lewin worked with the atmospheric value of leadership (Lewin et al., 1939; von Fircks, 2021b) and how the atmosphere changed the way how people related to themselves as well as to their environments; and by inviting participants in our research office, we bracket this social atmosphere or simply reconstruct it—if this can happen successfully.

Speaking about social atmosphere also brings us closer to the notion of feelings and emotions within the general inquiry of leadership. This is not a surprise because if two people come together and discuss how they might satisfy their deeply pressing needs and structure their personal worlds interdependently (von Fircks, 2022b, 2022c)—and where other people might block the need satisfaction, then this also implies the notions of feelings and emotions (von Fircks, 2023b). The major theories of leadership such as transformational, transactional and situational leadership do not work with a particular notion of affect, feeling and emotion and this comes not unsurprising. The reason why is that—as far my interpretation of feelings and emotions goes (von Fircks, 2024), emotions are not cognitively independent. In other words, in any situation we need to speak of a cognitive-affective situation (Vygotsky, 1996), and this also includes the various phenomena of leadership. For example, one person will face criticism with positive emotions because he sees in critique the opportunity for development while for the other critique is an attack of self-esteem. Here, emotions differ regarding different underlying need structures of the employees, and leadership if it wants to be successful must become aware of those need structures that are inherently cognitive-affective. Qualitative research on leadership is—according to my interpretation—often blind to the affective sides of leadership. Nevertheless emotions and affects are so important for the construction of the next present moment that we must not ignore them.

The different contributions in the present book are an interesting collection of analyzing leadership beyond the mainstream leadership literature. The authors are more than courageous in advocating an alternative approach to the study of leadership and as far as I oversee the thematic ground of their contributions, they come up with a differential net of axiomatic underpinnings not only how we need to understand leadership but also how we need to study such a dynamic phenomenon. For the ending of the present chapter, I'd like to introduce some of those axiomatic underpinnings:

1. Leadership is an interrelated field of meaning making between leader and followers or between followers themselves.
2. Meaning making develops and must not be fixed by items for example. Hence, the phenomenon of leadership needs to breathe

because it gets transformed in time. Leadership is and remains a process.

3. The basis of this transformation is the dialogical negotiation of what actually leadership means, where it starts, where it ends and how people can structure their meaning making fields insofar as they assist each other in pursuing their goals and satisfy their needs.
4. The study of leadership needs to be systemic meaning that we need to include not only an interpretational imperative when studying leadership but also a cultural context because interpretations happen against the background of a (cultural) environment.
5. Leadership is a cognitive-affective situation in which we should not only study the cognitive structure of a problem, misunderstanding or a conflict but also how emotions differ and work as a regulator for interrelated actions. Emotions give us a glimpse into the depth of a need structure that can be made fertile for the understanding and adaption of leadership interventions.

I began this journey 4 years ago. In those 4 years much has happened. This book is an interesting proof for showing that there are alternative pathways to make sense of leadership. The contributions show nicely that we can understand and analyze how growth—both for the leader and the follower—can come into being which is the ultimate goal of leadership.

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PART I

TOWARD A THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF
CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

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CHAPTER 1

CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP: FROM PROXIMITY TO SYMBIOSIS

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Culture and leadership are two manifestations of human subjective structures. They share some components which are used in different ways. Their manifestations, together with other structures such as identity, social representations, values, and psychological contracts fulfill functions for the construction of human individual and collective existence. These structures expose the subjective mechanisms of the human condition, expressing and instrumentalizing adaptation and self-determination, two of their landmarks. Culture contributes to these accomplishments as a kind of platform where events are contextualized, obtain meanings, acquire values, and are mutually connected, while leadership exposes the human activity of influencing others' behavior during the routine of collective actions, manifesting their need for complementarity. The quest for the understanding and investigation of these subjective structures is as old as social life, fostering along its path the development of distinct forms of knowledge, ranging from myths, philosophy, and the sciences, open to dialog with each other

and contributing to the organization of society. These forms of knowledge construct the diversity of human skills, comprising the imagination, arts, reasoning, intuition, and creativity, all serving as the tools for human adaptation and self-determination. The investigation of these subjective articulations, the recognition of their components, the ways in which they are related and integrated, and the mechanisms through which they accomplish a wide range of functions, foster the dialog among them out of which differences and development have emerged as permanent open questions.

Culture and leadership are recognized as pivotal subjective instruments of social existence, showing the self-other relationship to be the cornerstone of collective life. Their investigation has been an open field and a resilient challenge to human sciences' researchers and professional practitioners seeing that the self-other relationship is not a mere mechanical adjustment of distinct elements, but the construction of collective life achieved by protagonists capable of judgment and choices. That construction stems from both the observation of social relations and the endless emergence of new conditions of existence to which the subjective structures expose the mechanisms which sustain human behavior. The scrutiny of those structures has multiplied the questions raised on the researchers' and practitioners' paths. That broad issue has shaped the objective of this chapter as the analysis of the relationships between culture and leadership. Their boundaries may move, varying from proximity to symbiosis. The achievement of that objective is here focused on their boundaries, placing them, at one and the same time, as two distinct but overlapping subjective articulations contributing to the social existence with mechanisms such as the creation of meaning and cooperation.

