LEADERSHIP FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Joseph C. Rost

Greenwood
PUBLISHING GROUP

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JOSEPH C. ROST

Foreword by James MacGregor Burns

PRAEGER

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To
James MacGregor Burns,
who changed
my whole way of thinking about
leadership

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Contents

Foreword

James MacGregor Burns

Imagine the following: that you, as a student of leadership, have been invited to speak to doctoral candidates at a prestigious graduate program in leadership; that you are welcomed by the director of the program with more than the usual warmth and hospitality; that he presents you to his students with words of praise that you know are exaggerated several-fold but which, if only 20 percent true, offer you a gratifying little ego trip; but that, halfway through his introduction, his tone changes, he begins to critique your work, and it seems that—well, the guest speaker made a valiant and worthwhile effort, but he did not quite make it, did not quite get it right through, did not produce a breakthrough, but still, he is worth listening to, scholarly warts and all.

Imagine all that and you will have entered the iconoclastic world of Joseph C. Rost's doctoral program in leadership at the School of Education of the University of San Diego. But you need not share my rather daunting experience to gain a sense of the intellectual creativity and critical spirit of that school. You need only read this book. It is a biting critique of the great majority of writings on leadership, and certainly not sparing of my own. It will be, I expect, an intellectual blockbuster.

Rost contends that most of the works on leadership are describing not leadership but something else, such as management. He quotes approvingly Chester Barnard's comment that leadership "has been the subject of an extraordinary

amount of dogmatically stated nonsense.'' Rost indicts scores of authors for not defining—or even trying to define—leadership, for succumbing to a series of fads that have dominated the history of the study of leadership, for failing to sense that we must enter a whole new ''paradigm'' of leadership as we approach the next decade and the next century, for seeing the trees and not the forest, and thus missing the main point. And what is that? For Rost the main point that has been missed is the role of followership in a dynamic interplay of leader-follower activism.

But *Leadership for the Twenty-first Century* is no mere polemic. Rost offers a fascinating section on the origins of the word *leadership*—it is old in usage but relatively recent in importance—and many pages on shifting definitions of leadership. He demonstrates how, over the decades, the study of leadership has been dominated in turn by great man theories, group leadership as facilitative, psychologists' trait theories (mainly), political scientists' behavioral theories (mainly), historians' contingency/situation theory (mainly), and excellence theory. All these fundamental concepts Rost criticizes with gusto. These pages alone make the work indispensable for teachers of leadership studies, and for their students.

Since the vast majority of leadership studies these days are not about leadership, in Rost's view, but management, writers on that subject will feel challenged—indeed, infuriated—by Rost's views on the matter. Those studies, he contends, narrow and oversimplify a complex set of influence relationships, leader-follower interactions, and mutual purposes. They lack an adequate concept of power. They underestimate the multiple and complex relationships in which leader and follower activists are involved. Rost makes clear his own distinction between management and leadership—one that many management theorists, I expect, will not accept.

This work, in my view, is the most important critique of leadership studies in our time, and as such will stand as one of a half-dozen indispensable works on leadership. Will it also stand as a major positive contribution to the understanding of leadership? For some time the jury—the many jurors—will be out before rendering this verdict. But I expect that Rost's call for a ''post-industrial'' concept of leadership—the most important concept in the book—will put him in the vanguard of a whole new force and direction in leadership theory.

In the spirit of Rost and his school, I cannot refrain from seizing this golden opportunity of being the first to criticize Rost's own argument in this volume (ah, sweet revenge!). I suggest that despite his intense and impressive concern about the role of values, ethics, and morality in transforming leadership, he underestimates the crucial importance of these variables. Even more I miss (and this reflects my own strong bias) a grasp of the role of great conflict in great leadership; Rost leans toward, or at least is tempted by, consensus procedures and goals that I believe erode such leadership. But Rost's main theme towers over such criticism. In this work he calls for a new school of leadership to face the leadership demands of the twenty-first century. This book could well become the Bible of such a school.

Preface

This book has taken a long time to write. Not the actual writing, but what has happened in my mind and in my life, which is the heart and soul of what is in this book.

