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Earning the Right to Lead in Defining Moments: The Act of Taking Leadership

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Tom Karp

Earning the Right to Lead in Defining Moments: The Act of Taking Leadership

Introduction

Economist and diplomat, John Kenneth Galbraith, once said: *All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership.*

When we talk to senior leaders or train leaders at different levels in various leadership development programs, we have discovered that their personal paths to leadership are seldom a function of deliberate use of interventions, planning, motivational practices, power use, or other established leadership techniques. Successful leadership is often also viewed as a steady-state function and deliberate act of influence. This is not necessarily the case. When we talk to leaders and they reflect back on their careers, they often find

that their paths to leadership were the results of several incremental incidents where they earned their right to lead. It seems there are defining moments in leaders' careers where

strong bonds are created between the leader and his/her followers/peers/superiors – defining for the relationship and defining for the leader him/herself.

We often learn of such leadership when tragedies occur and become part of the public focus. Such leadership in events that gain national attention are often considered heroic. But these acts occur daily in many organisations when people need impromptu guidance. A leader emerges in the moment, displays leadership, and the individuals in the organisation move on as the exigency of the moment dissipates. Such incidents may be instrumental for collective success. They can be many and minor in significance or few and conclusive. These acts of effective guidance are often presented when conditions of instability exist in organisations, at times when the influx of information is overwhelming, when the achievement of solidifying a diverse workforce is exigent, and when heightened human connectivity is required. These are moments which define the relationship and bonds between leader and followers, leader and peers, leader and superiors, and additionally characterize the leader in his or her own individual capacity. In such moments – and there can be many throughout a leader's career – the ability to assume the lead is not predicted by one's transformational abilities, visions, knowledge, intelligence, charisma, or capabilities for setting direction. On the contrary, it is the leaders' emotional and interpersonal strengths that are tested, creating or breaking relational bonds between leaders and followers/peers/superiors. Such connections generate the requisite authority for an individual to assume *de jure* control and a legitimate position of leadership – not just when circumstances are challenging or related to unusual or unforeseen business crises (e.g., downturns, lay-offs, economic reorganization) – but during less catastrophic times.

In this article, we will discuss the phenomenon when a leader earns his or her right to lead organisations in defining situations. This right to lead involves a bond between the leader and the persons participating in the interaction. Such bond extends beyond the transactional level; it is a strong tie developed between people who voluntarily submit to the control of the leader in order to influence people and to direct their actions toward collective objectives.

The Dynamics of Power

The relationship of power and influence are essential in theories of organisational and individual leadership. Two concepts of power have dominated contemporary Western thought (Hindess, 1996). One characterizes the idea of power as a quantitative phenomenon. Power, in this sense, is a capacity to act. This notion of power is often attributed to Hobbes (1928, 1968) who argued that power is a necessary condition of human agency and a ubiquitous feature of human existence. Additional examples of this tradition include Weber (1978), who suggests that there will be an unequal relationship between those who employ power and those who are subject to its effects and Lukes (2005), who maintains that while the concept of power is “contested” by agents holding different values, power may nevertheless be reduced to capacity. In the words of Giddens (1984, p. 14), “[P]ower is the capability of the individual ‘to make a difference’ to a pre-existing state of affairs.” This understanding of power has also been dominant in organisational and leadership theory (e.g., French & Raven, 1959; Pettigrew, 1972; Yukl & Falbe, 1991; Bass, 1960; Etzioni, 1991).

Although the concept of power as a capacity resting in a single individual is widely employed in political, sociological, organisational, and leadership studies, there are other manifestations

subject to critique. Such views entail an understanding of power not only as a capacity but also as a right to act, with both capacity and right being seen to rest upon the consent of those over whom power is exercised (Hindess, 1996). Both capacity and right must be present in order for power to be recognized (Hobbes, 1968). Elias (2000) also suggests that power is not something anyone possesses, but is a characteristic of all human relationships. Foucault (1980) argues that power is a set of actions which influence the acts of other individuals who are otherwise unconstrained. This eschews the determinism of power as a quantitative capacity. Instead, power is a matter of instruments, techniques, and procedures employed in an attempt to influence the actions of those who have a choice about how they might behave (Hindess, 1996). If power consists of the attempt to influence the actions of others, then power is an inescapable feature of human interaction and so too is resistance to the exercise of power (Foucault, 1980). Power therefore manifests itself in a manner which operates both relationally and reciprocally (Simmel, 1964). Power then appears to function as a process – an aspect of an ongoing social structure wherein opponents both work together and in tension with each other. In order to form and maintain relationships with others, one cannot do whatever one wants. People both constrain others while being similarly constrained and enable while being reciprocally enabled. In human action, power pertains to this enabling-constraining relationship where the power balance is tilted in favour of some and against others (Stacey, 2006), presenting opportunities in organisations for one to earn his or her right to lead.