This chapter has not been written to offer a broad review of that issue but to analyze the consequences of the existence of emergent social and environmental conditions, adding further challenges to the understanding of and dealing with the inner subjective structures. Culture and leadership are expressions of subjective life, moving their frontiers creatively and exploring the potentialities of the human condition. To achieve that purpose, this chapter has been written on the basis of the analysis of the mechanisms that culture, and leadership bring about. After which it analyzes culture and leadership as functions of social interaction, followed by an analysis of the subjective structures and their role in collective life. Thence it analyzes the mechanisms of technological development and concludes with the relation between culture and leadership.

SUBJECTIVE STRUCTURES

Along its centennial path, psychology has learned to recognize culture and leadership as two subjective articulations grounding and energizing the understanding of human behavior, their components such as aspirations,

cognitions, and feelings, and their relationships with environmental conditions. That recognition has driven psychology to open its eyes to presumed variables hidden from direct observation—such as culture and leadership—but detectable through their effects. Thence, psychology has expanded its development through the direct observation of behavior and reflection on the analysis of their movements. Observation and reflection, two combinable techniques, have been able to capture those presumed structures which could not be directly observed but which are detected through their effects. That development drove psychology to explore such subjective structures as learning, conscience, and social interaction to understand their movements. That exploration has expanded its realm to include the mechanisms which sustain social interaction (Bales, 1951) as the basic element of collective life. Social interaction then began to be scrutinized in its distinct structures and their movements.

The exploration of those inner structures has called for the careful apprehension of their interdependent movements and their scrutiny through the use of the imagination to differentiate the distinct functions in the relationships between the self, the other and the environment. That task has called for the interpretation of the movements observed, their nature, their purposes, and the mechanisms of their relationships. How should one investigate love relationships, for example? Love, as one of these subjective structures, is an action tied to the movements of the other. It comprises internal and external variables acting together. The “capture” of culture and leadership, just as in the case of love, has required behavioral observation, analyses of the relationships among their elements, and inferences as to their movements. Their understanding and investigation are presumed to be the result of connections between visible and presumed variables, creative movements, and their integration into the wider context. That mingling of internal and external components emerges as the way social interaction appears to participate in human behavior. Some of its components are visible just as others require investigation.

Questions such as social interaction became the reason for the human sciences and their questions, bringing to light the persistent endeavor of researchers and practitioners to unveil their components, their mechanisms of interaction, and the ways they impact human behavior. Those movements suggested that observation and reflection could be enriched by inferences, the hypothetical existence of movements that could neither be observed nor denied. *Psychology learned that the access to these subjective structures such as culture and leadership are manifested through actions and discourse, seeing observation and interpretation as instruments for access to subjective reality.* Interpretation is an exercise of the imagination by which possibilities are confronted, compared, and analyzed in their representation of reality. That association between observed events and the possibility of their

interpretation opened up new paths for the understanding of such subjective structures as culture and leadership. Exploring that new path, psychology brought to light the meanings involved in that process as instruments associated with events, contributing to their understanding as observed in the investigation of culture and leadership.

That recognition of subjective structures was granted by Hippocrates when he related them to the causes of diseases. He recognized causes that he could not see or deny. Confirming Hippocrates' hypothesis, Catholic canon law also recognized the existence of subjective structures, acknowledging them as a hidden reality open to investigation. That recognition of subjective structures was expressed in the principle "de internis neque aeclesia," (on inner causes, not even the church) to be acknowledged when the causes of human behavior are investigated, as happens with the intentions. Through it, canon law acknowledges the existence of hidden causes, difficult to observe, but active in the dynamic of life and accessible to logical inference. That principle reveals the internal factors supporting human behavior and recognizes that meanings are a subjective construction which contextualize events, completing the perception of reality. They give sense to events and set them in their context. As a subjective production they are inferred through their manifestations in behavior. Created by individuals, meanings express their understanding of events. They imply the recognition of the event and of its role when it occurs (Gergen, 2001). Meanings then become a variable inferred from the observation of the movements of subjective structures as a personal creation, which affects the way that they are related to other events, creating a structure of meanings that offers these movements their rationale.

