

Leadership Communication

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In the first *Handbook of Organizational Communication*, the chapter on leadership was written by two leadership psychologists (Dansereau & Markham, 1987). Some 14 years later, a communication scholar authored the next *Handbook* chapter, although it was largely derivative of leadership psychology; the communication implications of individualist and cognitive leadership theories were the primary focus (Fairhurst, 2001). Both of these chapters reflected the times: Organizational communication was still coming into its own as a discipline (Mumby, 2007), and psychology had long dominated leadership study (Bass, 1981; House & Aditya, 1997). It made sense then to equate *leadership* with leaders whose strong inner motors explained how they transformed the world (for better or worse), while communication played a contributory, albeit subsidiary, role.

However, since the last *Handbook* review, communication has played an increasingly central role in leadership studies due in no small measure to the emergence of a social and cultural lens—focusing on how culture and social interaction impact leadership—appearing alongside (the strong inner motor of) an individual and cognitive lens (Fairhurst, 2007a). As a result, organizational communication scholars are conceiving of

leadership communication more complexly, for example, as an act of transmission *and* negotiated meaning. This, in turn, is moving communication scholars toward a more dialectical view of leadership: to see it as an individually informed yet relational phenomenon between people and even objects, to see leadership as a medium by which collectives mobilize to act but also as a highly desired (attributional) outcome of this interaction, and finally, to see *leadership* as definitionally unstable—across time, between people, and even among scholars—and yet oddly enduring. Turn to any recorded history to find that leadership is a concept for the ages. Unsurprisingly, with this new research complexity, the focus isn't just on leaders, but all actors (formal or informal leaders, followers, or other stakeholders) who can be transformative agents—and, as we will see, receptors of meaning and disciplined products of a leadership culture.

We begin the chapter with post-positivist approaches to leadership study, which are more individual and cognitive in focus while adopting a transmissional view of human communication. We then move on to an emerging narrative of more socially constructed views of leadership, which are more social and cultural in focus while emphasizing a meaning-centered view of

communication. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of the net gains of the research of the past decade and the contributions of a communicative lens. Before proceeding, however, please note that this literature review makes no attempt to be comprehensive, only representative of the field. As such, we proffer no universal definition of *leadership*. Following Wittgenstein (1953), we adhere to the belief that leadership is one of those *blurred concepts* and, following Gallie (1956), an essentially contested one. Better to view leadership as a family resemblance among power and influence-oriented language games whose character we now seek to describe (Kelly, 2008; Wittgenstein, 1953).

The Post-Positivist Approach to Studying Leadership

The history of post-positivist approaches to leadership study is an impressive one. A perusal of this vast literature over several decades includes the study of leader traits (Antonakis, 2011), leader behavior styles (Stogdill & Coons, 1957), leader behavior contingencies (Fiedler, 1978), leader-member relationship theories (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), charismatic and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; House, 1977), implicit leadership theories (Lord, Foti, & Phillips, 1982), and information processing about leadership (Lord & Emrich, 2001) and leadership attributions (Calder, 1977), including romantic ones (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985)—not to mention a host of new topics we sample below.

Definitions of leadership have also varied over time, for example, viewing *leadership* from the perspective of those holding positions of authority (where the terms *leader* and *manager* can be used interchangeably) to its more current status as synonymous with *change* (while *managing* is about implementation; Kotter, 1990). Definitions notwithstanding, post-positivist (leadership) approaches view the functions of theory as prediction, explanation, and control, while the research is usually survey based or experimental.

These are variable-analytic approaches that adopt a transmissional view of communication, such as we see in Shannon and Weaver's (1949) familiar Sender→Message→Receiver model, especially when concerned with predicting and understanding leader effectiveness.

After discussing the entailments of a transmissional view of communication, in the discussion below, we show how organizational communication scholars still contribute to research using post-positive approaches, particularly in the areas of supervisor-subordinate communication, global leadership, and leading change.

Transmissional Views of Communication

Historically, a transmissional view of communication dominated the organizational sciences due to roots in industrial and organizational psychology and (post-)positivistic science. When the primary lens is individual and cognitive and the preferred methods of choice are survey research or experimental design, the tendency is to view communication as a transmission, a process variable, or behavioral outcome. Accordingly, transmission views of communication see the world in terms of inputs, processes, and outputs. Communication is thus most advantageously treated as a conduit when the focus is on transmission and channel effects: message directionality, frequency, and fidelity; blockages that interfere with transmission; and perceptual filters that hinder message reception (Axley, 1984; Putnam, 1983).

For example, Neufeld, Wan, and Fang (2010) were interested in examining the relationship between perceived leader performance and physical distance, leader-follower communication effectiveness, and leadership style. In their study of 138 remote employees and 41 leaders, the authors conceive of *communication effectiveness* as the overall quality of interactions between leaders and followers as perceived by the followers. Because they view communication holistically and do not problematize issues of meaning, the

default view of communication here is transmissional. As such, these analysts found that communication effectiveness was positively related to perceived leadership performance, but physical distance had no influence on communication effectiveness or perceived leader performance.

Underscoring the relational nature of leadership, Connaughton and Daly (2004a, 2004b, 2005) examined leadership in virtual teams. Interviews with positional leaders in a multinational technology organization revealed several aspects of (transmissional) communication crucial to virtual team functioning, including information adequacy, information equity, and communication frequency (at key moments), among others. The authors also report how these aspects of communication are related to trust, perceptions of isolation, and other process issues and outcomes. Similarly, in an experimental study, Marks, Zaccaro, and Mathieu (2000) contend that the quality of communication processes among team members is just as critical to team performance as the quantity of interactions. Moreover, Morgeson, DeRue, and Karam (2010) advance a team leadership model that presents several leadership functions. Here too, communication is identified as leadership (transmissional) behavior needed for teams to be effective. As these and other studies indicate, researchers interested in team leadership are shifting their focus from individual leaders to leadership processes needed for team effectiveness.

