Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries

# *Reflections on Leadership and Career Development*

*On the Couch*
with
MANFRED KETS DE VRIES

Winner of the International Leadership Association
Lifetime Achievement Award 2008

# REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

## *On the Couch with Manfred Kets de Vries*

*On the Couch with Manfred Kets de Vries* offers an overview of the author's work spanning four decades, a period in which Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries has established himself as the leading figure in the clinical study of organizational leadership.

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# REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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To Elisabet—
who knows that patience is a major companion of wisdom.

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# INTRODUCTION

> An autobiography is only to be trusted when it reveals something disgraceful. A man who gives a good account of himself is probably lying, since any life when viewed from the inside is simply a series of defeats.
>
> —*George Orwell*

> I write fiction and I'm told it's autobiography, I write autobiography and I'm told it's fiction, so since I'm so dim and they're so smart, let them decide what it is or it isn't.
>
> —*Philip Roth*

> I don't think anyone should write their autobiography until after they're dead.
>
> —*Samuel Goldwyn*

Many of the major themes of this book—the relationship between leaders and followers, leadership archetypes, the enigma of Russia, and the challenges we all face at midlife and beyond—have marked formative experiences in my own life. Reviewing material that I have worked on over the course of 30 years I revisited many memories, some archaic ones, others more recent, which have informed my interest in these themes.

## BULLIES AND NARCISSISTS

One of my earliest memories is of being lost. However, because I was very young, I have never been sure whether it is a real memory or an implanted memory that I inadvertently internalized as the story was told to me over and over again by my mother. It is possible that these 'memo-

ries' were implanted—but in my mind's eye, I see myself doing these things from a first person perspective.

I was born and spent the first 11 years of my life in the outskirts of a small village called Huizen, on the Zuiderzee (now the Ijsselmeer), a large lake in the center of Holland, a place where people still wore traditional regional dress. The women wore very large white caps, while the men looked like crows, all dressed in black. The village was surrounded by endless meadows where cattle were raised. One day, it seems, I wandered off with my cousin and could not be found. My mother panicked and warned the authorities in the village. When there were important announcements or emergencies (like trying to find out what had happened to two small boys), the people in charge of the town hall sent a person armed with a rattle to bicycle around and make announcements. In this instance, the alarm was sounded and the whole village was alerted that two small boys had gone missing. Eventually, the two of us were found. From the dubious safety of one side of a small ditch, I was busily throwing stones at a big bull that was getting madder and madder. I still wonder whether I was trying to drive the bull away or was I the instigator of its fury—probably the latter. I don't remember why I was doing what I was doing. Luckily, the cavalry arrived in the shape of a farmer who saved us from what would have been an extremely unfortunate incident. This story was repeated to me many times over the years by my mother, who saw it as a metaphor for my attitude toward authority and 'bullies'—less sympathetically, my rebelliousness.

## BEING AN EXPLORER

Some things never change. All my life, I have obeyed the impulse to court danger. As a child, I always wanted to be an explorer—I wanted to go into the jungles in the heart of Africa or the Amazon, or to the deserts of the Sahara or Outer Mongolia, climb mountains in Asia or Canada, or be at the North Pole. The call of the wild was always with me. Moving from the center of the village where I lived during World War II to the countryside helped to deal with my adventurous bent. It was a great area to play in. Stalking birds, animals, and fish became a popular pastime. Luckily, our neighbor had a whole menagerie of creatures. Turtles, ducks, chickens, turkeys, pigeons, rabbits, dogs, and cats all roamed the garden. The most imposing creatures, however, were the geese, which, when they felt threatened, would raise their necks, make a lot of noise, and run after me, trying to peck me. All these animals

made up part of my inner life. My explorations in the heather, the forest, and the meadows became a transitional world where geese would magically transform into buffalos, cats into lions, and pike into piranhas and sharks. These outdoor activities continued when we moved to an apartment by the North Sea. The sea and the dunes were even more exciting playgrounds.