Defining Moments in Organisations

Conditions in the organisational world may be described as a maelstrom of changing markets, technologies, customers, products, and companies. Common notions of leadership grow out of viewing organisations as stable systems, a view rejected by an increasing number of scholars, who argue that many organisations exist in conditions of instability. Such behaviour may include permanent or ad-hoc conditions of insecurity and uncertainty, and evoke similar reactions in organisational members.

In permanent or temporary conditions of instability, people in organisations experience defining moments. These are incidents which often occur instantaneously and without forewarning. They can involve many people or simply relate to an interaction between two people. An incident can take the form of a significant crisis resulting from external events such as downturns, layoffs, hostile takeovers, bankruptcies and the like, or simply materialise during a regular staff meeting on a Monday morning where the discussion suddenly becomes tense and confrontational. Such defining moments are characterised by whether or not individuals agree to give the consent to lead to the one who wishes to be accepted as a leader. This is a connection between the follower/peer/superior and the one accepted as a leader, covering more than formal dyadic arrangements. It is defining for the relationship as it is defining for the leader him/herself as well. With respect to assuming positions of authority, similar ideas have been promoted by theories of authentic leadership. Avolio & Gardner (2005), Luthans & Avolio (2003) and May *et al.* (2003) posit that events that stimulate personal growth promote leadership. Such triggers may be positive or negative and can vary in terms of moral and emotional intensity. It is argued that morally-intense events require leaders to use their values and beliefs as guides for ethical decision-making (May *et al.*, 2003).

How then do members of organisations think, feel, decide and consequently, behave in such defining moments? Since Plato, philosophers have described decision-making as either rational or emotional. Findings within the field of social neuroscience contradict such a view. Emotions reflect levels of invisible analysis (Lehrer, 2009; Cozolino, 2006; Damasio, 2003), thus playing an important part in decisive moments in organisations.

Needs arise on both physiological and psychological levels. With respect to the psychological, people's intrinsic motivations form the basis for affective and behavioural outcomes. One example is provided by Sheldon (2004) who proposed that in addition to fundamental physical, innate social-cognitive, and socio-cultural needs and practices, different adaptations of people's behaviours in organisations serve to (1) sustain a basic sense of self (autonomy), (2) manipulate the environment in order to achieve instrumental goals (competence), and (3) form cooperative relationships with others (relatedness). Similarly, Hogan (1982) posited that such behaviours as socially integrating and advancing compose the majority of social concerns in group situations. Social acceptance (getting along) and status (getting ahead) are prime needs around which much social life is organised.

Contained organisational anxiety and power differentials due to circumstances of permanent or temporary instability in organisations may be a threat to satisfying people's needs. Examples include the uncertainty about an organisation's future, future market development, organisational prosperity, the security of one's own position of employment, and further career development. Others relate to insecurity and anxiety caused by poor relationships, power battles, and distress among colleagues; insecurity of belief in one's own worth in the organisation; and tensions, disagreements, and conflicts caused by strategic choices, conflicting value systems, professional matters or moral dilemmas. Further uncertainties include the lack of movement and action due to disagreements, in-house politics, structural problems, or ambiguous decisions. Such incidents can cause internal struggles where individuals strive to retain a sense of self and of order to reduce anxieties associated with instability, disorder, and unpredictability. In these defining moments, people thus want to believe that someone, somewhere, is willing to take responsibility.

Forming of Bonds in Defining Moments

When people's drives and needs are not met during the defining moments of an organisational structure, people react emotionally. Such emotional reactions obviously impact people's level of motivation and performance. Neurologically, fluctuations of dopamine play an important role in guiding actions, telling people how they should feel about what they experience (Montague *et al.*, 2006). People's emotions are not simply instincts, but are rooted in the predictions of brain cells that are constantly adjusting their connections to reflect reality (Lehrer, 2009). Such emotions affect relationships between people. Relationships can be characterised as strong or weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) as well as more positive or more negative in nature (Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003). Moreover, they will be motivated by drives or needs. Once formed, they provide a context for behaviour, establishing expectations, norms, principles, and values that serve as guidelines for behaviour. However, they remain dynamic; if the guidelines are violated, people

react, and relationships can dissolve or re-form in positive or negative ways (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2000).