For some researchers who adopt a transmissional view, communication is conceived of as a behavioral outcome. For example, in two models of leadership trust, Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, and Hackman (2010) and Burke and colleagues (Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007) view communication not only as an input to trust in leadership, but they also see upward communication as a proximal behavioral outcome of trust in leadership. Notice how the language of the transmission view is evident when Burke et al. write:

Taken together, by creating a sense of trust towards the team leader, communication

lines will be opened up to transmit needed information to lead to innovation, error remediation/prevention, and an ever growing and reciprocated sense of trust between the team leader and the subordinate. (p. 623)

A transmissional view of communication also finds its way into studies that examine transformational leadership and communication. For example, Purvanova and Bono's (2009) experimental study tested whether transformational leadership behaviors are more strongly associated with team effectiveness in virtual teams as opposed to face-to-face ones. Their results suggest that transformational leadership behaviors impacted virtual teams' performance more than face-to-face teams. Balthazard, Waldman, and Warren (2009) shed light on the traits as well as behaviors of emerging transformational leaders, in both colocated and virtual teams, focusing on the influences of personality characteristics, activity level (timing and frequency of participation), and what they term *communication/expression quality* (idea density and grammatical complexity) on perceptions of transformational leadership. This study had all team members rate other team members along several emergent leadership lines and used language sample analysis to assess the relevant aspects of communication.

Relatedly, research continues to examine the effectiveness with which vision is communicated. In their field study in an Israeli telecommunication organization, Berson and Avolio (2004) studied the relationship between transformational leadership and the articulation of strategic organizational goals. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data, they noted whether those reporting to transformational leaders articulate goals in alignment with them and whether transformational leaders are considered more effective communicators (being open, being a careful listener, being a careful transmitter). Researchers have also focused on variables related to vision formation (Shipman, Byrne, & Mumford, 2010) and vision communication (Stam, Van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2010).

While issues of meaning are narrowly problematized (if at all) in the foregoing research utilizing a transmissional view of communication, recall that the goal has often been to understand leadership communication amidst other relational and cognitive dynamics. A transmissional view best facilitates such a stance.

Supervisor-Subordinate Relationships

Post-positivist work on leadership has examined facets of supervisor-subordinate communication—for example, communication style (Sager, 2008), impression management strategies/social influence (Sosik & Jung, 2003), and contingencies impacting style such as found in Situational Leadership Theory (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). In her literature review of this area, Sias (2009) goes a step further by arguing that post-positivist leadership research has been able to examine a variety of supervisor-subordinate communication functions (e.g., information exchange and performance feedback and appraisal, including upward and downward feedback) along with relationship development processes and outcomes (see Sias, Chapter 15).

Research on Leader Member Exchange (LMX) serves as a case in point (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). It is among the most prevalent theoretical and empirical perspectives on the relational nature of leadership (Sparrowe, Soetjijto, & Kramer, 2006), often drawing communication scholars to add to its research base. For example, Kramer (1995) drew on LMX and assimilation research to find that the quality of the supervisor relationship significantly influenced the perceptions and job satisfaction of those transferring jobs. Lee (2001) examined the relationships among members' perceptions of fairness and LMX quality as well as cooperative communication. He found that members who perceived less distributive and procedural justice also tended to demonstrate less cooperative communication with other members. Members also reported fewer interactions and

shared fewer ideas and resources as well as less information with each other. Olufowote, Miller, and Wilson (2005) found that the quality of LMX moderated the relationship between the magnitude of role change and rationality, one of four upward-influence tactics examined. Finally, Jian (2012) found a curvilinear relationship between LMX and two key role stressors, role conflict and role overload, suggesting that there may be deleterious consequences associated with the challenging tasks with great visibility that high-quality LMX members often enjoy.

Further developments in LMX have included examining relationships other than leader-member and have pointed to the potential influences that other dyadic relationships, in conjunction with LMX, may have on various outcomes (Sluss, Klimchak, & Holmes, 2008; Tangirala, Green, & Ramanujam, 2007). In addition, the conceptual space in which LMX is examined continues to broaden with work by Graen (2012), who recasts LMX in terms of strategic interpersonal alliances.

Other post-positivist relational leadership work focuses not only on the individual leader (or member) but also on other dyadic relationships, teams, and organizations. In doing so, researchers increasingly use analytic methods that get at multiple levels of analysis. For example, Bakar and Connaughton (2010) used WABA I and II analytic techniques to examine supervisory communication, as informed by LMX theory, and its relationship with workgroup commitment.¹ Network studies of leadership in teams and organizations get at communication relationships among leaders and members and their influences on various outcomes (Dionne, Sayama, Hao, & Bush, 2010). Huffaker (2010), for instance, investigated how online leaders (or *influencers*) communicate, finding that those who influence others communicate more often, are deemed more credible and central in the network, and exhibit assertiveness and linguistic diversity in their messages. Over a two-year period, Huffaker analyzed an impressive 632,000 messages from over 34,000 participants in 16 online discussion groups and utilized automated text analysis, social

network analysis, and hierarchical linear modeling as analytic techniques.

Huffaker's (2010) study and the aforementioned Berson and Avolio (2004) and Balthazard et al. (2009) studies reflect a growing trend toward mixed methods. They demonstrate post-positivist tendencies with social constructionist sensibilities, in part because they are utilizing communication as data and/or turning to discursive methods, a point we address below.