I can remember very distinctly thinking about leadership as a high school student in the 1940s. More reflection occurred in college, especially when I wrote a thesis on the events in Japan that led to World War II. When I began teaching history and social studies in high school in the Midwest, I facilitated discussions about leadership among the students. I also have done leadership. I became very involved in a thirteen-state effort to infuse the study of non-Western cultures into the secondary social studies curriculum. I also spearheaded a youth movement to liberalize Roman Catholicism through the development of lay persons as church leaders.

As part of a master's degree, I wrote a thesis on Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempt to pack the Supreme Court in 1937, which was clearly a study of leadership although I did not frame it in that conceptual context.

When I became a Catholic school principal and later a public school district superintendent, leadership was constantly on my mind. And I was always involved in reform movements to make high schools more educationally relevant and effective. During a two-year leave of absence to complete my doctoral studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I studied leadership explicitly and

intensely. For my dissertation, I researched the successful attempt of Governor Patrick Lucey and the Wisconsin Legislature to merge the state's two university systems in 1972. I used Lindblom's (1968) reconstructive leadership model to make sense of that policy-making process.

When I came to the University of San Diego in 1976, I helped inaugurate a leadership doctoral program, a master's program in educational administration, and a leadership minor for undergraduates. Starting an educational administration program was an ordinary experience. Inaugurating the leadership doctoral program was a heady experience, the most extraordinary in my life. Since it was a leadership program (not a management or administration program), and since we wanted to study leadership from a multidisciplinary perspective with doctoral candidates from different professions but house the program in the School of Education, we were involved in double-duty (and at times multiple-duty) change processes simultaneously. There were no models in other universities that we could find, so we had to create the program and the curriculum from the ground up. With that kind of challenge, leadership had to be one's life, not one's job or profession.

Leadership for the Twenty-first Century is a critique of the efforts of leadership scholars and practitioners in the twentieth century to understand leadership based on the values and cultural norms of the industrial paradigm. It is also an effort to move our understanding of leadership forward, toward the postindustrial paradigm that will take hold in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 1 introduces three themes that are addressed throughout the book. Chapter 2 begins the critique of the leadership literature since 1930.

The first section in Chapter 3 details an investigation into the origins of the word *leadership* in English-speaking countries. Then definitions of leadership written in each decade from 1900 through 1979 are given, grouped in patterns of thought about leadership, and analyzed.

Chapter 4 is devoted to understanding how the concept of leadership was viewed in the 1980s, when an explosion of literature about leadership appeared in the bookstores. Again leadership definitions are grouped in patterns of thought and are followed by a more extended analysis of the views of leadership in the 1980s. The chapter ends with an explication of what I call the industrial leadership paradigm.

Chapter 5 begins with some ideas about the postindustrial era and its connection to our concept of leadership. Then I propose a new definition of leadership that is consistent with what some futurists see as the postindustrial paradigm of the twenty-first century. The definition has four essential elements, each of which is explained and amplified. The chapter ends with some thoughts on transformational leadership.

In Chapter 6, I deal with the issue of leadership and management. Past attempts to distinguish between the two have not been entirely successful, and I propose a conceptual framework that works because it uses the essential elements of the definitions—not traits, behaviors, and styles of leaders and managers—to make the distinction. Such a distinction, of course, is crucial to a postindustrial paradigm of leadership.
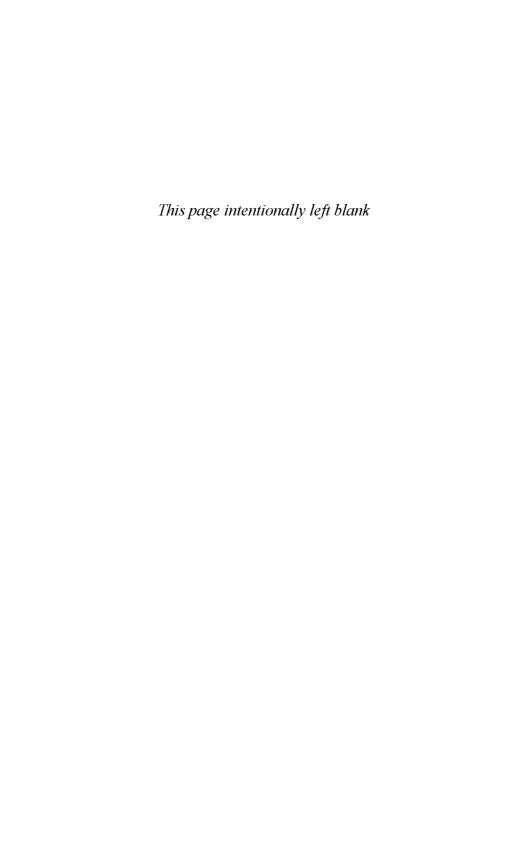
Chapter 7 develops some notions about the ethics of leadership. A distinction is made between the process and the content of leadership. Ethical perspectives concerning the process of leadership are fundamental to the nature of leadership as a relationship. The ethical content of leadership, which involves the changes that leaders and followers intend, poses severe problems because traditional ethical frameworks are only minimally helpful in confronting the ethical issues that leaders and followers must face in proposing changes in their organizations and societies. Finally, I propose two tentative ways out of this dilemma, but clearly there has to be much more thought given to this critical area of concern.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, summarizes the analysis and conclusions given throughout the book, and I make some suggestions to academic scholars, transition specialists (consultants and trainers), and practitioners for improving the study and practice of leadership in the twenty-first century. Actually, in the 1990s it is not too soon to start these efforts to transform our understanding of leadership. Thus, the final plea is for those of us concerned about the future to begin now.