What added to the theme of adventure in my inner world was my fascination for the novels of Karl May, a German writer of adventure stories. In particular, I would dream my way through his novels set in the American West—as he described it, a dangerous territory populated by cowboys and Indians. I was fascinated by May's characterization of Winnetou, the wise chief of the Apache, and Old Shatterhand, Winnetou's white blood brother (and May's alter ego). These armchair 'thrills and regressions' were followed by Hergé's comic strip Tintin, describing the exploits of a young Belgian reporter in all parts of the world, including space. To add to this sense of (sublimated) adventure, there were also cartoon strips of Tom Puss and Oliver B. Bumble ('Tom Poes' and 'Olivier B. Bommel' in Dutch), an anthropomorphic cat and bear, written by Marten Toonder. Their adventures and misadventures helped to quench my thirst for exploration. In addition, I was fascinated by the historically oriented voyages in a Viking ship of the cartoonist Hans Kresse's Eric de Noorman (Eric the Norseman). I remember clearly his many expeditions to uphold what was right. His exploits took him to Russia, China, Mongolia, Britain, North America, and even Atlantis. These adventures filled my imagination, and were acted out through various games in the forests, heather, and dunes.

At university I became fascinated by the Russian novelists and playwrights, triggered by discovering Ivan Turgenev's book *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, a collection of short stories based on his own observations while hunting at his mother's estate. I loved that book, which fed my passion for the outdoors. In it, Turgenev also described the abuse of the peasants and the injustices of the system that constrained them. At the time, a Dutch publisher was translating all the Russian classics into Dutch, a series to which I subscribed. In this way, I found other Russian writers, like Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Alexandrovich Goncharov, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Isaac Babel, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. It is little wonder that Russia has remained an area of continuing interest to me.

Sadly, on reaching adulthood, I realized that there's not much left to explore, but in my adult life—like the heroes of my youth—I've managed it by going on strange expeditions, usually combined with climbing, fishing, and hunting. After glasnost, I was one of the first to

travel to previously forbidden regions of the Russian Federation. I liked to explore the country's wild places, from Kamchatka, to Siberia, to the High Altai. I also went to the old republics, like Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kirghizistan. I get great pleasure from going to totally out of the way places where nobody else has been.

To pursue my anthropological bent, I like to better understand the indigenous people in those regions. I don't have any special training—I've spent time with the Inuit in the Arctic, the Indians in the Amazon, and the pygmies in the rain forest and I've relied on their special skills to find my way back. Being with these people gives me a sense of humility—realizing how knowledgeable they are in their natural environment. It also helps me appreciate the simple things of life—a good antidote of the luxuries to be found in the center of Paris.

During my exploits I've been seriously frightened on rare occasions, but those were usually the most exciting. Once on the Alaska Peninsula, early in the morning, a hungry Kodiak bear tried to get into my tent, an incident worth remembering. At another time, in the same area, I climbed a mountain with a guide, to look for two bears that I had seen at the top. Climbing up, we tracked them closer and closer until I suddenly spotted the two of them lying beside each other, not far from us, at which point it dawned on me that it was the mating season. I wanted to take a picture but when I went to take my camera out of my backpack, one of the bears caught the movement, and came straight for me. I dropped my camera, grabbed my gun, and was preparing to shoot when the guide who was with me stood up, waved his arms to make himself look as big as possible and yelled at the bear, which stopped dead in its tracks, and turned less than ten meters from us.

On another occasion, I had crossed the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, dressed as a Russian soldier—the only way to get in, as the Soviet war with that country was at its peak. There was bombing on the adjacent mountain. I will never forget my guide—as we climbed the mountain, hanging with our nails on the steepest cliffs I had ever seen—saying that we were '*сумасшедший*', or crazy. Not only was there the danger of breaking our necks, but there were also the mujahideen to watch out for, who had their own ideas of what to do with our necks. On our return to Tajikistan, following the course of a river at night, in a jeep, four sharp, penetrating lights suddenly appeared: Russian tanks. We were very lucky not to be shot to smithereens.