While individuals all possess some form of emotional biases (de Martino *et al.*, 2006), this does not mean that people are marionettes of the limbic system. The brain's ability to supervise itself by exercising authority over its own decision-making processes is one of its primary functions. The prefrontal cortex allows people to contemplate the functions of their own minds. This is how people regulate emotions and minimise biases. The problem-solving abilities of people's working memory and the prefrontal cortex are crucial parts of human intelligence. Being able to retain more information in the prefrontal cortex and retain that information for a longer period of time indicate that the brain cells are better able to form useful associations (Colom *et al.*, 2004). At the same time, the brain filters out extraneous thoughts, since they might lead to unhelpful connections. Such decision-making is the essence of rationality. When people become doubtful in stressful situations, they try to engage the rational circuits of the prefrontal cortex. But the prefrontal cortex is fragile. The brain was not designed to deal with a surfeit of data caused, for instance, by high information flows, high diversity among people, or the richness of connectivity in organisations. As a result, people have to deal with a volume of information that exceeds their frontal cortices' capacity to process as situations present more information and complexity than they can handle. Since the prefrontal cortex can process only a limited number of matters simultaneously (Dijksterhuis, 2004), it tries to consolidate information to make the data somewhat more manageable. People then rely on misleading shortcuts because they lack the computational power to think any other way. When the prefrontal cortex is overwhelmed, people struggle to make sense of the situation.

This means that in defining moments in organisations, people's first reactions often become dominant (Bechara *et al.*, 1997; Knutson *et al.*, 2007; Brock & Balloun, 1967). At any given moment while the cortex is struggling to make a decision, rival bits of brain tissue are contradicting one another. Different brain areas think different things for different reasons. Sometimes this argument is largely emotional and the distinct parts of the limbic system are juxtaposed to each another. Although people cannot always rationally justify their feelings, the feelings still affect behaviour. Other arguments unfold largely between emotional and rational systems of the brain as the prefrontal cortex tries to resist incoming impulses. Bechara *et al.* (1997) compare this neural competition to natural selection, with the stronger emotions and the more compelling thoughts gaining an advantage over weaker ones. Most of this competition is emotional and unconscious, lacking and real logic. Thus, unconscious processing invisibly guides people's moment-to-moment thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in defining moments (Kimura *et al.*, 2004).

Earning the Right to Lead in Defining Moments

In defining moments, people in organisations – leaders, followers, peers, and superiors – react when their needs in organisations are unfulfilled. In defining moments, the one who is eventually recognised as a leader influences the thoughts and emotions of others. If such influence is successful, favourable thoughts and emotions create connections between followers/peers/superiors and the one who is accepted as a leader. Defining moments also offer opportunities for growth (London & Smither, 1999, 2002) for the leader earning his or her right to lead. Several scholars have addressed critical episodes, crucibles, trigger events, or

moments that matter (Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Avolio & Luthans, 2006) as important for such development. There is, however, little research on the effect of such events on the strengthening or weakening of the relationships between people due to defining moments.

Research within neuroscience has argued that the brain itself is a social organ, and brains themselves exist and develop in relationship to other brains. Relationships between people impact the functioning and growth of the brain's neural circuitry, add to the development and expansion of neurons, and provide the added energy for their growth and survival (Cozolino, 2006). Relationships involve a connection or bond between one individual and another. The psychological explanation for this social phenomenon is that relationships in organisations may be regarded as shifting identities accomplished by conversations (e.g. Hegel, 1977; Elias, 1991; Cozolino, 2006). People communicate in order to couple their activities in the organisation with those around them to reason and to express identity (e.g. Reicher, *et al.* 2005; Stacey, 2006). In these attempts, people are constructing relationships (Shaw, 2003). Leadership and follower-ship are thus social realities connected to context as a result of an iterative process that is shaped by webs of interactions between individuals (e.g. Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Hosking, 1988; Sayles, 1964; Abell & Simons, 2000). In some cases, social interactions produce the relational bonds, and in other cases they do not.