Global Leader Effectiveness

Another body of leadership research examines leader effectiveness in the context of global organizations. Global/international leadership research grew out of the rise of the multinational corporation and scholars' quest to understand what makes (positional) leaders effective in these contexts. Two general themes can be observed in this body of work. For one, scholars have been interested in conceptualizing and measuring what global leadership is. In doing so, researchers have sought to explain the relationships between leadership and culture (Triandis, 1993) and how those relationships relate to performance. This work has prompted a scholarly conversation as to whether some universal attributes of leadership can be discerned across cultures and/or whether some features of leadership are culturally contingent. The large-scale data studies of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness or "GLOBE" project (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, & Dorfman, 1999) empirically examined these issues and have contributed to scale development on cultural dimensions and to theory development (Scandura & Dorfman, 2004). Regarding GLOBE project findings, Den Hartog and colleagues (1999) note that communication skills were seen by participants across national cultures as contributing to perceptions of transformational/charismatic leadership; however, perceptions of effective communication differ across national cultures (Trompenaars, 1993).

In addition, research has sought to pinpoint what makes leaders effective in global contexts. Drawing from Hofstede (1980), Triandis (1993) proffered that leadership processes deemed effective would be different based on whether an individual was from a collectivist or an individualist culture. A concern with effective leadership can also be found in Adler, Brody, and Osland (2001), who focus on women and global leadership. In their study of Latin American expatriates, Osland, De Franco, and Osland (1999) underscore the importance of expatriates' understanding of nine cultural contingencies, some of which are communicative (e.g., humor and joy) or have implications for communication (i.e., in-group/out-group, trust). And, in their model of cultural sensemaking, Osland and Bird (2000) encourage practitioners to embrace cultural paradoxes and consider context to help detangle them and work effectively around the world. As a whole, this research historically is often focused on positional leaders, is comparative in nature, is focused on the relationship between national culture and leadership, and utilizes quantitative and qualitative methods.

Within this body of work, organizational communication researchers are also making their mark. Research on leadership in a global context has focused on diverse ways of understanding leadership in various national cultures, noting leadership's communicative constitution. These studies foreground different conceptualizations of leadership, oftentimes rooted in entrenched cultural beliefs, as compared to the majority of the leadership literature with its Western bias. For instance, Lin and Clair (2007) developed an instrument to test, and find evidence to support, the influences of what they term *Mao Zedong thought* in organizations in contemporary China, while Brummans and Hwang (2010) investigate the influence of Buddhist philosophy on organizing practices in a Taiwanese nonprofit voluntary organization. Xu (2011) contributes to our understandings of leadership in the Chinese context by developing an instrument to measure the leadership of Chinese

academic leaders. In doing so, the author found that Confucian values still permeate Chinese understandings of leadership. In a study of LMX relationships and power distance in the U.S. and Colombia and their influence on voice, Botero and Van Dyne (2009) find that LMX and power distance relate to voice in different ways.

Moreover, recent organizational communication research interrogates how notions of leadership in various parts of the world are tied into larger structures and/or sets of values. For instance, Hall (2010) foregrounds Jamaica's postcolonial context, which informs Jamaican managers' notions of leading. Broader national cultural values of Malaysian society are highlighted as essential in understanding the supervisory communication examined in Bakar and Connaughton's (2010) work. Relatedly, contemporary organizational communication research has been concerned with non-Western sites in which to study leadership. Shi and Wilson (2010) examine upward-influence processes in China. Bakar and Connaughton (2010) investigate supervisor-subordinate relationships in Malaysia, and Hall (2010) highlights sensemaking narratives of managers in Jamaica. Relatively few of these studies are comparative across countries or cultures, although the aforementioned Botero and Van Dyne (2009) study is an exception.

To recap, leadership researchers, including many in organizational communication, are increasingly interested in understanding leadership through a non-Western lens and in non-Western organizational contexts—an organizational trend that is likely to continue with increased globalization.

Leading Change

One strand of leadership and change research contributes a communicative perspective to change implementation. In this body of work, change implementers are primarily leaders. For example, Hearn and Ninan (2003) underscore how leading change is communicative in the

sense that it is about managing meaning. As Lewis's (2011) program of research has shown over the past several years, planned change implementation is most certainly a communicative endeavor (Lewis, 2000, 2007). Lewis writes: "Communication represents not only the primary mechanism of change in organizations, but for many types of change may constitute the outcome as well (e.g., management programs which are evidenced in styles of supervision)" (Lewis, 2000, p. 46). Lewis and colleagues unearth reasons why change implementers communicatively attend to some stakeholders more so than others (Lewis, Richardson, & Hamel, 2003) and present a testable model of change implementation communication (see Lewis, Chapter 20, for more discussion of organizational change).

As can be seen from the above literature review, current research reflecting a more post-positivist approach to leadership continues to utilize a transmissional view of communication. Post-positivist survey methods also continue to dominate, although there are signs that mixed-method studies are growing with the treatment of communication as data. Finally, an individualist and cognitive lens continues, although there is increased sensitivity to multiple levels and units of analysis, especially in the move to studies of leadership in teams and networks.

Social Constructionist Views of Leadership

As the introduction suggests, since the last *Handbook* review, another narrative is challenging that of post-positivist leadership study. In this emerging narrative, communication is not just one of many variables of interest; rather, communication is central, defining, and constitutive of leadership. As such, several organizational communication and management scholars who favor social constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1966) are now casting leadership as a co-constructed product of socio-historical and collective meaning making (Barge, 2007; Barge & Fairhurst, 2008; Fairhurst,

2007a; Parker, 2005). They characterize this social and cultural lens in terms of three themes.