These stories say a great deal about my attitudes to independence and personal safety. I have never shaken off the impulse to explore, test, challenge, and ask questions. In my work, when trying to build better teams and organizations, some describe me as the 'Lord High Execu-

tioner' of asking questions of all and sundry—whatever their position. I may do so, but I do it—I hope—with very good intentions.

Those attitudes of rebelliousness and adventure have inevitably influenced the way I have dealt with leader–follower relationships throughout my life. We are all leaders and followers, in whatever sphere we operate—social, professional, and personal. Although academic institutions are not the simplest types of organizations, they are the professional context in which I have made my career and have had to make sense of the relationship between leaders and followers, first, as a student in Amsterdam, Harvard, and Montreal, and later in my role as a professor *vis-à-vis* various deans. As a follower, I have sometimes had to engage in a delicate dance with my leaders. Of course, like everyone else, the way I manage that dance originates in my relationship with my father and mother. As I have suggested, my rebelliousness toward authority and need for independence were established very early in my life. They informed my interest in entrepreneurship and pointed me to the road I took to becoming a psychoanalyst, a professor, a consultant—and a fly fisherman and hunter.

However, my earliest impressions of leadership were also colored—much more darkly—by my vague memories of life in Nazi-occupied Holland, and the stories I heard about the activities of the Nazis party in our country. Here I must have absorbed something of my family's (and particular my mother's) rebellious attitude toward bullies. During World War II, my maternal grandfather—who was a good carpenter—sheltered '*onderduikers*' (Jews and others who were hiding from the Nazis). He had built a double wall in the house to create a remarkable hiding place. The entrance to that place was underneath a carpet. Off and on, up to 20 people hid in his farmhouse, including a 12-year-old boy who had walked all the way from Poland with his sister. Feeding these 'non-existent' people, with strict wartime food rationing, was a major endeavor for my father and mother.

Understandably, being not allowed to go outside the house, the *onderduikers* (including my Jewish paternal grandparents) were all very bored and used to make a huge fuss of me. But the dangers of hiding people and possible discovery were enormous. The most likely punishment was death in a concentration camp. It would have been so easy for a small child to say or do the wrong thing. Although I have no clear memory of it, I must have been told not to talk about the people hidden in the house. But I do remember my mother, who was born in Germany and spoke fluent German, being very assertive—and fearless—with the *Grüne Polizei* (the Nazi police force) when they interrogated people in the house, looking for *onderduikers* and her heroic feat of getting my

father out of one of the transition camps—a temporary holding place for one of the death camps. The winter of 1944 was very harsh and Holland was empty of supplies; everything was siphoned off to Germany. My mother made many excursions with her sister into the countryside, on bicycles with hard rubber tires, to trade with farmers to obtain food. Now, the names of my mother and her parents are listed among those of other 'righteous Gentiles'—people who saved lives—at the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

If my early childhood experiences taught me a lot about the darker side of leader–follower relationships, I was also fast becoming aware of the many facets of narcissism. Like many young boys (and adults), I was no stranger to attention-seeking. I discovered a spectacular way of impressing all and sundry. For a while my brother and I, determined to trump the other boys in the neighborhood, specialized in falling out of trees. We had a very tall conifer in our garden, with plenty of well-spaced branches to enable a controlled fall, and we could make the exercise look a great deal more dramatic than it was. The worst aspect was being badly scratched—but it was worth the excitement. What made it even better was that no one else (with the exception of my brother) dared to do it. I can still remember the enormous fright of my grandfather, who caught us in the act. Attention-seeking though this kind of entertainment was, it was essentially innocent and comfortably at the healthy end of the narcissistic spectrum. The opposite extreme of narcissism run mad was being played out around me in the larger world.