Leadership emerges in defining moments as an act of recognising and being recognised (Griffin, 2002). This recognition will take place or not take place even though the leader's position is formally sanctioned by the organisation. It is in such situations that relational bonds between followers and leaders are formed or broken. The one who wishes to be accepted as a leader may or may not exhibit influence on the ongoing social interactions in the present by dealing with contained organisational anxieties and/or power differentials. As a consequence, leadership needs to be earned as opposed to being predefined within established frameworks and role expectations. Leadership is thus the dynamic enabling-constraining process that occurs between people rather than the sole function of the individual leader. The focus in leadership research and practice with respect to the individual leader is coupled with a tendency to characterise an organisation in terms of its leader, linking the nature of the organisation – in its broadest sense – to one individual. This has been a tradition since Plato set the scene for the greater body (Cooper & Hutchinson, 1997), thereby encouraging researchers to focus attention on the psychology of the single individual. Leadership is not alone pending the individual or permanently possessed (even though somebody has this in his or her job description) but emerges as a result of the ongoing interaction between people. What is being recognised in the leader-follower relationship is a configuration of power in which the power balance is tilted towards the one who is recognised as a leader (e.g. Griffin and Stacey, 2005). The one who is recognised as a leader (being formal, informal, appointed or not) is the one who has the leadership qualities and the consent to influence the group. Obviously, such parameters are not static. The potential for a shift in power is therefore present in any given moment as long as there is interaction occurring.

Leadership Qualities in Defining Moments

Leadership qualities – referring to an integrated constellation of attributes that foster an orientation toward influencing others and motivating their actions toward certain objectives – are, in addition to relationships, of interest. Leadership qualities have received much attention from researchers, scholars, and practitioners. Some argue that there is little evidence of any

personality traits that either distinguish leaders from non-leaders or predict leadership effectiveness. Researchers such as Moxnes (2007), Andersen (2005), and Jacques & Clement (2001) argue that blueprint leadership traits correlate poorly to leadership performance. Others,

such as Judge *et al.* (2002), have provided new evidence for re-evaluating the personality approach, claiming that leadership is always related to personality.

Although researchers disagree on the degree of correlation, there is a substantial research base linking personality variables and leadership. Personality is the trait that constitutes a pattern of behaviour in different situations over time (Moxnes, 2007). While human lives are individual variations on a general evolutionary design, people's dispositional traits sketch the outline of that individual. People develop characteristic adaptations that fill in the details of human individuality (McAdams and Pals, 2006). Such melding of traits into a self are the concerns of modern personality psychology. Conceptions of a self are based on people's observations of themselves, their inferences about who they are, their wishes and desires, and their evaluation of themselves (Stets & Burke, 2003). The self is thus comprised of the personal idiosyncrasies that separate one person from the next. It is responsible for the thoughts and actions of an individual (Erikson, 1980). Forces at various levels influence the accessibility of a given self-concept, leading to activation of personality traits at a particular point in time (Brickson, 2000). Thus, different situations may bring different states of the self to the fore, and the self-concept (i.e., one's personal qualities) is dynamic and may change due to various external stimuli and environmental challenges (Kark & van Dijk, 2007).

One way to approach the subject of personal qualities is through character analysis. Character strengths are those aspects of personality that are morally valued. They include habits — evident in thoughts, feelings, and actions (Peterson, 2009). This is a psychology that recognizes individual differences that are stable and general but are also shaped by the individual's setting and thus capable of change. Much of the research on leadership is premised on a position-based perspective of leadership. It concerns qualities residing in a position established within an organisational structure with legitimate power but does not provide adequate explanations for leadership emergence in defining moments.

In such situations, it may be tempting to search for the perfect actions by a logical, rational leader providing direction or meaning. Ostensibly, there is a rational element in defining the actions of leaders. However, in defining moments, we find that the act of leadership is emblematic of psychological strength and human positivism. Such arguments are supported by research by Kenny and Zaccaro (1983) and Arvey *et al.* (2006) who advocate that leader emergence is co-related to the character of the leader. Character strengths may be construed as positive traits and core personality characteristics as virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths are the psychological ingredients (i.e., processes or mechanisms) that define virtues, while virtues are the core personality characteristics valued across time and cultures. Several traditions of psychology have investigated the topic of character over the years. Works by Thorndike (1940), Erikson (1980), Greenberger *et al.* (1974), Jahoda (1958), Ryff *et al.* (1995), Kohlberg (1984), Vaillant (1993), Schwartz (1994) and Kumpfer (1999) have all provided prominent examples of psychological inquires of human qualities.