First, emphasis is given to a meaning-centered view of communication, which stresses authorship (i.e., leaders are neither the only nor the primary symbolizing agents), the formative power of language (i.e., the ability to categorize and label that which may only be vaguely sensed; Shotter, 1993), contested meaning (i.e., sometimes called *discursive struggle* because of a lack of agreement on matters ranging from world views to definitions of the *situation here and now*; Grint, 2000), and the role of socio-historical systems of thought (i.e., *discourses*) in sourcing not only ways of thinking, but ways of talking (Foucault, 1972).

Second, by emphasizing the centrality of communication to leadership, the constructionist processes that give rise to leadership attributions are key concerns. As such, there is a resistance to essentializing theory in which leadership is to be found in a leader's personal qualities (e.g., trait theory), situations they might face (e.g., Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory), or some combination thereof (e.g., contingency theories, such as when a strong leader and crisis coincides; Grint, 2000, 2005). Leadership is, instead, in the eye of the beholder (Calder, 1977) because "what counts as a 'situation' and what counts as the 'appropriate' way of leading in that situation are interpretive and contestable issues, not issues that can be decided by objective criteria" (Grint, 2000, p. 3). Constructionist leadership scholars thus problematize the variability and inconsistency in actors' accounts and/or analysts' findings and address how conflicting leadership truth claims might have been produced and even coexist (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010).

Third, the treatment of power in constructionist leadership approaches is much more encompassing than in post-positivist approaches (Fairhurst, 2007a). Constructionist approaches often integrate various forms of power and influence and conceive of them in both positive and negative terms (Collinson, 2006). As such,

Foucault (1995) is a particular influence here, given his focus on discourse as constituting power and knowledge systems and its influence on subjectivity. By contrast, post-positivist leadership research typically treats *power* as a negative and repressive property, while positive influence is often tantamount to a definition of *leadership* (Collinson, 2006).

Together, these three influences have spawned a new research agenda involving leadership as (a) the comanagement of meaning; (b) influential acts of human and material organizing; (c) a site of power and influence; and (d) alive with the potential for moral accountability, reflexivity, and change. We sample from each of these areas in the discussion below.

Leadership as the Comanagement of Meaning

In the 1980s, charismatic and transformational leadership theories (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977) initially appeared to challenge a transmissional view of communication by casting leaders as managers of meaning (Smircich & Morgan, 1982); however, leaders were often the primary (read: *only*) symbolizing agents (Fairhurst, 2001). Since the last review, however, leadership research is increasingly about the *comanagement* of meaning, in which followers or other leadership actors also manage meaning in such areas as sensemaking, framing, identity work, and leadership aesthetics.

Sensemaking, Framing, and Identity Work. A meaning-centered view of communication is a prerequisite to leadership actors' sensemaking accounts. As Drazin, Glynn, and Kazanjian (1999) explain, "Meaning—or sense—develops about the situation, which allows the individual to act in some rational fashion; thus meaning—or sensemaking—is a primary generator of individual action" (p. 293).

The meanings applied to situations have been called *frames* (Bateson, 1972; Goffman, 1974),

enactments (Weick, 1979), *schemas* (Lord & Hall, 2003), and *cognitive maps* (Drazin et al., 1999). If *frame* represents a cognitive meaning structure, the process of communicating those structures has been called *framing* (Fairhurst, 2011) or *sensegiving* in a leadership context (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Moreover, if leadership actors or collectives develop a cause-map of the world as a result of their sensemaking efforts, inevitably, they situate themselves in this map (Drazin et al., 1999). Thus we are likely to find individual and collective identity work in their sensemaking accounts in the form of categorizing and framing linguistic activity in response to questions such as “Who am I (in this context)?” and “Who are we?”

For example, several studies examine the identity work of middle managers in their sensemaking of top managements’ change initiatives (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007), while Lewis (2011) writes extensively about sensemaking and stakeholder identities in strategic change. Martin (2004) examines how female middle managers use humor to negotiate their identities to deal with paradoxical circumstances, while other studies feature the sensemaking and identity work of employees who resist management (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Sonenshein, 2010; Tourish & Robson, 2006). Moreover, Alvesson and Spicer (2011) explore the metaphorical basis (e.g., leaders as *saints*, *gardeners*, and *bullies*) of leader sensemaking and identity work. Notably, recent work adopting a sensemaking perspective moves beyond examining positional leaders and instead shifts attention to how interim or temporary leaders make sense of their roles and actions (Browning & McNamee, 2012).

Framing becomes a central focus in the work of Fairhurst (2011), whose goal is to capture how leadership actors reflexively use language and actions to create meaning and construct the realities to which they must then respond. Work by H. Liu (2010) and Craig and Amernic (2004) examine the *failure framing* strategies of leaders such as Al Dunlap and John Berardino,

respectively. The latter deployed a mind-numbing panoply of accounting details in testimony before Congress to deflect responsibility for Arthur Anderson’s role in the Enron debacle. Finally, work by Foldy, Goldman, and Ospina (2008); Sheep, Fairhurst, Khanzanchi, and Slay (2010); and Carroll and Simpson (2012) focus on framing strategies associated with problem and solution formulations highlighting cognitive shifts in collective identity or organizational change.

Leadership Aesthetics. An emerging area of meaning-centered leadership research involves aesthetics. Riley (1988) captured it as, “The notion of charisma, vision, and culture all share a sense of the aesthetic—the art form of leadership. . . . This requires forms of analysis . . . sensitive to style, to the creation of meaning, and to the dramatic edge of leadership” (p. 82). Working from a constructionist stance, Grint (2000) cast leadership as a series of art forms: philosophical, fine, martial, and performing. Eisenberg (2007) focuses on the ambiguity, contingency, and aesthetics of meaning in many leadership situations, while Harter, Leeman, Norander, Young, and Rawlins (2008) examine the tensions between aesthetic sensibilities and instrumental rationalities in the collaborative management of an arts organization.