Meaning as a subjective structure is not observed but inferred from the regularity of the movements of the events. It is a production of the individual, which regulates its effects, motivating their social life and interaction. Meanings are inferred from the observed movements and are related to events. Events have meanings with flexible boundaries to ease the adaptation to changes as required by each situation. That is the reason why meanings do not have a precise definition but are open to adaptation, changing their frontiers in accordance with the events. They play a role in the self-other relationships, indicating differences and justifications. Meanings express the understanding people have of events, revealing the subjective construction of the individual as a point for discussion with others. The difficulties involved in gaining access to them attest their effects, their relationships, and the way they impact human activities. That recognition drove psychology to the investigation of meanings and of their power over the directions of human actions. *Culture and leadership are two of these subjective structures, which organize subjective movements, making them reinforce, confront or go along with others.*

Events as objective facts can be differentiated in people's minds through distinct meanings. In accordance with this, work, for example, is an objective action observed through tasks whose meaning can be differentiated in an observer's understanding of them as opportunities, tradeoffs, self-fulfillment, or penance. Although performing the same tasks, their distinct meanings transform an individual's view of them into different actions for each worker with distinct effects on each of them. Two workers can perform the same task—but to one, it is an opportunity while to the other it is a penance, leading to a difference in their performance. Here, in this example, the power of subjectivity is shown as affecting the motivation of the worker. That power stems from factors which are stored in each person's history, experiences, their reactions, and the answers of others. Human beings are characterized by a diversity of meanings, a condition that stimulates their mutual interaction to learn more about the world. The impacts of work on human life depend on both the effects of the tasks and of the meanings which differentiate the way each person acts. *The meanings show the relation the task has to the individual and how they integrate it into the general context.*

The meanings are products of the individual action within the cultural platform and of the movements performed to accomplish human adaptation to the world. They stem from the movements of the subjective structures as a factor in which individuals participate actively. Individuals create the meanings and integrate them into the whole structure. Meanings started to be openly investigated in social sciences from the work of [Mead \(1934\)](#) in the late 1920s of the last century and since then they have been recognized as one of their landmarks. Culture and leadership as two subjective structures of social interaction are expressions of meanings and show how they are a factor of understanding and of persuasion in the production of distinct functions in social interaction. Culture is a platform of meanings with which new events are confronted for understanding and integration ([Valsiner, 2014](#)). Leadership expresses itself by the proposal of new meanings to act in the articulation of social changes ([Smircich, 1982](#)). Both are resources available within the group to develop its diversity, integration, and cooperation. They open up to individuals the possibility of being different, stimulating them to consider some new approach and revise their own view in the light of it. That movement lies behind the dynamics of social interaction and the flexibility of the human perception of events, stimulating contact between people and the consideration of their views.

Hence, the group is a network of social interactions tied to specific objectives, in which individuals discover the direction of its development ([Lane, 1984](#)). That direction is continuously reviewed by the movements of its members to expound and justify their differences and the resources found in their actions. People participate in a group because they seek creativity and cooperation between its members to achieve their

objectives. The group's objectives are achieved through the diversity of tasks and meanings of its members when everyone proposes their own vision of the action and of the ways in which they view their achievement. Bringing about the individual contribution, the objectives of the group and its common causes, depends on the mechanisms of the integration of that diversity. The participants reveal their differences and points of view. The group's performance occurs in the routine of the social interaction when its members adjust the flow of events or as a positive action for the accommodation, intervention, and change in the behavior of those who thus interact. The group constitutes a situation of diversity of meanings, always open to the confrontation of their differences in the search for the validity of their common action.

Furthermore, the group's performance reveals the world as a place for adaptation to fit individuals' imagination and their routine tasks. Social interaction is its main mechanism for revealing and managing their differences. By it, people find opportunities to learn about the vision of others, the power and flexibility of the human condition and of the diversity of meanings that actions may bring about. That diversity can be soft or hard in accord with distinct moments and the judgments of its members and may vary due to the dynamics of the events involved. To participate in a group the person is called on to act with his or her full range of skills and behave as a subject, listening, thinking, choosing, and acting. Culture and leadership are resources through which group members can integrate and change, thus demonstrating their freedom and self-determination. They are offered choices between distinct meanings, knowing that on their choice depends on the future of the group.

In social interaction, group members are called on to show their power to act in reciprocity with others because the others also have that same ability to judge, choose and build their roles in their respective group. In their social interaction they discover the boundaries of their freedom, facing the differences in meaning posed by others and the resistance to changing their opinions and choices. In that confrontation they revise the meanings they give to their project of life—which is decided by them in relation to others. They reveal the full range of human potentialities and their ability to act intelligently, in view of the possible diversity of actions and meanings. Culture and leadership reveal the tools they dispose of for the choice of an intervention to direct the future. Within the group, individuals find that they are required to be intelligent, open to a diversity of meanings and to interact with others to find together with them a common way into their future. That path stems from the ability to reflect on the possible diversity of meanings and actions. *Culture and leadership are structures that individuals dispose of to construct their future.*