While I have benefited enormously from the interactions with and the intellectual stimulation I have received from the leadership professors and students at the University of San Diego, and from the intense collaborations with educators as we have attempted to exert leadership in secondary and higher education, the analysis and proposals in this book are my responsibility alone. I am happy to take the credit and the blame for them, as the case may be.

I am indebted to several colleagues who reviewed the manuscript during various stages of its preparation and who made numerous helpful suggestions to improve the work. Their names shall remain anonymous. However, Alison Bricken of Praeger Publishers deserves special mention for her original evaluation of this book's merits, and she and Bert Yaeger were immensely helpful in editing and publishing the work. I also want to thank Edward DeRoche, dean of the School of Education at the University of San Diego, for supporting this work by awarding several faculty research grants and a sabbatical leave to facilitate the research for and the writing of this book.

Finally, there are family members and close friends who have been very supportive: with encouragement in times of what seemed to be a never-ending research project; with pressure in times of fatigue and letting go; with love and care in times of difficult analysis and writer's block, or fear. Thanks to one and all.

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The Problem with Leadership Studies

Leadership studies is an emerging discipline devoted, as the name suggests, to the study of leadership as it is practiced in different organizations and societies. Most of the people who call themselves leadership scholars study leadership in one academic discipline or profession. Numerous examples abound: Bailey (1988) in anthropology, Bass (1985) in social psychology, Hersey and Blanchard (1988) in human relations/resources, Selznick (1957) in sociology, Sergiovanni (1990) in education, Tucker (1981) in political science, Whitehead and Whitehead (1986) in theology, and Zaleznik (1989) in business. By far, most leadership scholars are in schools of business and write for corporate executives and business students.

These one-discipline scholars are easily recognized because they almost always put an adjective in front of the word *leadership*, such as business leadership, educational leadership, or political leadership; and they strongly hold the assumption that leadership as practiced in the particular profession they are studying is different from leadership as practiced in other professions.

The same can be said for leadership practitioners—those who lead organizations—and those who are responsible for professional training and development in leadership. Most of these leadership experts are heavily involved in only one profession either as trainers or as leaders, and by far the largest percentage are in business organizations. Educational and political organizations have their share

of such experts, but they are comparatively few in terms of numbers and influence.

In the 1980s a cadre of academics, trainers, and practitioners appeared on the scene who rejected the single profession and single academic discipline approach to the study and practice of leadership. These people increasingly use the term *leadership studies* to explain what they do because the title connotes a multidisciplinary, if not an interdisciplinary, approach to understanding and practicing leadership. These scholars have inaugurated university programs in leadership studies at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and these programs enroll undergraduate students with different academic majors or graduate students in different professions. There are also several doctoral programs in leadership studies throughout the United States that are graduating academics who teach in other leadership programs, training and development professionals who head their own consulting firms or professional development programs in large organizations, and practitioners who put leadership to work in many public and private organizations. The University of San Diego has such a program.