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

As I grew older, and saw the people around me aging, I became more and more interested in the adult life cycle. When I started teaching, much had been written about the early stages of human development, starting with Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality*. This famous work had established the foundation—but what about the stages of adult life? At that time, one of the leading figures in human development, Erik Erikson, was teaching the most popular course at Harvard University. I was lucky enough to be able to follow his classes; I met him, and became deeply interested in his work. I once remember sitting in a taxi in New York with Erikson and a very close friend and colleague, Sudhir Kakar—now a leading scholar and psychoanalyst. We were returning from a ceremony held by the International Psychoanalytic Association to honor Erikson for his work on the human life cycle. The taxi driver drove like a maniac, screaming and yelling, and commenting on all the 'idiots' on

the road. At one point, he asked us if we knew what made people 'tick.' We glanced at each other and kept quiet—it was clearly a rhetorical question—while he treated us all, including the giant in the field of human behavior, to a lecture on human psychology. It was an unforgettable and very funny moment.

Ironically, I wrote the articles about retirement, on which the chapters in the final part of this book are based, long before I reached the age when many people tend to retire. When I revisited them for this book, having now come closer to that point in my life, I was struck by how little I wanted to change them. I believe my impulse to write about a life stage that still lay in the distant future was related to my father's unhappiness about being forced to retire, and the disorientation he experienced.

My father joined a family firm in Amsterdam when he was 16 and remained with the firm throughout his working life. When the owner died after World War II, my father promised him on his deathbed that he would take care of his wife and children. And he did so by dramatically expanding the business, making them all wealthy in the process. But children grow up. Unfortunately, these children didn't have my father's entrepreneurial capabilities. Although he received a good salary throughout his career with the company, my father was neither given (nor asked for) shares. At 65, he was pushed out—one of the sons-in-law (the most capable) wanted to become president. This change in position was a catastrophe for my father, as, like many entrepreneurial types, the company was his life. Interestingly enough, after my father's exit, the family members started to fight among themselves and the company went down the drain. It was hard for my father to see so many people, who had worked with him for a lifetime, lose their job.

My father, to save his own sanity, and I imagine in a spirit of some defiance, after he was pushed out, decided to start his own entrepreneurial company rather than retire. He is not the type to plant roses. This made an enormous impression on me. I had already learned not to be dependent on other people and the value of my own independence: now I saw at first-hand the proof of the value of those ideals—and, through my father's example, to reject the arbitrariness of society's expectations of age-appropriate behavior.

An entrepreneur in my own way, and differently than my father, I have been an academic entrepreneur. Not only does my work involve teaching, writing, and playing with ideas, at INSEAD, I have also developed one of the largest leadership coaching centers in the world. And, to hedge my bets, I also have my own consulting firm. I am well aware that there are some people who start their retirement

long before they stop working but that way of behaving has never been attractive to me. I don't want to retire from something before I have something to retire to. I am always interested in doing new things. Furthermore, I also believe that age is only a number—a means of keeping track. As I play many roles in life, as long as my mind is functioning, I certainly will not retire. How can I retire from life? I know that sooner or later, I will die, but 'retirement' is not part of the package. There are still too many things and places left to explore. As the comedian George Burns said, 'You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old.'

# ABOUT THIS BOOK

To start off this book, I take an in-depth look at the way basic psychological processes operate on individual and organizational performance and analyze these in the context of case studies of leaders and organizations. In the second part, I look at various leadership styles, including a lengthy study of Vladimir Putin, as 'CEO of Russia, Inc.' The third part of the book examines the career life cycle and how leaders and executives cope (or fail to cope) with *rites de passage* like succession and retirement.

**Part 1 The Origins of Leadership** examines the qualities that characterize great leaders and the interactions, both positive and dysfunctional, between leaders and followers. Taking a psychological perspective, I describe the processes at work in leader–follower relationships and leadership coaching and counselling interventions.