A growing number of studies embrace aesthetics while decrying the “disembodied” leader in the mainstream literature. For example, Cunliffe (2002) and Shotter and Cunliffe (2003) speak of a (managerial) *social poetics* involving a “precognitive understanding in which poetic images and gestures provoke a response as we feel the rhythm, resonance, and reverberation of speech and sound” (Cunliffe, 2002, p. 134). Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer (2007) argue that *aesthetics* focuses on felt meaning, tacit knowing, and emotions integral to leading and following. Ladkin (2008) argues that “leading beautifully” requires mastery of the context, coherent (authentic) message congruence between speech and actions, and a sense of purpose that brings forth one’s ethical commitments. Finally, Sinclair

(2005) examines the body performances of leaders, calling for more studies that “hold bodies, in their fleshy version, prominent, and to focus on bodies as possibilities,” for example, in the ways they may interrupt systemic power (p. 388). Too often, she argues, “bodies disappear under the weight of theorizing” (p. 387).

To recap, understanding actors’ sensemaking, identity work, framing strategies, and aesthetics requires a meaning-centered view of communication. With this view, what some have argued to be a richer one (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009), we are able to see rationalities-in-the-making, identities in flux, and bodies that now matter. We now turn our attention to communication scholars who build upon a meaning-centered view of communication as they try to put “abstract [leadership] structures into live motion” (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 4).

Leadership as Influential Acts of (Human-Material) Organizing

This category of research focuses on the ways that leadership emerges in the management of the tension between agency and structure. Giddens’s (1979, 1984) *duality of structure* (i.e., structure, in the form of rules and resources, is the medium and outcome of action) has become a popular way to address this theme. In short, *influential acts of organizing* (e.g., communication surrounding a unit’s mission, vision, or values; Hosking, 1988) are made possible by extant structures, which leadership actors draw upon to navigate *the situation here and now* while reproducing or renegotiating these structures with each deployment. After reviewing structurationist leadership studies, several studies by the Montréal School of organizational communication extend this discussion with human-material acts of organizing.

Structurationist Leadership Research. Two themes in Ashcraft et al.’s (2009) recent review of structurationist research are leadership related:

(1) the relationship between structuration and discursive struggle and (2) a structuralist rendition of communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) theory. The former is based on Giddens’s (1984) view that all systems are marked by an *antagonism of opposites* as well as the dialectic of control in which the less powerful (e.g., employees) always maintain a measure of control over their leaders. While the dialectic of control is often used in studies of leading social or organizational change (Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1995; Putnam, 2003), others use Giddens’s insight about the antagonism of opposites as a touchstone to identify tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes and their management by leadership actors (Jian, 2007; Real & Putnam, 2005; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004; Sherblom, Keranen, & Withers, 2002; Sillince, 2007). For example, Tracy (2004) studied employee reactions to organizational tensions in a prison setting, while Fairhurst, Cooren, and Cahill (2002) examined leadership-induced tensions, tension management strategies, and their unintended consequences in successive down-sizings. The implications for leading systems such as these lie in understanding and even embracing counter-rational thought in order to find creative ways to manage oppositional tensions (Sheep et al., 2010).

A second strain of studies focuses on McPhee and Zaug’s (2000; Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009; see McPhee, Poole, & Iverson, Chapter 3) structuralist rendering of CCO theory in which four interrelated processes constitute organizations: (1) membership negotiation, (2) organizational self-structuring, (3) activity coordination, and (4) institutional positioning. For example, work by McPhee and Iverson (2009) in a Mexican community organization show how the “organization is a medium of agency by its designing managers” (p. 74). They demonstrate *reflexive self-structuring* through surveillance and performance monitoring at one site that reverberates throughout the system to sustain management interests, even while less powerful stakeholders reflexively monitor and rationalize ongoing

conditions. In another study, Browning, Greene, Sitkin, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2009) demonstrate *activity coordination* and *institutional positioning* in the dance between U.S. Air Force technicians and the civilian review boards charged with their oversight.

The Montréal School. The Montréal School of organizational communication and its scholars (Brummans, 2006; Cooren, 2000, 2004; Robichaud, 2003; Taylor & Van Every, 2000, 2011; see Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, Chapter 7) see Giddens's agency-structure dialectic as overly narrow and oppositional. Drawing heavily from actor-network theory (Latour, 1994), their view of organizations is filled with a plenum of agencies that can be textual, mechanical, architectural, natural, and human (Cooren, 2006). When paired together, human and nonhuman agents create *hybrid agency* and *networks* with their own structuring affordances activated through interaction (Cooren, Brummans, & Charrieras, 2008). As such, structure is not the driver of action, but something to be explained (Latour, 2002).

Work in leadership with the Montréal School of organizational communication has demonstrated the distributed nature of leadership in a high-reliability organization, its episodic structuring, and the manner in which *command presence* emerges in the sequentiality of unfolding crises (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2004; Fairhurst & Cooren, 2004). Similar work with Cooren's (2007) analyses of a corporate board meeting charged with leadership succession demonstrates how leadership attributions, in general, cohere as a sequence (Fairhurst, 2007b).

Other studies from the Montréal School focus on the role of nonhuman agency in leadership. For example, Fairhurst's (2007a) analysis of New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani during 9/11 reveals that the mayor's charismatic leadership at the time emerged as a distributed network of human and nonhuman agents, including emotion-laden objects, texts, and spaces. Fairhurst and Cooren (2009) examined leadership presence through

human and nonhuman agency in former Governor Kathleen Blanco's management of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's management of the 2007 California wildfires. Both leadership presence and successful crisis management appeared dependent on frequent hybridizing and networking with nonhuman agents—large or small—that were locally entrenched and responsive to conditions on the ground. Cooren, Fairhurst, and Huet (2012) examine nonhuman agency in a building manager's job and the manner in which such agency boldly asserts itself in construction matters yet falls silent with a topic change.