Earning the Right to Lead by Displaying Character Strengths

Defining moments in organisations are characterised by unconscious processing that guide people's moment-to-moment thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. People experience frustrating

thoughts and emotions, leading to de-motivation and dysfunctional organisational behaviour. When experiencing such thoughts and emotions, people in organisations want to believe that someone, somewhere, will be willing to take responsibility. People want role models displaying strengths, providing hope, and showing progress. They want leadership. The emergence of leadership in defining situations may be explained by psychological strengths – in the form of character strengths. In everyday conversation, people often speak casually of character as something that a person has or does not have, but the components of character – the specific strengths included above – are distinguishable and furthermore exist in degrees along a continuum.

In our discussion, we focus on the strengths of courage and humanity, as these are the predominant emotional and interpersonal characteristics on display when a leader earns his or her right to lead.

Courage. Courage is the emotional strength that involves exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, and is defined by the character strengths of bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Leaders who earn their right to lead tend to display bravery in defining moments. They do not shrink from threats, challenges, or difficulties. They speak up for what they think is right even if there is opposition from followers, peers, superiors, customers, or others. They show persistence, finish what they have started, and complete challenging tasks or projects.

The one accepted as a leader in defining moments must also display integrity. They speak the truth and take responsibility for their feelings and actions. Integrity has been discussed widely in leadership research and there has been renewed interest in this subject in recent years as a result of the focus on authentic leadership (e.g. George, 2003), as well as in the literature of ethics (e.g. Trevino *et al.*, 2000), and neo-charismatic (e.g. House & Aditya, 1997) theory. Integrity is also a determinant of trust. According to several researchers, a follower's trust is a prerequisite for sustainable leadership (e.g., Shamir & Lapidot, 2003), especially in defining moments. Placement of trust allows actions in organisations that are otherwise not possible (Coleman, 1986). Unless the ones who wish to be recognised as leaders are perceived as trustworthy, it is difficult to earn the right to lead, retain the loyalty of followers, or obtain support from peers and superiors.

Courage is not composed of just observable acts, but also of the cognitions, emotions, motivations, and decisions that produced them (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard, juxtaposed courage to anxiety (Dru, 1938). People's struggle to maintain a sense of order is linked to a wish to reduce anxieties associated with instability, disorder, and unpredictability. They want to believe that someone is in control, however, the notion of the leader as the one who is in control is not consistent with reality (Streatfield, 2001). Leaders who earn their right to lead have the courage to deal with the unknown and lead despite instability and unpredictability. They defy their own and people's innate need to control the external or internal environment, as opposed to dealing with the unknown and reality as it is (Binney, *et al.*, 2005).

Putnam (1997) has offered an inclusive account of courage by delineating three types: *physical*, *moral*, and *psychological*. *Physical* courage helps one to overcome the fear of physical injury or

death in order to save one's self or others. *Moral* courage entails maintaining integrity at the risk of losing friends, employment, privacy, or prestige. The President of the Institute for Global Ethics, Kidder (2006), has argued that moral courage — the readiness to take professional risks for the sake of principle — is essential for leaders but is difficult to instill. Morality involves, at its simplest level, choices about how people treat other people. Doing the right thing by carefully weighing competing claims has a long history in philosophical reflection. Philosophers such as Leibniz and Descartes tried to construct a moral system free of feelings. Kant argued that doing the right thing was a consequence of acting rationally. But these conceptions of morality are contested by neuroscience. When people are confronted with moral dilemmas, the unconscious automatically generates emotional reactions (Lehrer, 2009). It is only after the emotions have produced a decision that people create rational reasons to justify their moral intuition. The capacity to make moral decisions is therefore innate. The circuit is hard-wired in most healthy people (psychopaths do not have this capacity). This allows them to empathize with others — not through conceptual reasoning but by direct simulation, that is, by feeling, not by thinking (Rizzolatti *et al.*, 1999). However, this phenomenon requires experience and reflection in order to develop fully.