**Part 2 Leadership and Personality** builds on the clinical orientation introduced in Part 1. In these chapters I introduce a range of character types and leadership archetypes, examining how they operate within organizations, and how to deal with them as bosses, colleagues, and consultants.

**Part 3 Leadership and Career Development** is an examination of the issues, anxieties and opportunities that we face at midlife and beyond, a critical time both personally and professionally, as we confront changes in family life and our career trajectory changes direction.

In the **Conclusion**, I explore the ways in which change can be embraced to alter our perspective on life, giving us the opportunity to become 'twice-born.'

Manfred Kets de Vries
Paris 2009

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This is the second book in a three-part series, *On the Couch with Manfred Kets de Vries*, a collection of essays about leadership and career development that I have written over the last 30 years. Most of the chapters in this book are based on previously published material that has been revised and updated. The chapters in Part 3, 'Leadership and Career Development,' conflate a number of shorter articles published in various journals and extracts from some of my books. I would like to thank my editor, Sally Simmons, and her colleagues Carol Schaessens and Mary Conochie at the Cambridge Editorial Partnership, for their help in reshaping such a large amount of material. Sally has managed to keep her sense of the ridiculous throughout. It is her way of dealing with life's absurdities.

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PART 1

# THE ORIGINS OF LEADERSHIP

# INTRODUCTION

The search for the origins of leadership seems to preoccupy a lot of us. There are over five million entries for 'origins of leadership' in Google, so plenty of people have obviously tried hard to identify them. In their most basic form, the origins of leadership, like so many other aspects of human nature, are probably to be found in our fundamental needs systems. These in turn are a function of our earliest experiences, which determine the roles we will play in our human drama. Some of us are marked out as leaders, others as followers, and our success in either of these roles depends on our finding the right position on this stage.

The first chapter in this book is about narcissism—an inescapable aspect of human nature—and leadership. Everyone knows the myth of Narcissus, the beautiful boy who rejected all his would-be lovers only to lose his heart to his own reflection, and pine away to death, grieving over the impossibility of consummating his passion. But the real hero of the story is the prophet Tiresias. When he was born, Narcissus' mother, fearful that her son was too beautiful to live, consulted Tiresias about the boy's future. The seer first prophesized a long life for Narcissus. But his prophecy carried a warning: 'If Narcissus ever truly knows himself, he will die.' In making this prophecy, Tiresias set the scene for the dramatization of one of our greatest challenges as human beings: for our psychological health we have to outgrow our childhood narcissism, which puts us at the center of everyone's existence. If we do not, we will sentence ourselves to a lifetime of isolation and illusion. Narcissus' inability to separate himself from the object of his own affection brought him an early death. Even as he was rowed over the Styx to Hell, he couldn't resist taking a last glimpse of himself in the river. The myth ends with Narcissus' metamorphosis into a spring flower—the ultimate symbol of the transience of beauty and existence.

Leaders, not surprisingly, tend to have a large dose of narcissism—but as I explain in the opening chapter of this book, narcissism has

generally had a bad press. There is such a thing as a healthy dose and it lies somewhere on a wide spectrum that ranges from grandiosity and showmanship to denigration and coldness. My successive 'couches' have been well warmed by narcissistic leaders and from my observations, I have identified three main types of narcissistic orientation that operate in leadership situations, all of which have their origins in early childhood experiences and relationships. I term these various forms reactive, self-deceptive and constructive narcissism and in the second part of this chapter, I examine how these different orientations work within organizations. All will be recognizable: but how can their narcissism be managed? What measures can be taken to control their behavior and to protect the people with whom they work?