The Montréal School studies give credence to Grint's (1997) wry observation that "naked, friendless, money-less, and technology-less leaders are unlikely to prove persuasive" (p. 17). The role of nonhuman agency and its structuring potential with human hybrids in leadership situations is crucial in this genre. Like the Montréal School, structurationist research also examines the structure-in-action of leadership. However, it eschews nonhuman agency in favor of the structuring potential of rules and resources, which also enables less powerful leadership actors a measure of control based on access. Interestingly, neither theoretical framework is about leadership *per se*, but they easily adapt to better understand agency-structure tensions in the leadership relationship.

Leadership as a Site of Power and Influence

Post-positivist leadership research is often based on a Western conception of the self as autonomous from society. More constructionist approaches adopt a post-structuralist view in which the self and society are inseparable (Collinson, 2006), supplying yet another reason for a social and cultural lens on leadership (Fairhurst, 2007a). Here, leadership actors are looked upon as cultural products; they are receptors of socio-historical meanings, for example,

about what constitutes leadership/management within a given historical era (du Gay, Salaman, & Rees, 1996; Western, 2008). As mentioned earlier, Foucault's (1990) more encompassing view of power is a key influence here; however, orientations toward power in this area vary in terms of how much they foreground power processes. As will be explained in the paragraphs that follow, more general constructionist approaches leave open the opportunity for power and politics while acting as the starting premise for critical management studies (CMS).

Constructionist Approaches. The approaches in this genre view leadership as attributional (Calder, 1977), grounded in social constructionist processes (Berger & Luckman, 1966) such as language games (Wittgenstein, 1953), and context-dependent (Fairhurst, 2009). Leaders must persuade themselves and others of their leadership, leaving open the possibility of contestation and conflict when multiple actors or observers are present. Contestation or discursive struggle implies power dynamics, as some views weigh more heavily than others by virtue of skill or position in the hierarchy (Smircich & Morgan, 1982); however, power concerns are not always foregrounded.

For example, Grint's (2000, 2005) constructionist leadership project not only recasts leadership as a series of art forms, as mentioned previously, but highlights the role of persuasion in creating believable leadership performances. His work on problem-centered leadership focuses on *wicked* and *tame problems* (Rittel & Webber, 1973), but also *crises* (Grint, 2005, 2010). *Wicked problems* require (collaborative) leadership, because no one person has the answer; *tame problems* require managerial solutions based on established processes; *crises* require commanders who do not waste time. Lest we form an addiction to elegant frameworks such as these, Grint reminds us that leaders often cast problems in one of these three ways to simply rationalize their preferred decision-making style.

Kelly (2008; Kelly, White, Martin, & Rouncefield, 2006) and colleagues use Wittgenstein (1953) to suggest that leadership should be seen

as a family resemblance among language games understood best by those who use the term *leadership* and its derivatives. Ethnomethodological methods are needed in order to focus on the local logics and labeling that organize situated applications of the term, including that of analysts (Kelly et al., 2006). Reminiscent of Grint (2005), Kelly and colleagues (2006) cast leadership as a *design problem* in which actors must figure out what leadership is in the context of what they do and persuade themselves and others that they are doing it.

Critical Management Studies. Following Cunliffe (2009), CMS can be divided into three perspectives, all focusing on power and the politics of meaning. The first, Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives, has little use for leadership study *per se*, preferring instead to focus upon forms of control that privilege elites such as shareholders, owners, and managers (Deetz, 1992). The second is postcolonial studies, which critique Western views of leadership and management in a global business society (Hall, 2010; Said, 1993), a topic addressed earlier. Finally, post-structuralist studies have been a prime generator of leadership research in recent years in the areas of denaturalization and dialectics and resistance.

In denaturalization studies, that which appears *the way things are* or *natural* are rendered problematic (Fournier & Grey, 2000). Here, post-structuralist studies center on discursive practices involving language systems, texts, ways of talking and thinking and nondiscursive practices such as institutionalized structures, social practices, and, particularly, techniques regulating what is normal or appears natural (Cunliffe, 2009, p. 25). For example, Fairhurst (2007a; Fairhurst, Church, Hagen, & Levi, 2011) and colleagues examine *discursive leadership* at the intersection of "little *d*" discourse or language-in-use practices, such as sequentiality, membership categorization, and narrative, with "big *D*" Discourses that, following Foucault (1990, 1995), are more enduring systems of thought sourcing communicating actors with

linguistic repertoires. They pay particular attention to executive coaching Discourses and the manner in which Foucault's (1990) confessional and examination technologies operate within them but also how they work to *other* female leaders and normalize alpha males as senior leaders, even while disciplining them.

In her critical feminist study of African American women executives, Parker (2005) writes about race neutrality in leadership studies and the way it *dominates* African American women leaders through unquestioned assumptions about superiority and inferiority, *excludes* them from the site or sources of knowledge production, and *contains* them by silencing those who would speak out. Gordon's (2010) analysis of a police organization likewise demonstrates how certain historical practices (read: *discourses*) are accepted as the natural order of things, reinforce hierarchy, and undermine efforts to facilitate empowerment and disperse leadership. Several other studies focus on the power of discourse to influence the subjectivities of leadership actors who discipline themselves to its ways, including Sewell, Barker, and Nyberg's (2012) study of management training employees as "piggies-in-the-middle"; Ziegler's (2007) study of organizational lists and discourses portraying firefighters as benevolent leaders, heroic saviors, self-aware servants, obedient rule followers, or critical-thinking team members; and Medved and Kirby's (2005) analysis of corporate mothering discourses, which create subject positions for stay-at-home mothers as professionals, managers, productive citizens, and irreplaceable workers. Likewise, Western (2008) examines four leadership discourses—controller, therapist, messiah, and eco-leader—and demonstrates the ways in which they privilege certain views of the world, impact leadership practices and organizational culture accordingly, and may have emancipatory potential.