In 1991, the University of Richmond (Virginia) will inaugurate the first undergraduate program in the United States leading to a bachelor's degree with leadership studies as a major. It will not be the last.

Examples of multidisciplinary scholars who have written books on leadership are still somewhat rare, but their numbers are increasing. Burns (1978) is probably the most widely read. Maccoby (1981), Gouldner (1950), Greenleaf (1977), McCall and Lombardo (1978), and Paige (1977) were other early advocates of the interdisciplinary approach. More recently, Adams (1986), Cleveland (1985), Ford (1990), Gardner (1990), Heller, Van Til, and Zurcher (1986), Henrickson (1988), Kellerman (1984b), and Rosenbach and Taylor (1984) have used such an approach. To some extent, Bennis (1989a), Nanus (1989), and Peters (1987) have developed a more generalized view of leadership that reaches across professions, although they are more noted for their studies of business leadership. Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Willner (1984) used a multidisciplinary approach to study charismatic leadership.

An increasing number of practitioners are able to engage in leadership in a variety of contexts. And an increasing number of training and development experts offer interdisciplinary professional development programs in leadership for practitioners. Many of these people have graduated from the leadership doctoral programs that tend to take a multidisciplinary approach to leadership studies.

This new trend in leadership studies brings with it a promising breakthrough in our understanding of leadership. The study of leadership has been mired in a single disciplinary view for most of the twentieth century; the leadership studies approach allows scholars and practitioners to think radically new thoughts about leadership that are not possible from an unidisciplinary approach.

There are many problems confronting leadership scholars and practitioners in the 1990s. Some of these stem from the study and practice of leadership since

the 1930s. Those problems will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. For the present, I want to discuss three overarching problems that leadership scholars and practitioners must confront in the 1990s. Solving these problems is crucial to the development of leadership studies as a serious academic area of inquiry. Dealing with these problems is extremely important to the practice of leadership in the twenty-first century.

These three problems actually introduce the themes that appear over and over again in this book. They did not suddenly come on the scene at the beginning of the 1990s. Rather, they evolved out of the ferment generated in leadership studies during the 1980s, the inadequacies in our understanding of leadership as it has been defined over the years, and the transition from an industrial to a postindustrial paradigm in the United States and other Western countries.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERIPHERY AND CONTENT IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES

The first problem of leadership studies has been the emphasis that writers on leadership have placed on (1) what is peripheral to the nature of leadership and (2) what I call the content of leadership—the ideas and information that leaders and followers in particular professions or organizations must know in order to influence one another in a leadership relationship. Traditional leadership scholars and the theories they have developed have been almost totally concerned with the peripheries of leadership: traits, personality characteristics, "born or made" issues, greatness, group facilitation, goal attainment, effectiveness, contingencies, situations, goodness, style, and, above all, the management of organizations—public and private. These peripheral elements are, for the most part, visible and countable, susceptible to statistical manipulation, accessible in terms of causality probabilities, and usable to train people in the habits of doing what those in the know may think is the right thing.

The emphasis on peripheral elements allows leadership practitioners to seize something tangible in their quest to define and practice leadership and to believe in the effectiveness of the prescribed behaviors. That emphasis allows followers to feel good about following because they can see leaders taking charge of organizations according to scripts written in their minds. Finally, the peripheral emphasis allows scholars to feel good about themselves because these theories were developed using the best scientific methods known to researchers and conformed to the best logical positivist framework for research. Whether the theories and research actually dealt with the essence of leadership did not seem to have been overly important to these researchers. Rather, what seems to have been important was that the research was based on empirical data and that it was done according to the traditional, quantitative methods.

On another level, traditional leadership scholars and practitioners are very interested in the content of leadership—what leaders need to know about a particular profession, organization, or society in order to be influential in it. The

content of leading—the knowledge that leaders must have—is almost always thought of as more important as a determinant of leadership effectiveness than the process of leading. Such things as knowing the state-of-the-art theories and practices in a profession; understanding human behavior, situations, environmental stress, and future trends; having a grasp of the technical information needed in an organization; knowing the critical data needed to introduce change; and even an intuitive understanding of what all these new ideas mean for the profession or organization one is leading—these are the real essence of leadership, the stuff that separates the real people from the quiche makers. The process of leadership, the understanding of leadership as a relationship, the connection among leaders and followers—all these are far down on the list of priorities that scholars and practitioners must have in order to understand how to put leadership to work.