In Chapter 2, I take a closer look at 'the influence game.' We all think we know a leader when we see one, but what characteristics and qualities do effective leaders have? What is it leaders do, to make people want to be part of their team? Without digressing too far into the psychology of followership, I take the examples of some formidable, more 'heroic' types of leader in the worlds of politics and business (including Charles de Gaulle, General MacArthur, Winston Churchill, Henry Ford and Walt Disney) and examine how their leadership behavior puts them at the top of the influence game. As well as their more intangible skills—their ability to provide focus, their gift for empathy, their appreciation and manipulation of symbolism, their sense-making—their effectiveness largely derives from their capacity for sheer hard graft. They need to know their stuff, and they need the stamina to persevere in getting what they want. Churchill's public rhetoric was universally inspirational but his personal motto was much more prosaic: Keep Buggering On. Perhaps more than anything, however, effective leaders possess the kinds of qualities actors have—but actors who are directing their own script as they go along. For them, authenticity, consistency of character and performance is critical: one false step and it could be a company or an entire country, not just a performance, which is brought to a standstill.

At its best, organizational play is lively, playful and mutually beneficial: when it goes wrong, it shades into collusion, what I term 'a neurotic form of collaboration.' I extend the metaphor of the organizational theater in Chapter 3 but the approach I take to what goes on in the leader-follower relationship is drawn from a very different field of study—couple therapy, which I have discovered is eminently applicable to work settings. The organizational leader is an actor-director, selecting members of the cast and assigning roles. This requires a substantial quantity of integrity and trustworthiness. It is very easy to typecast some people and put them in roles where they will give what you want rather

than perform their part creatively. Once the insidious and largely unconscious process of projective identification—pushing our personal shortfalls onto others—takes hold, a huge amount of psychic energy is generated and wasted. Leaders and followers locked in collusive relationships experience high levels of stress, not least from the mutual need to maintain the equilibrium of a dysfunctional relationship. Chapter 3 offers some typical dysfunctional scenarios within organizations, tracing them to their roots in childhood development, and makes some initial recommendations about how individuals and 'organizational detectives'—consultants and professional counselors—can intercept and reveal these processes, allowing repair work to be done.

One of these is encouraging the ability to pick up on subliminal and non-verbal forms of communication, by 'listening with the third ear,' which I describe in detail in Chapter 4 as one of the key skills the therapist, leadership coach, and consultant bring to individual and organizational interventions. I wrote this chapter from the perspective of a management consultant or leadership coach who has some clinical training. My approach to my work with organizations is the application of a clinical paradigm of intervention, drawn not only from psychotherapy but also from cognitive theory, family systems theory, group dynamics, motivational interviewing, neuropsychiatry, and developmental psychology. In this chapter I look at a key element of all psychotherapeutic interventions—countertransference. In Book 1 in this series (*Reflections on Character and Leadership*) I wrote about transference, a process first identified by Sigmund Freud, who became aware that patients were transferring archaic feelings for others to him during interventions. Transference is an inappropriate repetition, in the present, of a relationship that was important in a person's childhood. All human relationships are mixtures of realistic and transference reactions.

Freud initially considered transference a nuisance, then realized that it provided a tool to deep understanding for both patient and therapist—indeed, we all transfer these archaic feelings to significant people and situations throughout our lives. The other side of this particular coin is countertransference, where the response of the consultant or therapist to the client is informed by the archaic feelings the patient evokes in the therapist. Countertransference is a useful tool for the therapist to uncover deep meaning and significance in an individual's inner theater—and incidentally, one reason why all would-be therapists would do well to undergo therapy themselves.

Part 1 ends on this analytical note and in Part 2, I put some leaders 'on the couch,' illustrating the many ways leadership personality works within organizations.