Finally, work by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a) takes the leadership literature to task for portraying leadership as something special when it often loses itself amidst the everyday

aspects of work. They proclaim a need for leadership agnosticism as a result, thus following some CMS scholars' suspicion of leadership (cultural discourses) as a mechanism of domination (Hardy & Clegg, 1996) or as overly reductionist (Cunliffe, 2009). In another study, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003b) argue that the mundane job of managing is socially shaped by *highly responsive subjects* (i.e., managers) willing to buy into managerialist attempts to inflate the job of managing. More recent work critiques Alvesson and Sveningsson's view of leadership as a disappearing act (Kelly, 2008) or suggests a rapprochement between critical theory and leadership studies (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007).

The second CMS area involves leadership dialectics and resistance. Increasingly, post-structuralist CMS scholars are speaking out against views of power and control as a simple binary that privileges one or the other in order to capture resistance (or dissent) and control in more complex terms (Banks, 2008; Fleming & Spicer, 2008; Mumby, 2005). Collinson (2005) argues that the very nature of leadership is "discursive, dialectical, contested, and contradictory" as he explores three dialectics—control/resistance, dissent/consent, and men/women—and how they operate in the leadership relationship (p. 1427). Zoller and Fairhurst (2007) add several additional dialectics to understand dissent leadership, including fixed/fluid meaning potentials, overt/covert behavior, and reason/emotion, to suggest how position in the hierarchy matters little regarding who emerges as leader when these dialectics are managed well. On the rise, however, are a growing number of discursive dialectical analyses that examine tension, contradiction, and paradox in leadership/management contexts more generally (Martin, 2004; Real & Putnam, 2005; Tracy, 2004; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004).

To recap, in viewing leadership as inherently power based and a site of contestation, we are compelled to see leadership actors more complexly in two ways. First, who can become a leader is less a function of position in the hierarchy and

more a function of the ability to manage key dialectical tensions. Second, leadership actors are not just managers of meaning, they are also receptors of meaning based on the cultural discourses about leadership to which they are subject (Fairhurst, 2007a).

Leadership and the Potential for Reflexivity, Moral Accountability, and Change

The studies in this genre concern themselves with social constructionist praxis and are the product of four influences according to Fairhurst and Grant (2010). The first is a concern for ethics, heightened by a seemingly endless string of corporate scandals that bring attention to the dark side of leadership (Anderson & Englehardt, 2001; Christensen, Morsing, & Cheney, 2008; Johnson, 2009; Tourish, 2013). The second involves communication scholars' turn toward practical theory (Barge, 2001; Barge & Craig, 2009), which has roots in action science (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Schon, 1983) and the theorizing of Dewey (1938). The third influence in this genre is critical management education that, along with its emphasis on the operations of power, takes seriously the emancipatory goal of critical theory (Perriton & Reynolds, 2004). The final influence is the turn toward discourse, which Marshak and Grant (2008) describe as an interest in narrative, text, and conversation and the ways they shape and are shaped by organizational processes and change, the ways they reinforce mindsets, and the way that power structures require change via the story lines that instantiated them.

All four of these influences shape an emerging grammar of applied social constructionism that includes the following pairs of terms: (1) meaning and framing, (2) reflexivity and moral accountability (ethics), and (3) relationality and dialogue (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). For example, the concern for *meaning* and *framing* counters the tendency of some (managerial) leadership

actors to view communication as a simple transmission and to heighten sensitivity to language use as a basis for reflexive reality construction (Eisenberg, 2007; Fairhurst, 2005, 2011). As mentioned earlier, leadership aesthetics (Hansen et al., 2007) and social poetics (Shotter & Cunliffe, 2003) follow naturally from this work—as does research in the area of leadership narratives (Barge, 2004a; Boje, Alvarez, & Schooling, 2001) and appreciative inquiry in which the power of language is used to construct more positive, life-affirming ways to lead organizations (Barge & Oliver, 2003).

Reflexivity/moral accountability is another key pairing predicated on the role of introspection in promoting more ethical behavior (Anderson & Englehardt, 2001; Gardner, 2007). The work of Barge and colleagues (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2007; Barge & Fairhurst, 2008; Barge & Little, 2002) and Cunliffe and colleagues (2004, 2009; Cunliffe & Jun, 2005) is of interest here because of the ways in which they see opportunities for reflexivity and change in present moments, which they try to re-story to affect more ethically and relationally responsive leadership action. Such work is consistent with more general treatments of leadership ethics in the literature (Christensen et al., 2008; Johnson, 2009) as well as case analyses of ethical breakdowns by organizational leaders (Seeger & Ulmer, 2003; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005). Work by McKenna and Rooney (2008), which recasts *reflexivity* as *ontological acuity* to stress leaders' need to understand the cognitive and discursive basis of their knowledge foundations, is particularly interesting in this regard.

A final pairing involves *relationality* and *dialogue* among leadership actors (Forester, 1999; Isaacs, 1999). The view of relationality here is one of relational responsiveness (Cunliffe, 2002; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Shotter & Cunliffe, 2003) and sensitivity to systems dynamics (Barge, 2007; Barge & Fairhurst, 2008). Such views mesh nicely with a dialogic view, expressed by Gergen, Gergen, and Barrett (2004) as an “inter-subjective connection or synchrony . . . (that may) serve many different purposes, both negative and

positive” (pp. 42–44). Dialogue is increasingly a foundation for leadership praxis from a communication perspective (Barge, 2007; Barge & Little, 2002; Deetz, 2006).