Psychological courage includes the ability to confront a challenging situation; it is bravery inherent in facing one's inner demons. This is courage related to one's self and development of that self. For example, scholars within the modern psychoanalytical tradition (e.g., Higgins, 1987), describe the self in terms of different concepts such as actual/ideal/ought selves. Psychological courage is therefore the courage to confront and deal with these conceptions of selves. According to Binney, *et al.* (2005) such courage has to do with how leaders who earn their right to lead deal with their "inner demons"— issues resulting from their formative experiences earlier in life that they continue to work on as adults. The self-concept related to leadership is discussed by many (see for instance Stogdill, 1974; Yukl, 2006; Karp & Helgø, 2009) and includes aspects such as self awareness, assessment, esteem, control, and confidence. Much leadership research claims that people with high self-confidence are more likely to attempt difficult tasks (e.g., Kouzes & Posner, 2008). Some also claim that self-confidence makes the difference between effective and ineffective leadership in critical situations (e.g., Boyatzis, 1982); that self-confidence predicts subsequent advancement (e.g., Howard & Bray, 1988); and that self-confidence is essential for charismatic leadership (e.g., de Vries, 1994).

Humanity. Humanity is defined as the interpersonal strength that involves tending and befriending others, and additionally consists of the character strengths of love, kindness, and social intelligence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Leaders who earn their right to lead value close relations with others, whether followers, peers, superiors, or others. They are close to people when situations or circumstances are challenging. They take care of their followers. Leaders who emerge in defining moments display social intelligence. They have a way to become aware of the motives and feelings of other people and appear to know what to do in different social situations.

Social intelligence — including the related terms of emotional and personal intelligence — has received attention with respect to the subject of leadership in recent years. Social intelligence is

the ability by the one who is recognised as a leader to determine the requirements for leadership in a given situation and to respond appropriately (e.g., Zaccaro *et al.*, 1991). This

strength has received recent interest as part of the growing volume of research on leadership and emotions (e.g., Goleman, 1995), although some researchers disagree about its importance (e.g., Antonakis 2003). Some argue that socially intelligent leaders have the capacity to sense the emotions of others. This is a capacity for empathy as well as emotional awareness (e.g., Griffin & Stacey, 2005). People with high social intelligence also have an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and they are oriented toward self-improvement. They are less self-centred, care about other people, possess self-control, have stable emotions, and are less defensive (e.g., Howard & Bray, 1988). It is also likely that such leaders display higher levels of moral development (e.g., Yukl, 2006).

Sponsors of social intelligence (e.g., Goleman *et al.*, 2002) argue that leaders create resonance through the use of their emotional capabilities. According to these researchers, the one who wishes to be recognised as a leader should pay attention to how he or she handles him/herself and his/her relationships. This is a function of personal competences (self-awareness and self-management) as well as the social competences (social awareness and relationship management). Goleman & Boyatzis (2008) also argue there is a large performance gap between socially intelligent and socially unintelligent leaders, and that social competence may be of particular importance in challenging situations.

Conclusion

Heroes are persons who, in the face of challenges, display courage and the will for self-sacrifice for some greater good. Some researchers argue that the “transforming hero” has become a powerful picture of leadership (e.g., Binney *et al.*, 2005). They argue that the leadership which involves a person with superior qualities is a myth; an idea that exists on paper but that bears little relationship to most of the leadership that is provided in the majority of organisations daily. They are right in such argument. Leaders that earn their right to lead in defining moments are not “transformational heroes.” Nevertheless, they display character strengths – but not necessarily superior qualities – in the face of challenging situations. This is not a leadership that is provided day-to-day, but a form of leadership that is provided when circumstances are unstable and uncertain – circumstances often experienced in most organisations. When leaders succeed in providing such leadership, they create bonds between themselves and followers/peers/superiors. Such bonds are the building blocks of relationships that transcend the transactional level and provide leaders the necessary power to operate an organisation.

This also entails that leaders who have earned their right to lead do not need to rely on the use of hard power, detailed supervision, control mechanisms, and the like. They have earned their right to lead as a result of providing leadership in challenging organisational situations. They do not therefore need to prove themselves and show off their “brass” – they have gained authority. This also means that they do not need to involve themselves in political ploys only to manifest their power base as many leaders have a tendency to do. They are instead given the luxury to concentrate their time and energy as leaders on developing their overview, on developing themselves as leaders and human beings, and on developing their consciousness with respect to becoming better aware of defining moments when they may again be given an opportunity to earn further rights to lead.

Although our findings presented in this article are based upon observations of and conversations with individuals in leadership development programs, our conclusions are conceptual. Further empirical research is needed for affirmation and verification. It should also be noted that the observations are made in a Scandinavian context, and thus, within cultural and organisational frameworks applicable to these countries.

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