CHAPTER 1

# NARCISSISM AND LEADERSHIP[1]

> If each of us were to confess his most secret desire, the one that inspires all his deeds and signs, he would say, 'I want to be praised.' Yet none will bring himself to do so, for it is less dishonorable to commit a crime than to announce such a pitiful and humiliating weakness arising from a sense of loneliness and insecurity, a feeling that afflicts both the fortunate and the unfortunate with equal intensity. No one is sure of who he is, or certain of what he does. Full as we may be of our own worth, we are gnawed by anxiety and, to overcome it, ask only to be mistaken in our doubt, to receive approval from no matter where or no matter whom
>
> —*Corian, Désir et honneur de la gloire*

> Whoever loves becomes humble. Those who love have, so to speak, pawned a part of their narcissism.
>
> —*Sigmund Freud*

## LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

We still know little about what makes a good leader, though not for any lack of research on the subject. The late scholar of leadership, Ralph Stogdill, made the discouraging statement that 'there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept' (Bass, 1981, p. 7). In his classic *Handbook of Leadership*, Stogdill reviewed 72 definitions proposed by scholars between 1902 and 1967.

[1] Some material in this chapter has previously appeared in published form in the following: Kets de Vries, M.F.R. and Miller, D. 'Narcissism and leadership: An object relations perspective,' *Human Relations,* 1985, 38 (6), 583–601.

The proliferation of literature on leadership is reflected by the increase in the number of articles listed in the *Handbook*: in the 1974 edition of the *Handbook* 3000 studies were referred to but seven years later, the number exceeded 5000. And the latest count will not be the end of it.

Thus competing theories clearly abound. We find Great Man theories, trait theories, environmental theories, person-situation theories, interaction-expectation theories, humanistic theories, exchange theories, behavioral theories, and perceptual and cognitive theories. This confused state of affairs caused some scholars to abandon the subject altogether and focus on more specific problems such as power or motivation. Other researchers, however, are less pessimistic, anticipating that the wealth of results constitutes some basis for a cogent theory of leadership. They attempt to escape the labyrinth of contradictory findings and theories of leadership by proposing a contingency paradigm (House and Baetz, 1979). Some try to explain the discrepancies in the research, noting that 'leadership has an effect under some conditions and not under others and also that the causal relationships between leader behavior and commonly accepted criteria of organizational performance are two-way' (House and Baetz, 1979, p. 348).

Despite the quantity of material on leadership we would argue that far richer characterizations of leadership are still needed: those taking into consideration both its cognitive and affective dimensions. Such characterizations are suggested by the psychoanalytic and psychiatric literature. Using these orientations to analysis, the inner world of leaders can be analyzed and their personalities and characters related to their behavior and situation. Research that aims to decipher intrapsychic thought processes and resulting actions thus involves the study of 'psycho-political drama' (Zaleznik and Kets de Vries, 1975; Kets de Vries, 2001, 2006), which relates managerial personality both to role behavior and to administrative setting.

In my view what most leaders seem to have in common is the ability to reawaken primitive emotions in their followers. When under the spell of certain types of leader, their followers often feel powerfully grandiose and proud, or helpless and acutely dependent. Max Weber (1947) used the term *charisma* to elucidate the strange influence of some leaders over followers which, for him, consisted of:

> a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them, the individual concerned is treated as a leader (pp. 358–359).

We might not want to go so far as Weber, but whatever strange quality leaders possess, some have the power to induce regressive behavior among their followers by exploiting (not necessarily in full awareness) unconscious feelings of their subordinates. In this process, some followers may try to embrace an idealized, omnipotent leader, one who will fulfill their dependency needs, which may lead to the destructive suspension of their own rational faculties.

In spite of the regressive potential of some leaders, there are, however, others who are prepared to transcend their personal agenda, who are able to create a climate of constructiveness, involvement, and care, who engender initiative, and spur creative endeavors. This is the kind of person Zaleznik (1977) had in mind when he wrote:

> One often hears leaders referred to in adjectives rich in emotional content. Leaders attract strong feelings of identity and difference, or of love and hate. Human relations in leader-dominated structures often appear turbulent, intense, and at times even disorganized. Such an atmosphere intensifies individual motivation and often produces unanticipated outcomes (p. 74).

James MacGregor Burns (1978) probably had similar thoughts when he compared 'transactional' with 'transformational' leadership. While the first type of leader motivates followers by exchanging rewards for services rendered (whether economic, political, or psychological), the latter type recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the successful transformational leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy their higher needs, and engages their full potential. The result of the most adept transformational leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents (Burns, 1978, p. 4).