That this "periphery and content" syndrome is so pervasive can easily be illustrated by counting the number of workshops or seminars on the content of leadership as opposed to the process; by analyzing the number of class hours spent in educational, business, or public administration programs on the content of leadership as opposed to the process; by paying attention to media coverage of the content of leadership instead of the process; or by counting the number of books or journal articles with leadership in the title that deal primarily with the content of leadership and not the process.

The upshot of all this is that leadership scholars have spilled much ink on the peripheral elements surrounding leadership and its content instead of on the nature of leadership as a process, on leadership viewed as a dynamic relationship. Most of the research on leadership has emphasized the same two items—the peripheral aspects and the content of leadership—and almost none has been aimed at understanding the essential nature of what leadership is, the process whereby leaders and followers relate to one another to achieve a purpose.

Many scholars have wondered why we have not been able to get a conceptual handle on the word *leadership*. Stogdill (1974) and later, Bass (1981) collected and analyzed some 4,725 studies of leadership that Bass listed on 189 pages of references in his handbook. Stogdill concluded that "the endless accumulation of empirical data has not produced an integrated understanding of leadership" (p. vii). Bass, in his update of Stogdill's *Handbook*, came to the same conclusion, but ended on a note of optimism:

Some disparage the thousands of research studies of leadership completed with the supposed lack of progress. Yet, when we compare our understanding of leadership in 1980 with what it was thirty years earlier, we can agree with T. R. Mitchell (1979) that "there seems to be progress in the field. Theory and research are developing and much of what is being done is being used in practice. There is reason for controlled optimism. Yet, the challenges are still there for the years ahead." (p. 617)

Three years earlier, Burns saw little reason to be optimistic after analyzing past leadership study and practice. He wrote:

The crisis of leadership today is the mediocrity or irresponsibility of so many of the men and women in power. . . . The fundamental crisis underlying mediocrity is intellectual. If we know all too much about our leaders, we know far too little about *leadership*. We fail to grasp the essence of leadership that is relevant to the modern age. (1978, p. 1)

"Leadership," he concluded, "is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (p. 2).

In 1984, Burns returned to the same theme: We know much about our leaders, he opined, but we know very little about what leadership really is. He criticized the media for spending "twice as much time commenting on trivial personality and tactical matters as on substance," newspeople who are "fascinated by little blunders" or "matters essentially lacking in substance or significance," and media coverage that is "perverse, superficial, unfair, [and] often biased" (Burns, 1984, pp. 155–156). In sum, we relate to our leaders by "mass spectatorship and personalism or personalismo" (p. 156). And why are these tendencies disturbing? Because their long-run effect undermines "effective, committed, collective, and durable leadership in politics" and has "dire implications for governance" (p. 156). Because these tendencies lead to a "politics of personality [rather] than of policy, program, authority, governance . . . , a politics that . . . seeks votes by appealing to short-run, superficial, and narrow needs and hopes," a "leadership [that] is classically short-run, unstable, ineffective, irresponsible" (p. 156).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) complained that "thousands of empirical investigations of leadership have been conducted in the last seventy-five years alone, but no clear and unequivocal understanding exists as to what distinguishes leaders from nonleaders" (p. 4). They opined that "books on leadership are often as majestically useless as they are pretentious," and insisted that they did not want "to further muddle the bewildering melange of leadership definitions" (p. 20) in their book.

Smith and Peterson (1988) cited 451 references in their study of leadership theory and research, and they review many of them in the first four chapters. They warned their readers: "Cumulatively, the chapters delineate the impasse which many researchers of leadership have diagnosed in recent years, and which has lead quite a few practitioners to conclude that research into leadership has little to offer them" (p. 1).

My own view is that it should be no surprise that scholars and practitioners have not been able to clarify what leadership is, because most of what is written about leadership has to do with its peripheral elements and content rather than with the essential nature of leadership as a relationship. If scholars and practitioners have not focused on the nature of leadership, it should not surprise any of us who are interested in the subject that we do not know what leadership is.

Thus, in the 1990s, it is absolutely crucial that scholars and practitioners interested in leadership studies de-emphasize the peripheral elements and the content of leadership, and concentrate on understanding its essential nature. There