

THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP: THE COURAGE TO BE BOTH LEADER AND FOLLOWER

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We are in a massive leadership crisis worldwide (Kellerman, 2012; Lipman-Blumen, 2004). Although business schools and leadership professors, and the International Leadership Association as a global organization, have tried to develop methods of selecting, training, and developing “good” leaders, we too often see incompetency’s dominance. Money and power are prevailing in contemporary society, instead of a combination of effective, authentic, and ethical behavior (Hickman, 2016; van Loon, 2017). The answer in changing this trend is not so easy as it requires future leaders to be trained in reconciling inner polarities, by which one becomes more aware of the role of power, status, and money. In *Courage to be*, Tillich (1952) set the foundation for exploring what it means to exist, and how to affirm oneself with courage by being both an individual and a member in the world. In what he described as the ground of being, *to be* and *to be a part of*, to essentially both lead and to follow. These two sides, according to Tillich are “distinguishable but not separable,” (p. 86). In our view, Tillich’s theory is applied in the dialogical self theory (DST) (Hermans, 2018) where the internal dimension (“to be”) and the external dimension (“to be a member”) are brought together.

Based on DST a theory and practice can be established to develop this type of leader, who is able to allow these two aspects to coexist simultaneously, maintaining and transcending the polarity. Dialogical self leadership is based on *three* basic ideas which are explored in detail

below in relation to a vision on the future of leadership: relational influencing, being a member of multiple contexts, and valuing leading *and* following in research.

Leadership fundamentally is a relational *process of mutual influencing* (Hickman, 2016; Ismail, Malone, & Van Geest, 2014; Koonce, 2016; van Loon, 2017). Without influence, there is no leadership; with an organization full of people who are unwilling to accept your influence, one is not a leader. To shift the current trend in leadership, leaders must become more aware of their context and how to use power appropriately for the impact that they wish to have. A leader in Exponential Organizations has to be “selfless” in Ismail’s view. “In order to live on the exponential curve and not get caught in the linear mindset of organizational bureaucracy, you must be willing to be fired or even fire yourself.” (Ismail et al., 2014, p. 212). This requires an understanding of how they allow themselves to be influenced in various relationships, how they use different sources of influencing and power.

Leaders and followers are *by definition* members of multiple contexts. People leading organizations have to become aware in consciousness and behavior that they are always and by definition *synchronously leading and following*. One has to become conscious of how power is claimed and distributed amongst people. Developing a hybrid identity (in terms of DST: a meta-position) is an object for further reflection, research, and training (Hermans, 2018; Mack, 2015; Suderman & Foster, 2015). In each context, we change the way we interact

depending on our roles and how we perceive ourselves in relation to others. As a CEO, I might be dominant and strong, pushy, and relentless, while as a wife or husband, soft-spoken and flexible, submissive and yielding. As a member of one team, I may lead by means of a resolute, unquestionable resolve; I empower myself through my ability to be assertive and knowledgeable. While in another team, I give direction through my power of questioning and stimulate others to act with encouragement; others feel empowered and have access to the knowledge they need. These contrasting approaches indicate that at any one time I have the capacity within myself to lead *and* follow, to take space *and* to give space, to tell *and* to ask. When we define one of these positions as better (morally higher) than the other, we may tend to swing between the polarities, rather than recognizing that both are valuable aspects of leadership. In the army, there is a rule that you can only start being a leader when you are willing and able to accept the leadership of other people. You cannot lead if you cannot follow.

For the future of leadership to become different than what it is today, we must also change the way we study it. Leadership and research have to be redefined: *scientific research is an intervention* influencing the relation with the object to be studied. One cannot study leaders and followers in an (organizational) culture, without making your research participants (more) aware. The sole act of asking *the question* is by itself an intervention (Gergen, 2009). Currently, we still operate from an objectivist paradigm, where quantitative data and methods are preferred over qualitative. The challenge is that leadership itself is by definition about a dual relationship: internally with *yourself* and externally *with others* and a context including culture, as the Other (with a capital).

The future of leadership implies that these topics will take a core position in the research of leading and following. For the scientific practice, this implies that we have to fundamentally rethink our paradigms of studying leadership. At the same time, we have to do campaigns of communication to make people aware of the fundamental relationship between leading and following as two sides of one face, one coin. By bringing people back to their sense of relational autonomy in a hierarchical situation, we can change the common sense about leadership. Thirty years ago, when I started with my leadership consulting practice, the word “leader” was a taboo in the

Netherlands. Nowadays, everybody wants to be a leader, and the word is common practice. So, there is hope!

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