In constructionist leadership, actors shape and are shaped by the realities, relationalities, and identities they jointly create. Ethnographic and discursive methods tend to be favored with this more social and cultural lens, which privileges a meaning-centered view of communication. In turn, leadership actors are encouraged to become reflexive practitioners and develop a heightened sensitivity to language and the meanings they cocreate in order to promote more ethical organizations and relationally responsive leadership.

Conclusion

We have been arguing that since the last *Handbook* review, there have been significant strides in the development of a communicative lens by which to study leadership. Based on the above literature review, we can conclude the following three points about the nature of this lens:

1. *Leadership communication is transmissional and meaning centered.* Analysts are fruitfully using both definitions to ask very different questions about leadership, such as those involving leadership outcomes and effectiveness for transmissional views and the (embodied) experience of leadership for meaning-centered views. This variety, including their combined use in future research agendas, should only enrich the study of leadership communication going forward.

2. *Leadership (communication) is relational, neither leader centric nor follower centric.* As we have seen, definitions of *relational* tend to vary in terms of post-positivist versus constructionist approaches (Uhl-Bien, Maslyn, & Ospina, 2011), where the former is mostly marked by theories of leadership relationships and its qualities (e.g., LMX) and a consideration of multiple levels and units of analysis (Connaughton & Daly, 2005). In

the latter, constructionist approaches focus on leadership as codefined (and thus contestable), dialogic (versus monologic), and a self-conscious way of being in relation to others (Barge & Fairhurst, 2008; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Interestingly, management scholars are increasingly joining communication scholars in making the case for a relationality grounded in social constructionism, initiating sometimes-difficult conversations over the past dominance of scientific methods in leadership study (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012).

3. *Influential acts of human-material organizing are the medium and outcome of leadership communication.* This claim not only takes seriously that leadership is interactionally produced (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2004; Wodak, Kwon, & Clarke, 2011) but emphasizes the study of leadership communicative *practices* embodied in talk, action, and other symbolic media increasingly associated with a material world (Cooren et al., 2012; Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009). We are only at the forefront of studies in this area, but the promise here is not just to “put abstract structures into live motion” (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 4), as interactional leadership scholars have been doing for some time now (Courtright, Fairhurst, & Rogers, 1989; Gronn, 1983), but the elucidation of leadership concepts (e.g., presence) once thought too abstract to understand in only the most general of terms.

4. *Leadership (communication) is inherently power based, a site of contestation about the nature of leadership.* This claim turns the view of leaders as transformative agents on its head, first, by recognizing that the agents are also receptors of meaning and disciplined products of culture based on the discourses about leadership to which they are subject (Fairhurst, 2007a). Second, based on the tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes of complex organizational life, who can become a leader appears less a function of position in the hierarchy and more a function of recognizing and managing these tensions. As such, there is much to learn through future

research regarding leadership actors' sensemaking, problem-setting, and tension-management strategies. This is because the discovery of counter-rational forms of thinking—most likely, within collaborative structures, because no one person can have all of the answers in complex environments—may hold the keys to navigating contemporary organizational life and the qualities leadership must assume in the 21st century (Grint, 2010; Sheep et al., 2010).

5. *Leadership (communication) is a diverse, global phenomenon.* If ever there was a need for post-positivist and constructionist views of leadership to work in tandem, it lies in understanding the cultural bases of leadership (L. Liu, 2010), especially in intercultural and postcolonial contexts. Post-positivist approaches to leadership study can be especially useful in noting central tendencies across cultures and cross-cultural comparisons, while constructionist leadership approaches help us to understand the unique power dynamics and meaning potentials wrought by multiple and competing (cultural) discourses. Just as important are the broader issues of space, distance, and time as they interlace with the affordances of new technologies and leading in multicultural environments (Connaughton & Daly, 2005).

6. *Leadership communication is alive with the potential for reflexivity, moral accountability, and change.* Work by Lewis (2011) reflects the kind of cross-paradigmatic and mixed-method commitment that many post-positivist leadership communication scholars are making to understand organizational change. However, at this juncture, the promise of more ethical leadership is perhaps best realized in constructionist leadership scholars' projects on reflexivity, moral accountability, dialogue, and inclusion (Barge, 2004c, 2007; Deetz, 2006; Parker, 2005). Unfortunately, the urgency of continuing to develop ethical leadership has never been greater.

Although organizational communication scholars have not been alone in establishing this

communicative lens on leadership, they are certainly making their mark—and, arguably, are uniquely positioned to continue to do so. Communication scholars have benefited enormously from the linguistic turn in philosophy in which language no longer mirrors or represents reality but constitutes it (Rorty, 1967). They have many tools by which to understand the negotiation of meaning and communication's unending variety and detail. They are also used to a healthy eclecticism and cross-paradigm work, as the humanists and social scientists occupying their departments long ago learned to talk to one another. Given rhetoric's strong presence in the communication discipline, analysts are also used to managing the tension between representation and critique, a key feature of a critical perspective. At the same time, organizational communication leadership scholars are as likely to describe or critique the discursive construction of leadership as they are to demonstrate how such constructions predicatively relate to various other processes and outcomes. It is an appreciation of this overall diversity that will best serve the field of organizational communication as it looks further into 21st century leadership.

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Note

1. WABA stands for “within and between (group) analysis” (Dansereau, Alutto, & Yammarino, 1984).