To conclude, leadership can be pathologically destructive or intensely inspirational. But what is it about the leaders themselves that causes them to be one or the other? I believe the answer lies in the degree of narcissism in the personality of the leader in question.

## THE NARCISSISTIC DISPOSITION IN LEADERS

Narcissists live with the assumption that they cannot reliably depend on anyone's love or loyalty. They feel they must rely on themselves rather than on others for the gratification of life's needs. While pretending to

be self-sufficient, in the depth of their being they experience a sense of deprivation and emptiness. To cope with these feelings and, perhaps, as a cover for their insecurity, narcissists become preoccupied with establishing their adequacy—whether in terms of power, beauty, status, prestige, or superiority. At that same time, narcissists expect others to accept the high esteem in which they hold themselves, and to cater to their needs. What is striking in the behavior of these people is their interpersonal exploitativeness. Narcissists live under the illusion that they are entitled to be served, that their own wishes take precedence over those of others. They think that they deserve special consideration in life.

It must be emphasized, however, that these characteristics occur with different degrees of intensity. A certain dose of narcissism is necessary in all humans in order to function effectively and so we all at times show signs of narcissistic behavior. Among individuals who possess only limited narcissistic tendencies, we find those who are very talented and capable of making great contributions to society. Those who gravitate toward the extreme, however, give narcissism its pejorative reputation. Here we find preoccupation with self, excessive rigidity, narrowness, resistance, and discomfort in dealing with the external environment. The leadership implications of destructive narcissism can be extremely dramatic.

Although the narcissistic type of personality has long been recognized, only relatively recently has it come under critical scrutiny. For example, the latest version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) lists a large number of diagnostic criteria to describe narcissistic personality disorders. Many of these characteristics are also applicable, albeit in smaller measure, to narcissistic individuals who adopt a more 'normal' mode of functioning. According to the manual, these people have 'a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning in early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

> has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)
>
> is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love
>
> believes that he or she is 'special' and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
>
> requires excessive admiration

> has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
>
> is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
>
> lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
>
> is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her
>
> shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.' *(American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 661.)*

The reason I dwell on narcissism is that if there is one personality constellation that best fits most leaders it is the narcissistic one. Freud (1921) identified this in his study of the relationship between leaders and followers, stating that 'the leader himself need love no one else, he may be of a masterful nature, absolutely narcissistic, self-confident and independent' (pp. 123–124). Later, he introduced a 'narcissistic libidinal personality,' an individual whose main interest is self-preservation, who is independent and impossible to intimidate. This individual may also show significant aggressiveness, which sometimes manifests itself in a constant readiness for activity. People belonging to this type impress others as being strong personalities. They are especially situated to act as moral ideological bastions for others—in short, as true leaders (Freud, 1921, p. 257).

In a similar context, Wilhelm Reich referred to a 'phallic-narcissistic character,' which he portrayed as 'self-confident, often arrogant, elastic, vigorous and often impressive ... The outspoken types tend to achieve leading positions in life and resent subordination ... If their vanity is hurt, they react either with cold reserve, deep depression or lively aggression' (Reich, 1949, p. 201).

Narcissism became a particularly important topic for study when new developments in psychoanalytic theory occurred in this area. The introduction of object relations theory in the 1940s and self psychology in the 1970s was especially fruitful. The most important revisions concerning narcissism were formulated by clinicians such as Otto Kernberg (1975) and Heinz Kohut (1971). I will not dwell here on the theoretical controversies about whether narcissism is a result mainly of developmental arrest or regression, or whether it possesses its own developmental lines. My aim is to explore the relationships between narcissism and leadership, a connection recognized by both Kernberg and Kohut. For example, Kernberg states that because 'narcissistic personalities are often driven by intense needs for power and prestige to assume positions of